

# NO MORE EXCUSES

AN INDUSTRY RESPONSE TO THE LANGUAGE, LITERACY AND NUMERACY CHALLENGE



This document prepared by:



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# WHY?

**AROUND HALF OF WORKING AGE AUSTRALIANS HAVE LLN PROBLEMS**

- inadequately prepared workforce entrants
- limited access to LLN expertise
- an ageing workforce
- increasing use of technology
- increasing compliance requirements
- demand for higher level skills

**13%**

**46%**

**53%**

# WHO?

Approximately 53% of working age Australians have difficulty with numeracy skills; 46% of Australian adults have difficulty with reading skills, and 13% are classified in the lowest literacy category.

## SOLUTIONS

This document looks at a variety of solutions to Australia's LLN issues including:

setting learners up for success

supporting training product users

changing the mindset of employers and employees

boosting VET system capacity

investing wisely

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) are the essential underpinning skills that enable people to be productive in their work, to continue to learn and develop, and to participate fully in society. This is an obvious statement, the truth of which has been recognised for decades. But it needs to be made, as progress to a satisfactory situation has been slow:

- Literally millions of Australians have insufficient LLN skills to benefit fully from training or to participate effectively at work
- The situation looks as if it could be getting worse, not better: the LLN performance of Australian students<sup>1</sup> has, over the past decade, worsened in comparison to other OECD countries
- Access to LLN expertise at the right time in the right way remains limited.

LLN issues and challenges manifest differently in different industries and workplaces, but some similar challenges are faced across all industries. They include inadequately prepared workforce entrants, the challenges of an ageing workforce, increasing use of technology, increasing compliance requirements, and a demand for higher level skills. This represents a considerable list of potential barriers to learning and to an effective workforce.

The Industry Skills Councils (ISCs) believe that responsibility for building the LLN skills of Australians should be shared by industry and all education sectors. Nothing less than a co-ordinated response to the LLN challenge will succeed. To achieve this, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) should establish an overarching blueprint for action on LLN in Australia 2012-2022 to identify and address long-term goals that will profoundly shift the capacity of learners and the workforce and significantly impact our nation's future.

More immediately, within the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system, ISCs propose:

- better identification of the LLN skills of learners before training, and targeted funding to address identified LLN skill gaps
- the inclusion of clear advice on LLN skill requirements in Training Packages and/or their companion volumes
- the implementation of a strategy to develop greater national awareness of LLN issues, including the de-stigmatisation of LLN skill development
- an increased capacity in the VET system, and all practitioners, to support the LLN skill development needs of learners and workers
- better-targeted solutions for building the LLN skills of workers/learners.

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<sup>1</sup> Recent results from the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey reveal that Australia has seen a decline in the reading and mathematics performance of 15 year olds between 2000 and 2009.

## THE CASE: ECHOES FROM THE PAST

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Twenty years ago the first survey of adult literacy in Australia pointed out what many in industry already knew from their own experience: a significant proportion of Australian adults from both English-speaking and non-English speaking backgrounds could not read and write well enough to participate effectively in work or training.<sup>2</sup>

Two further surveys of adult literacy, in 1996 and 2006, have since confirmed those initial findings. The enormity of these figures, representing approximately half of Australia's working age population, can have the effect of making the problem too overwhelming or difficult to comprehend. But when the complexity of literacy and numeracy demands in modern society is taken into account the figures are more easily understood.

*More than 7 million Australian adults are likely to experience difficulty with reading skills*

This does not mean that this number of adults cannot read at all. It means that the reading tasks required in work or personal environments are sometimes beyond the skill level of 46% of Australian adults. People experience difficulties, or make mistakes, reading and following instructions, communicating reliably via email or interpreting graphs and charts.

*Nearly 8 million Australian adults are likely to experience difficulty with numeracy skills*

Again this does not mean that people cannot use numeracy skills in their lives. It means that the numeracy tasks required in work or personal environments are sometimes beyond the skill level of 53% of Australian adults. People experience difficulties, or make mistakes, calculating correct change, recording accurate measurements, checking calculations against estimates.

Not all people assessed as having difficulty will find the same tasks challenging, and they may not make the same mistake every time, but they are likely to experience difficulty with some of the literacy and numeracy tasks they have to tackle.

It is important to remember that the language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) demands of work are not static so exactly what it means to read and write 'well enough' for the workplace is constantly shifting. The assessment of what this meant 20 years ago will be very different to what is required today. A move away from low-skilled work to greater knowledge-based work has increased the need for workers with good LLN skills. Rapid changes in technology have triggered the creation of new business models, systems and processes that require considerable, and ongoing, upskilling of the workforce. In addition, the ageing of the Australian workforce has put pressure on employers to retain and re-skill older workers.

The adult literacy survey data also shows that:

*About 2 million adult Australians are in the lowest literacy category*

More than ever it is critical for Australia to not only raise the literacy and numeracy skills of those performing at the lowest levels but also raise the capacity of all Australians to fulfil their potential as learners, workers and citizens.

Many qualifications under the Enterprise Based Productivity Places Program are in competitive manufacturing. Business expectations around monitoring quality, reducing failures, dealing with variation and identifying process improvements are demanding LLN skills from workers who have not previously been expected to use these skills. Similar demands are being made of workers in Community Services and Health occupations where increasing compliance requirements are putting an emphasis on the quality of reporting.

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<sup>2</sup> Wickert, R (1990) No Single Measure: Summary Report

Statistical analysis by Productivity Commission staff<sup>3</sup> has estimated that an improvement in literacy and numeracy skills has a larger effect on workforce participation and productivity (as measured by hourly wage rates) than increasing educational attainment.

While some of the data is new, the overall message is not. Echoing through the last twenty years are recurring declarations of the importance of language, literacy and numeracy skills to the workforce and productivity.

## THE MESSAGE REMAINS CLEAR

There is undeniable evidence to demonstrate that poor communication skills adversely affect productivity in the workplace... productivity suffers as does our global competitiveness.

The Hon John Dawkins MP<sup>4</sup>

The levels and types of English language and literacy required in modern Australian society have increased dramatically. Economic restructuring has placed heavy demands on skills, and on education and training programs to develop those skills. English language and literacy is fundamental to the whole of the education and training effort.

All Commonwealth Ministers for Education and Training<sup>5</sup>

We are living in a time of skill shortages arising from demographic and technological change and the proportion of jobs requiring vocational education and training qualifications is expected to significantly increase in the future, yet the capacity of many individuals to re-skill and up-skill is constrained by poor LLN.

Julia Gillard, Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations<sup>6</sup>

1990

1993



2008

2010

Literacy and numeracy shortfalls have emerged as a major issue for employers as they evaluate their skills base against opportunities presented by the improving economy... more than 75% of employers responding to our survey reported that their businesses were affected by low levels of literacy and numeracy.

Heather Ridout, Chief Executive, Australian Industry Group<sup>7</sup>

Language, literacy and numeracy skills are now recognised as fundamental to improved workforce participation, productivity and social inclusion.

Skills Australia<sup>8</sup>

The importance of foundation skills such as literacy, language and numeracy cannot be overstated. Poor foundation skills can be a major barrier for job seekers and for those wishing to up-skill. These core skills are crucial to higher educational outcomes — which in turn lead to higher workforce participation and higher productivity.

Australian Government Budget<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Shomos, A (2010) Links Between Literacy and Numeracy Skills and Labour Market Outcomes: Productivity Commission Staff Working Paper

<sup>4</sup> Minister for Employment, Education and Training, Keynote Address to the National Literacy in Industry Conference, Sydney, 28 November 1990

<sup>5</sup> National Collaborative Adult English Language and Literacy Strategy, 1993

<sup>6</sup> DEEWR, Foreword to the Australian Core Skills Framework, 2008

<sup>7</sup> Australian Industry Group, National Workforce Literacy Project: Employer views on workplace literacy and numeracy skills, their impact on business and the most effective measures for improving skills, May 2010

<sup>8</sup> Skills Australia, Australian Workforce Futures: A national workforce development strategy, March 2010

<sup>9</sup> Australian Government, Budget Strategy and Outlook 2010-11

There has been no shortage of agreement about the significance of LLN skills to the Australian workforce, but astonishing little in the way of outcomes. Industry Skills Councils (ISCs) agree that now is the time for action. The current public and policy interest in foundation skills presents an opportunity for co-ordinated and strategic action to make real inroads into the national LLN challenge. There can be no more excuses: it's time to act.

### What do we call them?

Over the last twenty years, language, literacy and numeracy skills have been frequently relabelled, often in an attempt to gain policy traction. Core skills, foundation skills, essential skills, key competencies, generic skills, basic skills, employability skills, enabling skills – a variety of terms has been used both officially and unofficially to encompass LLN, often in conjunction with other non-specific workplace skills like working in teams and self-management.

Even when used independently, definitions of language, literacy and numeracy are slippery and can be the subject of fervent academic debate.

*Literacy has been defined in many different, sometimes contradictory, ways. Some definitions focus on the skills needed by individuals for work, education, social interaction and negotiation of everyday living.*

*Others have a more social focus, and include the literacies for specific contexts and those which empower particular communities enabling them to challenge the status quo. How literacy is defined shapes the kinds of policies developed and the teaching/learning practices adopted.<sup>10</sup>*

Although the terms language, literacy and numeracy may be only narrowly understood by many Australians, they do at least have meaning. In contrast, terms such as employability skills and foundation skills always need to be accompanied by an explanation of the types of skills that are intended.

ISCs understand LLN as enabling, context-sensitive skills that can be demonstrated over a continuum from basic to advanced practices. However they also recognise that agreed definitions will not provide solutions. Addressing the workforce LLN skill challenge will require action, not words.



<sup>10</sup> Lonsdale, M and McCurry, D (2004) Literacy in the new millennium, NCVER

## THE CHALLENGE: UNDERVALUED, UNDERFUNDED, UNDERDONE

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While individual industries, sectors and enterprises face specific LLN issues (as outlined in section 2), Industry Skills Councils believe that a number of broad challenges apply across the Australian workforce. Despite the efforts of many within the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector, at a system level LLN skill development has not been accorded the value, funding or attention that it deserves as an integral part of workforce development. Employers are increasingly reporting that they have LLN problems in their existing workforce and that the LLN skills of new recruits are inadequate.

Research within Australia and from around the world confirms what Australian employers have been reporting. From the research and from on the ground experience, ISCs understand that the LLN challenge is complex and has many contributing factors. These factors include workforce and VET system realities as well as commonly held attitudes to LLN. By exploring some of the prevailing views about LLN it is possible to gain an insight into the complexity of the challenge and into possibilities for solutions.

### ● “BLAME THE SCHOOLS”

Some employers feel let down by the school system:

*This is system failure on a grand scale – industry should push back and say that they want students to come out of the education system with a certain level of LLN.<sup>11</sup>*

A recent project<sup>12</sup> looking at the maths skills of commencing bricklaying apprentices within a regional TAFE showed that:

- 75% could not do basic arithmetic such as adding numbers with decimals or subtraction requiring ‘borrowings’
- 80% could not calculate the area of a rectangle, or the pay owed for working 4½ hours
- 20% could not interpret millimetre measurements from a centimetre/imperial calibrated tape measure.

While this is a strongly held view, the problem is of course far more complicated. Firstly, one-sixth of the Australian workforce was actually educated overseas.<sup>13</sup> But more importantly, there is a difference between school literacy and numeracy and the skills required in the workplace. Employers of apprentices frequently complain that:

*Apprentices get high scores on the numeracy test, but they can't do the maths in the workplace – can't transfer to a new context.<sup>14</sup>*

In addition, the majority of employees left the school system 10, 20, 30 or even 40 years ago, and what was learnt at school is sometimes not sufficient to meet to workplace LLN requirements.

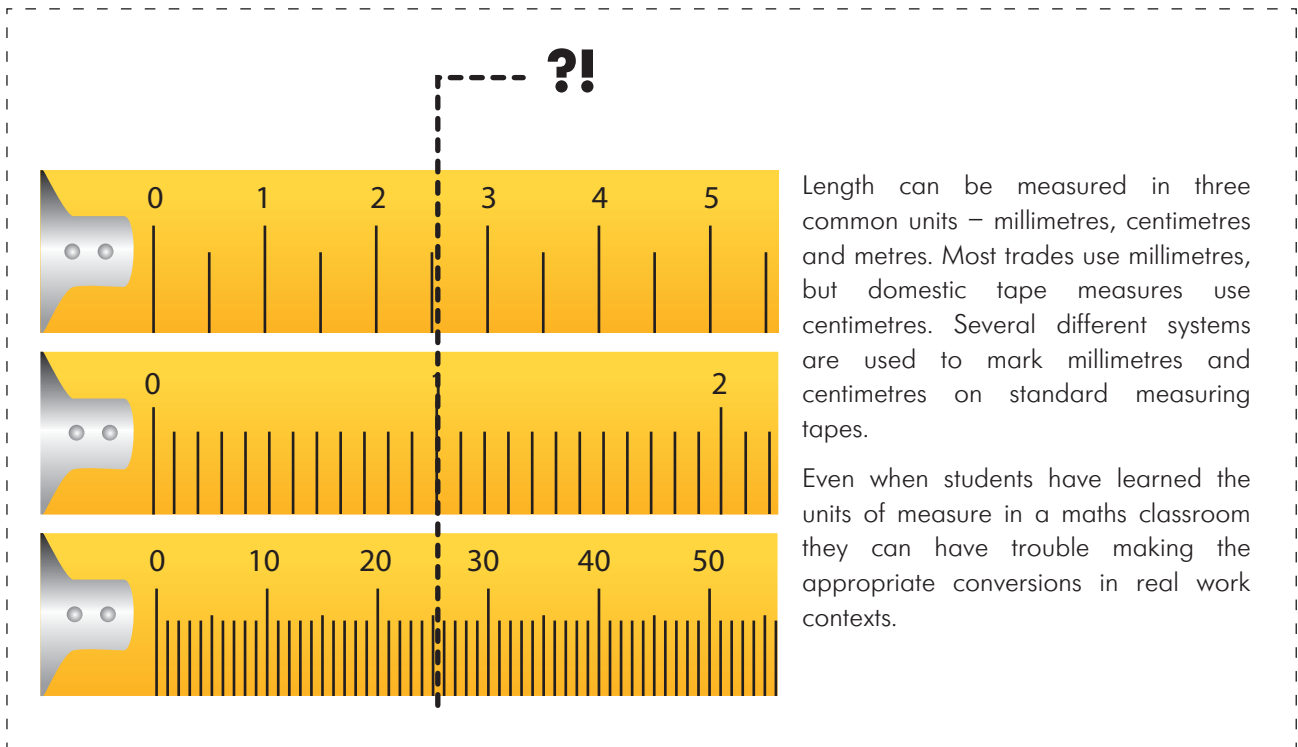
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11 Employer representative at IBSA 2011 Environment Scan consultation, Brisbane, August 2010

12 GippsTAFE Trade maths project 2009

13 Most recent data available: ABS (2007) Migrants, Education and Training Experience, Australia 2005

14 Employer at Ai Group National Workforce Literacy Project round table, Wollongong, August 2009



Length can be measured in three common units – millimetres, centimetres and metres. Most trades use millimetres, but domestic tape measures use centimetres. Several different systems are used to mark millimetres and centimetres on standard measuring tapes.

Even when students have learned the units of measure in a maths classroom they can have trouble making the appropriate conversions in real work contexts.

A supplier of timber roof trusses and frames to the building industry in South East Queensland has partnered with local secondary schools to present practical maths classes that help students take the step from school into employment. Classes are conducted on the worksite using the timber and trusses to talk about trig, volume and length. Students discover the importance of maths knowledge in the real world and the enterprise gets a real buzz from seeing these non-maths theorists enjoying the concepts in a practical sense.

ISCs believe that the declining results are consistent with concerns expressed by employers about the skills of workforce entrants.

Although Australia’s overall results remain above the OECD average, there is an urgent need to arrest any further decline and to ensure that Australian students are developing the LLN skills that will equip them for an internationally competitive labour market. Schools need to ensure that students have the LLN skills that they will need for the future.

Responsibility for the development of adequate LLN skills for work or further study needs to be shared by all stakeholders – schools, employers and the tertiary sector. Effective collaborative approaches are essential at the local level but they also need to be supported by collaboration and shared goals at the system level. Nothing less than a co-ordinated response to the LLN challenge will succeed.

Recent results from the international Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey<sup>15</sup> suggest that schools are not succeeding in giving students the LLN skills they need for learning, work and life: they reveal that Australia has seen a decline in the reading and mathematics performance of 15 year olds between 2000 and 2009. In particular the survey shows that fewer Australian students are now performing at the highest levels. Australia is also unique among all participating countries in that students with an immigrant background in Australia now outperform students without an immigrant background.

<sup>15</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, PISA 2009 Results: What Students Know and Can Do – Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science, 2010

● “JUST FIX IT”

In ISCs’ experience, many employers take a pragmatic approach to workforce development issues.

*If there is a problem in my workforce that is impacting my business productivity then I need to do something about it.*<sup>16</sup>

This attitude is laudable and has allowed Australian businesses to flourish by taking proactive steps to overcome workforce skill gaps. Perversely, though, this self-reliant approach to addressing workforce LLN needs has the effect of hiding examples of effective solutions. Many of the businesses that just get on with fixing the issue don’t realise that they have done anything special or difficult – it’s all part of running a business.

While conducting Certificate IV level supervisor training, a Melbourne-based warehousing operation realised that LLN issues were preventing people from completing the training. Conscious of the need for effective outcomes from their investment in upskilling, the company immediately took a proactive approach to fix the problem. The manager spoke with employees individually to work out what the underlying issues were and find workable solutions.

One-on-one support was provided to help learners cope with the LLN requirements of the training, as well as extra study time and resources. Although it took an extra eight months for some people to get through, everyone completed the certificate and significantly increased their capacity to contribute to the workplace.

Sharing and showcasing examples of effective, individual business solutions for LLN issues are important for raising awareness and driving change for other enterprises and training providers.

● “IT’S LOW LEVEL BEGINNER STUFF”

*Skills can be acquired, developed, maintained and lost over the lifespan, making the relationship between skills and age complex.*<sup>17</sup>

LLN skills are developed over time and demonstrated on a continuum from basic to advanced skill levels, but this reality is not well understood outside the LLN field. ISCs are mindful of the difficulties presented by reskilling and upskilling, especially given the ageing of the Australian workforce. Underpinning LLN skills are not only built prior to entry into the workforce but need to be continually built and updated over a lifetime and are an issue at every level of qualification.

ISCs have particularly noted the way that LLN skills can act as a barrier to progression into supervisor roles. The demand for new and higher LLN skills at supervisory level is common across all industries and poses a problem for workers who do not have access to appropriate preparation and support to build the newly required skills. Alternatively, LLN issues can arise after workers have been in job roles requiring low levels of LLN for many years, and like other skills, their LLN skills have deteriorated without use.

An assessor working in the forestry industry in Tasmania had aspirations of becoming a qualified trainer but was limited by his own LLN skills. Coming from a third generation logging family, the assessor had extensive industry knowledge and experience but without better reading and writing skills he could not complete the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment or work effectively as a trainer.

Determination to achieve his goal provided the incentive for the assessor to practice and develop his LLN skills until they were good enough to successfully undertake the Certificate IV qualification. The effort and reward of developing his own LLN skills also gives the newly qualified trainer direct insight into the way in which LLN issues impact on skill development.

All employers, employees, vocational trainers and others responsible for workforce development need to understand that LLN skills are an ongoing and integral part of workforce development. Currently this understanding is not aided by VET system funding mechanisms which focus almost exclusively on LLN skills at lower levels and ignore the development of high level LLN skills.

<sup>16</sup> Employer at Ai Group National Workforce Literacy Project round table, Brisbane, August 2009

<sup>17</sup> Willms, J. and Murray, T. (2007) Gaining and Losing Literacy Skills Over the Lifecourse, International Adult Literacy Survey, Statistics Canada

● “NOT MY BUSINESS”

*Experienced managers and trainers often do not see the literacy demands of roles because they are so embedded in the work.<sup>18</sup>*

Many employers do not see a direct connection between LLN issues and their own business. Employers, of course, are not homogenous and they have widely varying views on LLN and training issues. However, there are some commonly held views that prevent a focus on LLN skill development. These include:

- LLN skills are required for workforce entry and should already have been addressed elsewhere
- low-skilled work roles do not require LLN skills
- highly qualified workers do not require LLN skill development
- LLN deficits are individual failings that are private and potentially embarrassing for employees, the organisation should not draw attention to them
- it is not viable to ‘stop the workflow’ for LLN training.

In general, there is limited understanding, and limited real data, on the return-on-investment relationship between LLN and business outcomes. This is especially the case in industries with a highly educated workforce where problems with ‘low level’ skills are uncommon. An understanding of LLN as only low level skills, or very narrowly defined skills of reading and writing, can blind people to the real embodiment of LLN in the workplace.

A Melbourne-based chemical manufacturer identified the need to improve the LLN skills of key workers to address problems with communication breakdowns and productivity. Participants in the LLN skill building program included two production workers, a supervisor and an industrial chemist. The specific training objectives for each participant were based directly on the requirements of their job.

Through the program one production worker developed the numeracy skills to calculate amounts, volumes and yields, another production worker improved their clarity in spoken English. The supervisor improved reading speed and the ability to write toolbox reports, while the industrial chemist honed his ability to write and present unambiguous data reports for internal company use. Through the program the company’s management also developed a deeper understanding of the way in which LLN skills underpin work at all levels of the organisation.

Industries with safety and compliance requirements have more readily seen a connection between LLN and business goals. The avoidance of workplace accidents might be the most compelling reason for attending to LLN issues, but many others are also triggering greater attention. Organisations wanting to introduce change in the workplace – new business objectives, restructuring, new technologies, systems or processes – often find that workforce LLN skills are an impediment.

ISCs are conscious of the significant awareness raising that is needed to ensure that LLN issues are recognised in the workplace and addressed during all forms of training and skill development.



<sup>18</sup> Business NZ et al (2007) The Key Steps Forward for Workforce Literacy

● “LLN ARE OUT-DATED SKILLS”

*Increasing requirements of regulation, accountability and proficiency in IT are putting more pressure on individuals in the workplace to develop their literacy skills. Those with low level skills are using a variety of strategies to cope including: avoiding work requiring LLN skills, relying on memory, increasing their use of technology to disguise skills deficiencies, and using colleagues and wider social networks to assist them.<sup>19</sup>*

There is a belief held by some VET stakeholders that the traditional paper-based LLN demands of the workplace are decreasing as a result of new technologies – GPS navigators, barcode scanners, speech recognition software, visual computer operating systems and video based communications. Employers are now focussed on the digital skills required by employees but few recognise that this is also a form of literacy.

Workplaces have two broad options for addressing LLN issues: build or bypass. The build solution involves building employees’ LLN skills to meet the workplace LLN demands. The bypass solution involves modifying workplace processes to reduce the LLN demands. Often the most effective approach involves a combination of the two.

At a food processing plant in Queensland while conducting a training program to build supervisor and line manager LLN skills, a workplace-based LLN trainer noticed that important workplace documents needed simplifying for line workers to read them. Workshops were held for a number of senior managers to emphasise the principles of writing documents in plain English so all staff could engage with the material. As the company’s risk manager observes:

*Sometimes the problem can be perceived as the reader’s issue, but if you think about it – it is a two way thing. The writer has to think about the needs and skills of the audience.*

A Sydney-based aged care provider with a high proportion of employees from non-English speaking backgrounds found that staff LLN skills were a barrier to meeting regulatory reporting requirements. While the organisation’s long-term staff were highly valued for their experience and their ability to communicate with residents in their first language, many of these employees did not have recognised qualifications or the LLN skills to participate in vocational training.

Over a two year period, LLN support and skill development were provided to staff working across the organisation, in direct care, recreation, catering and administration. With attention paid to their underpinning LLN skill development most staff were able to achieve relevant Certificate III and IV qualifications. The program resulted in a significant improvement in documentation and a tremendous boost to staff confidence and self-esteem.

The ‘bypass’ approach is also used in many industries during training and assessment, where assessment practices are adjusted to minimise LLN demands. In some cases this is done to accommodate learners with LLN difficulties, in others it is to replicate the LLN realities of the workplace. ISCs have noted that innovative approaches to reducing the LLN demands of assessment can sometimes raise problems during Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) audit processes. They may also fail to prepare workers for changing workplace requirements or for further training or career progression. It is likely that a combination of building and bypassing is also most effective in training and assessment practice.

<sup>19</sup> NRDC for adult literacy and numeracy (2007) Learning for and in the workplace

● “MY SKILLS ARE FINE”

*The self-assessment approach to measuring literacy is usually regarded as unreliable.<sup>20</sup>*

ISCs know that getting participation in LLN up-skilling programs can be difficult. For many people in the workplace LLN difficulties have a stigma attached, making them something that must be disguised or hidden. Workers are often unwilling to participate in LLN programs – although this is not always the case for people for whom English is a second language, for them there is less of a stigma because they have obvious and understandable reasons for not communicating well in English.

People can also be remarkably unaware of their own skill gaps. Many studies<sup>21</sup> have shown that people are not good at judging their own LLN ability or skill needs. People develop, often unconsciously, personal strategies for overcoming their individual LLN barriers. In the workplace these coping strategies can mask LLN problems and work effectively until a change in workplace requirements or job role makes the strategies ineffectual.

Limited LLN skills can prevent people from taking up workplace training or development opportunities and from seeking promotion. The resistance or avoidance strategies used by people in these situations to avoid potentially embarrassing identification of LLN skill gaps, can sometimes be interpreted by employers as laziness or lack of commitment, which are then inappropriately dealt with as workplace discipline issues, creating even greater problems.

Given many employers’ limited understanding of LLN, they are often incapable of explaining the benefits of LLN skill development to employees. Frequently there is an assumption on the part of employers and trainers that people understand the importance of improving LLN skills, but that is not necessarily the case. Employees have many demands on their time and they will place other priorities above LLN skill development unless the case for development is made clear to them and the skilling objectives are seen to be valued by the employer.

A large printing business in Queensland realised that improving teamwork and communication was vital for the introduction of the company’s manufacturing excellence plan. Taking on the extra responsibility for meeting key performance indicators and achieving production targets would be difficult for some of the site’s valued workers, many of whom had been with the business since completing their printing apprenticeships 20 years earlier.

The company adopted a gradual approach to the introduction of LLN training that was sensitive to workers’ self-esteem and attitudes. The LLN trainer was on-site regularly to raise awareness and increase worker receptiveness to skill development. Inclusive approaches were used so that individuals were not singled out for remedial training and opportunities were maximised for one-on-one coaching. According to the company’s HR manager:

*“Analysing the characteristics of your workforce is important for creating a skill development program that delivers the desired result.”*

An underground coal mine in NSW embarked on a workplace-based LLN program with a view to improving communication, safety and productivity. The single greatest challenge for the employer was ensuring that workers on all shifts could access the training, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The solution was two-fold: management gave a clear message of support for the program by paying workers overtime to access the training either before or after their scheduled shifts; and the enterprise-based trainer offered a range of delivery modes to maximise access including one-on-one, small group, computer-based and self-paced approaches.

<sup>20</sup> Sussman, S (2003) Moving the Markers: New Perspectives on Adult Literacy Rates in Canada

<sup>21</sup> Including: ABS (2007) Adult Literacy and Life Skills: Summary Outcomes, and Bynner, J and Parsons, S (2006) New light on literacy and numeracy: summary report, National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy, UK

A local government in southern NSW instigated a long-term workforce development program to increase the number of staff with formal qualifications. The organisation recognised that some of the outdoor staff targeted for participation in the Certificate III in Local Government (Operational Works) would need convincing to undertake a traineeship due to LLN difficulties and lack of self-confidence.

A twelve month workplace LLN program was used to prepare outdoor staff for the commencement of the traineeship. The LLN program helped staff get involved in learning by making it directly relevant to the workplace using toolbox meetings and onsite trainer visits. As a result the LLN program got trainees off to a good start in the Certificate III by building their communication skills and breaking down their resistance to training at the same time.

ISCs understand that targeting people for LLN skill development is difficult and requires great sensitivity. Employers and trainers need to work together to develop inclusive, non-threatening solutions, but even more importantly all stakeholders need to work to change the stigmatised view of LLN training. These skills need to be portrayed in a new light as complex, dynamic, universal and in need of continual updating to adapt to new technologies and everyday work and life requirements.

● “DON'T CREATE BARRIERS TO ADVANCEMENT”

*People with higher literacy and numeracy skills are more likely to participate in the workforce, be employed in more highly skilled jobs and earn more, compared with people who have lower skills.<sup>22</sup>*

The competency based training approach used within the Australian VET system focuses on the achievement of workplace standards as an outcome from training. In the development of Australia's national training framework there was a conscious effort to ensure that VET qualifications did not create barriers to advancement in the workplace or barriers to uptake for adult learners. As a result, Training Packages and the qualifications they contain specify skill outcomes from training but they do not generally specify minimum LLN skill entry levels.

ISCs suspect that ongoing LLN skill development has been an inadvertent casualty of this approach. The *built in not bolted on* policy emphasised the importance of identifying and embedding the underpinning LLN skills into Training Packages. This policy makes sense when units of competency are interpreted as outcomes statements. However, when units of competency are used to guide skill development programs the open-ended approach to entry level skills means that building the skills required for competency may require an enormously wide range of time depending on the skills of the learner on entry. Even this in itself should not be a problem. Competency-based training is specifically designed to accommodate variations in learner background and preparation, however funding approaches based on a nominal duration of training did not change with the introduction of Training Packages. The irony of this situation is that rather than being inclusive and supportive of learners from a variety of backgrounds, the system's funding models have in fact set many learners up to fail.

ISCs know that LLN skills are contextual. Often they are inseparable from vocational skills – such as in the development of communication skills for customer service – and their development at the same time as vocational skills is essential for meaningful learning. However, there is a need to differentiate between the application of LLN skills to new vocational purposes or settings and the development of the underpinning LLN skills themselves. ISCs are aware that the line between these concepts is fuzzy. The extent to which learners can develop underpinning LLN skills within a vocational training program will depend on the time and resources available and the VET practitioner’s skills.

More clearly highlighting the underpinning LLN skills required, as well as the way in which they must be applied in a workplace context, could assist the development of appropriate training solutions for individual learners and learner cohorts. This would need to be supported by a less rigid and more sophisticated funding model.

South Australia’s electricity distributor has been proactive in ensuring that powerline workers have the LLN skills they need to stay safe. To combat skill shortages in the industry the organisation has recruited significant numbers of overseas workers. The organisation’s training services co-ordinator found that while the vocational skills and professionalism of these recruits was exemplary, communicating effectively in English was an obstacle to their integration into the Australian workforce.

A TAFE workplace language course was used to introduce new recruits to the Australian colloquialisms and language they would encounter in the workplace, helping them to overcome the language and cultural barriers of a foreign environment and develop the communication skills needed on the job.

A family-run retail group in South Australia recognised the need to bring staff up to speed with changing workplace demands such as OHS legislation and compliance. The employer also wanted to provide career pathways for casual employees to encourage them to stay with the business, but for many their limited education or non-English speaking backgrounds were a barrier to further training.

A work-based training program was developed to integrate LLN skill development and support into vocational training – and tailored to meet the needs of both the business and its employees. The program has helped casual staff transition into more permanent roles within the business, including as store manager.



● “LLN IS SEPARATE FROM VOCATIONAL SKILL”

*Evidence suggests that embedded LLN promotes learners’ progress and achievements on vocational programmes. Embedding LLN learning in a vocational context is particularly important for learners who do not immediately recognise their own need to develop LLN.<sup>23</sup>*

ISCs believe that the LLN content of Training Packages has not been consistently well delivered through the VET system. Many vocational training providers lack staff with the LLN awareness or expertise to identify the LLN requirements embedded in training products, or to reliably pinpoint the LLN skill development needs of learners. Compounding this problem, access to practitioners with LLN expertise to assist VET delivery is limited for a number of reasons including:

- lack of LLN awareness among vocational training providers can mean that they do not always recognise a need to seek LLN advice or expertise – ISCs have also found that the issue of practitioner capability can often be more about insufficient pedagogical expertise to address the individual needs of learners, rather than a specific lack of LLN expertise
- there is a limited number of expert LLN practitioners, and an even more limited number willing and able to work in vocational areas – this is especially pronounced in regional and remote locations
- institutional structures and departmental budgets can limit the extent of cooperation and support provided across different business units in large RTOs
- many smaller RTOs cannot afford or access qualified LLN practitioners and do not include LLN competencies or courses on their scope of registration

- separate funding programs and mechanisms for LLN skill development and vocational skill development can make it difficult to integrate training using expert practitioners from both fields – this has been ISCs’ experience in relation to the Productivity Places Program and the Workplace English Language and Literacy program.

There are a number of funding models that enable training providers to provide LLN support and skill building in tandem with vocational delivery. One such model is the Western Australian accredited Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills (CAVSS). The course is provided using a team-teaching approach comprising an LLN specialist and a vocational practitioner working together in a face-to-face classroom environment.

LLN support provided through CAVSS is directly responsive to learner needs and the vocational context. The course has the additional benefit of enabling two-way staff development and the creation of more effective working relationships between vocational and LLN practitioners.

ISCs note that initiatives are underway to build the LLN expertise available within the VET sector. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) has funded a scholarship program that aims to increase the supply of VET practitioners with LLN expertise and Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA) has conducted recent projects to consider the LLN skill needs of the VET workforce. These are positive developments, but ISCs are concerned that increasing the availability of LLN expertise in the VET system will not have the desired effect unless the barriers created by VET funding mechanisms are also addressed. It has been suggested that nominal hours for LLN skill development are locked away in funding for state accredited courses. Greater access to this funding source for vocational programs would provide much-needed support for learners in vocational contexts and better pathways into employment.

<sup>23</sup> NRDC for adult literacy and numeracy (2007) Learning for and in the workplace, citing Casey, H et al (2006) “You wouldn’t expect a maths teacher to teach plastering ...”: Embedding literacy, language and numeracy in post-16 vocational programmes – the impact on learning and achievement. London: NRDC, UK

## THE RESPONSE: WHAT ISCS HAVE ACHIEVED TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE

Industry Skills Councils have been tackling LLN issues within their industries through a range of initiatives. Section 2 of this report provides further detail on individual ISC responses to the LLN drivers and challenges of the industries they serve.

### 1. LEADING COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES

## ISCS DRIVING REAL CHANGE

### 2. RAISING INDUSTRY AWARENESS

ISCs have an important role to play in raising industry and employer awareness of training and workforce development issues. In this role ISCs have undertaken numerous individual initiatives, and joint initiatives through the work of the ISC Foundation Skills Network, to raise awareness about LLN. Initiatives include:

- promotion of the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) training program through industry forums, collaborative activities with DEEWR offices and individual ISC WELL broker roles
- development of individual and joint ISC publications and print and web-based communication materials highlighting benefits and success stories from LLN skill development
- sharing knowledge and research across ISCs and with industry stakeholders through formal and informal communication channels.

#### Critical success factors:

Understanding industry priorities: not talking about LLN in a stand-alone sense but linking it to issues that employers care about, e.g. safety, productivity, quality control, implementing workplace change and technology, addressing skill shortages.

Drawing on real examples: using employers as spokespeople or champions to provide real world examples of LLN issues and solutions – statistics are not as attractive to employers, but good data on ROI could be useful if available.

ISCs, and ITABs before them, have used networking and community of practice approaches to build and share knowledge about LLN. Since 2005 representatives from each ISC have met regularly to focus on LLN issues and the development of collaborative solutions. With DEEWR funding the ISC Foundation Skills Network has:

- interrogated data from the 2006 Adult Literacy and Life Skills survey to identify and report implications for the Australian workforce and for particular industries
- reviewed and updated national availability information for LLN resources for each industry
- researched and developed information and resources to inform the work of ISC workforce development teams to ensure that LLN is taken into account when working with enterprises to identify training and development needs.

#### Critical success factors:

Strength through collaboration: using the collective leverage of ISCs to access expertise from other organisations, e.g. ABS, NCVER, State/Territory Training Authorities, DEEWR and RTOs.

Knowledge building and sharing: Boosting internal ISC capability by building LLN knowledge and awareness among network representatives and equipping them with information and resources that can be shared with other ISC staff.

### 3. BUILDING PRACTITIONER SKILL

### 4. CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVING TRAINING PRODUCTS

### 5. PROVIDING SUPPORT RESOURCES

In recognition of the need to build the LLN capability and awareness of vocational trainers and assessors, ISCs have taken the lead on the development and implementation of many professional development initiatives. LLN professional development activities tailored to the specific needs of industry trainers and assessors have been conducted by a number of ISCs. Many of these initiatives have drawn on the Australian Core Skills Framework as a tool to increase understanding.

These professional development initiatives have been well received by practitioners and are viewed by ISCs as one way of boosting the quality of training and assessment within their industries.

#### Critical success factors:

Contextualisation for different industries: professional development that is customised and targeted to trainers and assessors in specific industries so that discussion of LLN is put into a context that is directly relevant to them.

Using robust tools: the structured framework of the Australian Core Skills Framework is useful for explaining how LLN skills range across different levels and contexts.

ISCs continuously improve their Training Packages in response to, and in partnership with, industry stakeholders. This process provides opportunities to reconsider LLN content in the light of feedback from Training Package users. Qualifications and skill sets with significant take-up among indigenous learners have particularly benefited from the opportunity to reconsider the LLN skill demands embedded in Training Packages and reflected in assessment practices.

A number of ISCs anticipate using the Australian Core Skills Framework to identify LLN skill levels within Training Packages following the outcomes of a pilot project being conducted by EE-Oz Training Standards.

#### Critical success factors:

ISC capacity building: a number of ISCs have found that building the LLN knowledge of ISC staff has aided the consideration of LLN as an integral part of the Training Package development and implementation cycle, rather than a separate activity.

Continuous improvement of products: feedback from Training Package users, including users that represent particular learner cohorts, is essential for reviewing the appropriateness of LLN content.

Consistency of approach: for some ISCs the Australian Core Skills Framework has provided greater consistency around the approach taken to identifying and describing LLN skill requirements.

ISCs have developed a wide range of resources to support the implementation and uptake of Training Packages. Many resources developed through WELL funding have targeted specific learner cohorts or qualifications where LLN issues have been identified. ISCs have also partnered with or supported other organisations in their development of LLN support materials. In recent years, through the WELL-funded ISC Foundation Skills Network, ISCs have taken steps to review the range and availability of LLN resources for their industries. This activity has served to identify existing resources that can be promoted to stakeholders and gaps in resource availability.

#### Critical success factors:

Learning from ISC experience: collaboration and information sharing across ISCs aids the identification of resources and approaches to resource development that have application beyond an individual industry.

Staying informed: formal and informal communication channels with DEEWR help ISCs to stay informed about WELL-funded resource developments and allow them to contribute to the identification of resource funding priorities.

## JOINING FORCES: PROPOSALS FOR ACTION






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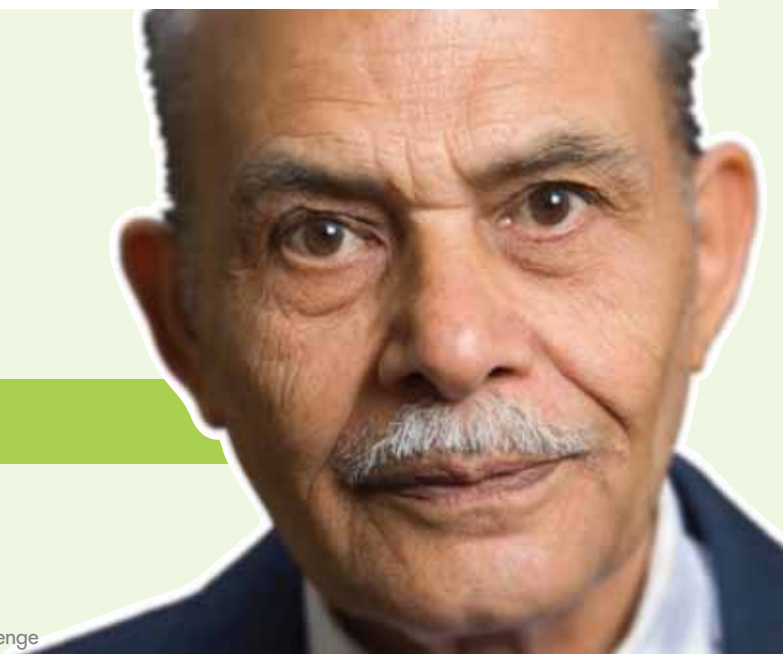
LLN skills are currently on the national agenda and ISCs recognise that now is the most promising time in 20 years to implement real change and national action around the way in which these skills are developed in the workforce. At this critical time ISCs believe that care must be taken to avoid opting for a one-size-fits-all solution or a single focus approach that does not bring about the far-reaching cultural and structural change that is truly needed.

ISCs believe that at times Training Packages have been viewed as the solitary mechanism for tackling workforce skill challenges. But the size and complexity of the LLN challenge means that there is no single answer. The challenge is beyond the scope of even the VET system and must be addressed across all aspects of education and workforce development.

Shared national goals will need to be supported by a co-ordinated range of approaches and initiatives across the entire population. All stakeholders must be involved in the creation of solutions that enshrine the flexibility required to meet the needs of different industries, workplaces and workforce cohorts.

ISCs have identified a number of goals that need to underpin national action to address the LLN challenge. They are:

-  SET LEARNERS UP FOR SUCCESS
-  SUPPORT TRAINING PRODUCT USERS
-  CHANGE THE MINDSET OF EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES
-  BOOST VET SYSTEM CAPACITY
-  INVEST WISELY



## ➔ SET LEARNERS UP FOR SUCCESS

### ... by clearly identifying the LLN skills and support needs of vocational learners

To gain the full benefit of vocational training, people need suitable preparation including an appropriate level of underpinning LLN skills. While LLN skills can be developed in conjunction with vocational skills, and LLN skill development benefits from this contextualisation, there is a need to differentiate between the LLN skills needed to enter a training course and the LLN skills that can be developed as part of vocational skills development.

Recent research<sup>24</sup> has found that in the delivery of vocational training LLN expertise is only brought in when problems become apparent, little attention is given to preparation. ISCs believe that early assessment of learners' LLN skill levels is important for identifying support needs. A number of ISCs are developing pre-training reviews to help training providers with the process of identifying entry level skills. When used by training providers, tools such as these can produce a gap analysis that will guide program planning and ultimately improve the quality of training.

**A word of warning:** In New Zealand all VET linked to Levels 1 to 3 of the NZ Qualifications Framework must have literacy and numeracy embedded into the course. To comply, VET providers are using an assessment tool to measure each learner's literacy and/or numeracy skills at the beginning and end of the course and to measure literacy and numeracy gain. However, concerns have been expressed by training practitioners, LLN specialists and employers that now a learner's first exposure to VET is an assessment that looks very much like school.

Pre-training assessment processes need to be well-designed, contextualised and administered in a way that supports, rather than deters, learners.

Whilst the AQTF requires RTOs to assess the needs of learners (including their LLN needs), providing advice on the LLN demands of vocational qualifications would ensure that RTOs are in a position to better identify the level of extra support or assistance with skill building that learners might need to complete a competency or qualification. ISCs may do this in a variety of ways: through the identification of Australian Core Skills Framework levels in the endorsed or non-endorsed component of Training Packages; through the use of pre-requisite LLN units or modules; or through inclusion of guidance on unpacking Training Packages in the companion volumes. This additional information would give RTOs a sound basis for planning training programs that meet the specific needs of their learners and allows them to access funding to provide any extra support that might be needed.

Pre-training assessments are not about 'screening people out'. On the contrary, ISCs believe training providers could use them to better identify where pre-entry programs or extra support are needed, thus increasing the likelihood of securing funding to provide these services (where such funding streams are available).

A DEEWR-funded Australian Core Skills Framework mapping project planned for 2011 will provide ISCs with valuable data that will help them to provide Training Package users with guidance on the extent of the LLN support that may be required to ensure the success of all learners.

## ➔ ISCs propose:

- That ISCs use Training Package companion volumes to provide RTOs with advice on determining whether learners will need extra support to participate in vocational training
- That RTOs use pre-training assessments as a planning tool to identify LLN support and skill development needs for VET learners
- That funding bodies establish industry- and learner-centred funding mechanisms to ensure that appropriate nominal hours funding is allocated for the development of required LLN skill.

<sup>24</sup> Black, S. & Yasukawa, K. 2010, Integrated Literacy and Numeracy Support in VET: Implications for skills, equity and research, Briefing paper for Building the Foundations: NCVET Adult literacy and numeracy search conference, Canberra, 13 September.

## ➔ SUPPORT TRAINING PRODUCT USERS

### ... by clearly identifying LLN skill requirements within Training Packages

ISCs are conscious that Training Packages are a powerful lever for influencing the way in which LLN is addressed for VET learners. Since 1997 ISCs, and National ITABs before them, have put considerable effort into ensuring that Training Packages contain information on the LLN components of each competency. The way in which this content is included has been continually refined and improved.

However, within the structure and language of units of competency, and in combination with equally important vocational content, there is a limit to how explicitly LLN requirements can be expressed. ISCs are also aware that Training Packages alone cannot solve the challenge of *undervalued, underfunded and underdone* LLN support and skill development. Through the implementation of Training Packages it has become apparent that vocational practitioners have difficulty unpacking the LLN content of competencies and that if this content is not immediately obvious it will not be delivered or assessed. It is also apparent that funding mechanisms and competitive training system realities sometimes work against the implementation of Training Packages that was envisaged during their development.

The outcomes of the *VET Products for the 21st Century* project and consequent Training Package development and continuous improvement processes which have the four quality principles as a cornerstone will provide an opportunity for ISCs to incorporate a range of information about LLN in their training products. ISCs are planning to use a variety of approaches to provide greater clarity on the LLN skills contained within Training Packages according to the specific needs and context of their industries.

Examples of ISC initiatives include:

- Using the Australian Core Skills Framework in the endorsed component to provide greater clarity on the LLN skills contained within units of competency or qualifications
- Referring to the Australian Core Skills Framework in the non-endorsed component to guide RTOs in their unpacking and implementation of the Training Package
- Packaging stand-alone LLN units into qualifications or skill sets to clearly indicate the required LLN skills
- Developing units of competency that describe LLN skills contextualised for specific work environments.

If LLN is to penetrate the mainstream, however, it is essential that the needs and context of each industry are paramount, and this principle needs to guide decisions on the way in which LLN is included. A 'one-size-fits-all' approach will not work.

**A word of warning:** ISCs agree that LLN skills in Training Packages need to be linked to a work context. While the use of stand-alone LLN units or modules packaged into qualifications can ensure that important LLN skill development is not overlooked in training delivery, this approach also brings a danger that LLN will be de-contextualised and the skills developed through training will not be directly relevant to the workplace.

## ➔ ISCs propose:

- That ISCs ensure the LLN requirements of vocational skills are accurately captured in Training Packages and/or their companion volumes
- That ISCs include advice on LLN in companion volumes for Training Packages users
- That VET policy makers and stakeholders recognise that Training Packages alone cannot counter the workforce LLN challenge and that a broad and co-ordinated strategic approach is needed across all education and workforce development spheres.

## ➔ CHANGE THE MINDSET OF EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES

### ... by raising awareness of the business benefit of LLN skills

ISCs support a VET system responsive to the needs of industry. At a broad level, ISCs can see that industry is demanding better LLN outcomes from vocational training. However, at an individual level ISCs believe that many employers and employees do not understand the importance of LLN in the workplace.

Without widespread and consistent demand from employers and individuals for LLN skill building solutions, the VET system cannot respond. ISCs believe that more needs to be done to increase understanding across the Australian population of the place of LLN in workforce development and workplace performance. In particular, messages that need to be communicated widely are:

- ongoing LLN skill development is part of life for everyone and there should be no stigma attached to the need to build LLN skills
- there are many business and personal benefits from improving LLN skills
- LLN skills are context-dependent and they are most effectively developed in the context in which they will be used.

ISCs have used awareness raising approaches with industry stakeholders within their industries with some success, but this is an area where a cultural shift is needed at a national level.

ISCs note that DEEWR has funding to conduct a national community education campaign to raise awareness of adult LLN skill needs and highlight solutions. It is important that the development of this campaign includes input from VET system stakeholders to ensure that the messages used are consistent with VET and workplace realities, and acknowledge the practical and emotional challenges facing those who could benefit from a higher level of LLN. LLN learning can be difficult and time-consuming and learners need clear and concrete reasons and rewards, along with support and encouragement, to make the effort required over time to increase their skills.

Through their work in this area, ISCs have seen the value of industry spokespeople or champions. Attitudes to LLN are also changed through direct experience to effective skill development approaches. ISCs believe that more on-the-ground workplace-based LLN skill development programs have the potential to raise awareness by exposing more of the workforce to relevant and contextualised LLN solutions.

### ➔ ISCs propose:

- That employers, unions and peak industry bodies lead initiatives to raise awareness and destigmatise LLN
- That DEEWR be asked to consult with industry stakeholders on the development of a national awareness raising campaign
- That policy makers and funding bodies ensure that government-funded training programs encourage the development of LLN awareness in enterprises
- That individuals are encouraged and supported to undertake learning activities that will require effort and determination over significant periods of time.

## BOOST VET SYSTEM CAPACITY

### ... by building skills and breaking down divides between vocational practitioners and LLN experts

The VET system must provide effective LLN support and skill development solutions, both prior to and during vocational training, to ensure that people acquire the LLN skills required in the workplace. For LLN service provision on a greater scale significantly more LLN practitioners will be needed. ISCs welcome the DEEWR LLN scholarship initiative as a means of increasing the LLN practitioner workforce, but a greater range of expertise will be needed to address the workforce LLN challenge.

In particular there is a need for:

- vocational practitioners who are able to recognise LLN issues, and identify and source appropriate interventions – a number of ISCs have conducted successful professional development initiatives to build the LLN skills and awareness of trainers and assessors within their industries. Using the Australian Core Skills Framework to help vocational practitioners understand LLN skills in their industry context has been an effective approach. There is a need for more of this activity in a wider range of industries.
- vocational practitioners who are able to work in collaboration with LLN experts where necessary – ISCs have found that workplace trainers are often better placed to deal with LLN issues in workplace delivery situations with access to LLN experts as mentors, but workplace trainers must be up-skilled to work effectively in this way.

- LLN practitioners who are willing and able to work closely with vocational practitioners in industry settings. ISCs believe there is a whole generation of LLN practitioners who have had exposure to learners in classroom-based contexts with little or no connection with VET pathways or content. As a result they are not familiar with the application of LLN skills in workplace contexts.

ISCs know that traditional classroom-based approaches to LLN skill development are rarely possible or desirable for existing workers. Opportunities for contextualised LLN skill development and support need to be built into all VET programs. Encouragement for RTOs to provide integrated solutions wherever possible may be necessary in the form of KPIs or funding incentives.

The current division between LLN experts and vocational practitioners is a significant barrier to addressing the widespread LLN needs of the workforce. While ISCs acknowledge that LLN is an area of specialist knowledge and that more specialist LLN practitioners are sorely needed, there is also a need for LLN responsibility to be shouldered more broadly within the VET system. Vocational practitioners need a greater capacity to provide LLN support and services in partnership, or under supervision or mentoring arrangements, with LLN experts.

## ISCs propose:

- That VET regulatory bodies provide clear and explicit advice about LLN and ensure that appropriate standards are met
- That funding bodies and VET employers ensure that time and funding is available for practitioners to engage in appropriate professional development activities
- That RTOs encourage individual practitioners to develop awareness of their responsibility for attending to LLN issues; and ensure that structural barriers do not prevent vocational and LLN practitioners from working collaboratively
- That IBSA develop advice and guidance for deliverers of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment that stresses the importance of ensuring that aspiring VET practitioners develop the skills to identify LLN problems
- That employers demand integrated training solutions that support the LLN skill development needs of workers.

## ➔ INVEST WISELY

... by ensuring that government funding supports flexible solutions that are responsive to enterprise and learner needs

ISCs acknowledge that there is considerable government investment in LLN, but the scale and persistence of the LLN challenge present a strong case for even greater effort both within and

beyond the VET sector. The ISCs believe that responsibility for building the LLN skills of Australians should be shared by industry and all education sectors. Nothing less than a co-ordinated response to the LLN challenge will succeed.

## ➔ ISCs propose:

- That the Council of Australian Governments establish an overarching blueprint for action on language, literacy and numeracy in Australia 2012-2022, which spans early childhood, school and tertiary sectors, and the workplace, to identify and address long-term goals that will profoundly shift the capacity of learners and the workforce and significantly impact our nation's future.
- That DEEWR ensure that new initiatives – such as the National Trade Cadetships – are developed in collaboration with all relevant government, industry and education sector stakeholders to create consistent, compatible programs that contribute to clearly articulated long-term goals for LLN.
- That funding bodies establish mechanisms that provide appropriate funding models with sufficient flexibility for training providers to address individual needs for LLN skill development whether it is integrated into vocational training or provided separately
- That DEEWR work with ISCs to enable the continuation and expansion of professional development initiatives for trainers and assessors within specific industries
- That DEEWR ensure that the WELL program, and other government funded training programs, enshrine the features of effective LLN skill development approaches
- That ISCs, peak industry bodies and RTOs trial, evaluate and identify effective models for the provision of LLN support and skill development.

## THE ISC RESPONSE

Different industries and industry sectors are affected by LLN issues in different ways, and each Industry Skills Council is attentive to the specific needs and challenges of its industry. Many industries are affected by:

- inadequately prepared workforce entrants
- limited access to LLN expertise
- an ageing workforce
- increasing use of technology
- increasing compliance requirements and
- demand for higher level skills.

However, the way in which these issues play out can be quite diverse. Geographic dispersion and thin markets limit access to LLN expertise for agrifood employers while in the transport and logistics industries the staffing profile of the mostly small RTOs servicing the industries limits access to LLN expertise. A single solution is unlikely to address both scenarios.

The applicability of LLN solutions for particular industries is affected by the industries':

- training culture – the educational background of the workforce and the degree of emphasis placed on accredited training
- workforce LLN skills – the current and traditional expectations for LLN skill levels within the industry
- the number and size of enterprises within the industry and their ability to access funding for training either individually or collectively
- the level of awareness among employers of the relationship between LLN and broader business concerns
- the perceived importance of the industry to policy makers and funding bodies
- the location of enterprises within the industry and the extent of their existing relationship with training providers with LLN expertise.

The Industry Skills Councils are well-placed to advise on the effectiveness of LLN skill building solutions for their industries. Through their work with industry stakeholders they have had the opportunity to consider what works and what does not. The achievements that are documented in this section has led to each Industry Skills Council developing insights will be invaluable to the development of any future national approach to addressing the workforce LLN challenge.



## AGRIFOOD SKILLS AUSTRALIA

The agrifood industries cover rural and related industries, food processing (including beverages, wine and pharmaceuticals), the meat and seafood industries and racing. The industries employ more than 800,000 people and comprise around 140,000 separate enterprises.

Economically, environmentally and socially, the agrifood industries play a vital role throughout Australia's regional landscape. They are at the forefront globally in productivity, product quality, innovation and sustainable practice. However, in the face of rapid developments in science and technology industry stakeholders realise that massive shifts in industry practices and workforce skills are required to maintain this position.

AGRIFOOD SKILLS AUSTRALIA IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FOLLOWING TRAINING PACKAGES.

ACM10 Animal Care and Management Training Package

AHC10 Agriculture, Horticulture, Conservation and Land Management Training Package

AGF07 Agrifood Training Package

FDF10 Food Processing Training Package

MTM07 Australian Meat Industry Training Package

RGR08 Racing Training Package

SFI07 Seafood Industry Training Package

SUG02 Sugar Milling Training Package

## KEY DRIVERS

The imperative for improved workplace productivity and participation levels are the drivers for an increased focus on Foundation Skills (LLN and Employability Skills) within the agrifood industries.

### Rapidly changing science and technology in the industries

Faced with the challenges of increasing global production from dwindling resources, the agrifood industries are becoming some of the most knowledge intensive industries in the Australian economy. For instance, the rate and scale of changes required for agrifood industries to remain at the forefront in the sustainable use of our land and marine resources, to build resilience to varying climatic conditions, to maintain food security and to build sustainable production systems capable of producing strong economic returns are immense.

Employers and industry stakeholders have recognised that significant upskilling of the agrifood workforce will be needed to put the scientific and technological solutions into practice that will enable the industry to continue to increase production and maintain domestic and global market share along the full supply chain.

### Foundations for higher level skills

The adoption of higher level skills across the agrifood workforce has been identified by industry stakeholders as the single most critical strategy for meeting future industry challenges. Inherent in this is the imperative for increased workforce proficiency in the foundation skills of language, literacy and numeracy that will provide the basis for building higher level analytical and communication skills.

## CHALLENGES

### **Geographic dispersion and thin markets**

Spread as they are over nine million square kilometres (60%) of the Australian landmass, agrifood enterprises have limited access to appropriate training and LLN expertise. It is also difficult for small enterprises in regional areas to release staff for voluntary training and meet the costs of overtime or relief staff.

AgriFood Skills Australia has direct experience of this challenge through its role as a broker for the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program in 2010. Despite considerable efforts by the AgriFood WELL broker, the broking model proved too difficult to access for a dispersed industry with many small scale enterprises, small and often seasonal workforces and a shortage of suitable LLN providers. As a result only one WELL training project was able to be implemented. The project involved twelve Indigenous workers from a number of employers and the training provider travelled to each of the workplaces to facilitate training.

Perhaps understandably, the thin markets created by geographic dispersion can make many of the agrifood industries an unattractive proposition for training providers.

### **Seasonality and casual work**

The seasonal nature of many of the agrifood industries results in high levels of casual and intermittent employment. This creates a challenge for the implementation of effective workforce development solutions. The skilling of casual workers, beyond the necessary requirements of the operating environment and immediate task at hand, is not a feasible business decision for most employers, especially small enterprises. Even for those employers who would like to build the skills of their casual workforce, the nature of casual employees is that they are only in the workplace during the busy period and cannot be spared to participate in training.

### **Just in time training culture**

In the agrifood industries the prevailing training subculture is one of building incremental skill sets for the immediate tasks at hand. While the concept of just in time training may work for some types of skill acquisition, LLN skills take considerable time to develop and may not be achieved within an employer's expected timeframe.

In large culturally and linguistically diverse workplaces, various strategies are adopted to accommodate workers' LLN shortcomings. An example being the use of graphics and diagrams to demonstrate safety considerations and operating procedures. For many such workers, there is little or no incentive to undertake voluntary and time-consuming LLN training.

There is growing recognition within the agrifood industries that inadequate language, literacy and numeracy proficiency is increasing worker vulnerability as technology and new approaches to risk management necessitate higher level analytical and communication skills.

## AGRIFOOD SKILLS AUSTRALIA RESPONSE

### Policy platform

It is the view of Agrifood Skills Australia that foundation skills are the key components of human capital and are fundamental to improving workplace productivity and participation levels.

Agrifood Skills Australia is currently developing a Foundation Skills policy platform, based on the understanding that foundation skills development is a shared responsibility of both industry and government. The policy platform focuses on the full spectrum of workforce development, from assessment of skill needs, through to skill development and skill utilisation.

### Embedding foundation skills

In recognition of the need for underpinning Foundation skills throughout the agrifood workforce, AgriFood Skills Australia will provide guidance on preliminary Foundation Skills assessments within core units of certificate I to III qualifications from the new AHC10 Agriculture, Horticulture and Land Management Training Package. The assessments and support materials will guide teachers and training practitioners on suitable approaches for building the LLN skills that learners need. The development and trial of the resources will be supported by professional development activities for key industry-based trainers.

### Enabling trainers and RTOs

AgriFood Skills Australia is working with trainers and RTOs to build their capacity to integrate LLN skill development in the agrifood industries. AgriFood Skills Australia has also developed a series of publications that aim to build the LLN skills and understanding of VET practitioners working in the agrifood industries. The publications have been widely distributed and are freely available from the AgriFood Skills Australia website. They are:

- *Working WELL* – stories and advice from teachers and trainers who have used WELL resources to support their training and assessment in the agrifood industries
- *WELL Worthwhile* – case studies of effective integrated literacy training programs in three agrifood workplaces
- *The Get Real Factor* – guidance for vocational trainers and assessors on addressing LLN in AgriFood Training Packages
- *From the Ground Up* – a guide to core LLN skills for teachers, trainers and assessors delivering entry-level qualifications in the agrifood industries.

## CONSTRUCTION & PROPERTY SERVICES INDUSTRY SKILLS COUNCIL

The construction and property services industries employ more than 1.8 million Australians in approximately 500,000 enterprises involved in the design, building, maintenance, management and protection of Australian property. The industries and enterprises are diverse in their skill needs and vary considerably in the extent to which they rely on LLN skills, from traditionally low LLN expectations in the building trades to highly developed LLN skills in building design, property management and sales.

Of these workers a significant number have low levels of literacy and numeracy. Despite this, these industries have a demonstrated history of failing to seek support and training for these workers.

The 2006 Adult Literacy and Life-skills Survey

(ALLS) reported that the construction industry has large proportions of their workforce with literacy and numeracy skills at the lowest measurable levels. The comparison of the literacy and numeracy levels of the construction industry with the cross-industry average below clearly shows that the construction industry has a significant percentage of workers with low literacy and numeracy levels compared to the cross-industry average.

### KEY DRIVERS

Although ABS data from the 2006 Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALLS) survey revealed that a significant proportion of the construction industry workforce has very low LLN skills, the industry does not generally seek LLN support or training.

For many employers within the construction and property services industries LLN is not considered an important issue. However, industry stakeholders have informed CPSISC that there is a need to address LLN issues that are impacting on work performance and skill development. Drivers that may bring about an increased focus on LLN in the Construction and Property Services industries are increasing safety and compliance requirements and barriers to productivity and progression.



THE CONSTRUCTION & PROPERTY SERVICES ISC IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FOLLOWING TRAINING PACKAGES.

CPC08 Construction, Plumbing and Services Integrated Framework Training Package

CPP07 Property Services Training Package

PRM04 Asset Maintenance Training Package

### Increasing safety and compliance requirements

Like many other industries, the construction and property services industries are experiencing increased legislative and compliance requirements. The rising reporting obligations that accompany this change are exposing the limited LLN skills of many workers and drawing attention to the need for improvement. Long-term workers engaged in highly specific tasks, such as commercial cleaning and security guarding are particularly affected by increasing safety and compliance requirements. It is important that the LLN skills of existing workers continue to improve so that they remain productive members of the workforce.

Limited LLN skills among many small business owner-operators in the construction and property services industries affect their ability to meet compliance requirements for OHS, insurance and accreditation. Difficulties with compliance requirements can also affect an employer's readiness to take on apprentices.

### **Barriers to productivity and progression**

The impacts of LLN issues in the workforce are most readily noticed by employers when they affect the bottom-line. Enterprises in the construction and property services industries can incur unnecessary waste and expense when employees cannot perform simple calculations and estimations of materials. Enterprises are also disadvantaged when skilled existing workers are unable to progress from operational trade roles to supervisory positions because of their inability to cope with the documentation requirements.

Another particular pressure for small business owner-operators with limited LLN skills can be an inability to keep up-to-date with ICT skills and therefore to implement new technologies in their business. In extreme situations business owners can find themselves at the mercy of employees who have a greater understanding of the business' financial software systems.

### **CHALLENGES**

#### **Limited industry awareness**

Despite awareness raising activities by many industry bodies and associations, many employers within the construction and property services industries remain unaware of the adverse impact low levels of LLN are having on their business.

#### **Funding availability**

Perhaps because LLN skill development is not high among the priorities of construction and property services industries employers, there is limited willingness on the part of employers to pay for such LLN training.

### **CPSISC RESPONSE**

#### **Awareness raising**

CPSISC actively disseminates information on LLN and seeks out feedback from its industry sectors in order to respond to specific LLN issues and continuously improve its LLN resources and workshops. The ISC uses a structured approach to gathering industry input on LLN, maintaining a database of interested individuals and conducting regular teleconferences with twelve sector specific RTO cooperatives to validate resources and generate feedback on LLN.

CPSISC also has a dedicated webpage for LLN providing reports, events and general information for enterprises and RTOs within the construction and property services industries.

CPSISC has developed a three year strategy to respond to LLN issues in the construction and property services industries. Initiatives in the strategy aim to benefit a wide range of VET stakeholders, including employers and training organisations who may need to have the benefits of LLN training 'sold' to them. A key focus of the strategy is the delivery of professional development workshops for RTOs to build their knowledge and use of the Australian Core Skills Framework and the WELL program.

#### **Supporting workplace training programs**

Given industry resistance to outlaying funds for LLN training, CPSISC is working with specific companies, including Sydney Night Patrol and Enquiry (SNP) and Simmonds Domestic Home Building Company, to help them access funding for company-specific LLN programs for their workforce. CPSISC will continue to work with companies like SNP and Simmonds during the second year of their WELL Broker project.

## COMMUNITY SERVICES & HEALTH INDUSTRY SKILLS COUNCIL

The Community Services and Health industries comprise services in a wide range of sectors – including aged care, disability, mental health, children, youth and family, and drug and alcohol – and a comprehensive range of health services, such as nursing, ambulance care, dental, optical and alternative health.

Face-to-face interaction and responsiveness to client needs are key features of the Community Services & Health industries. The language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills of the Community Services & Health workforce impact on the industries' capacity to provide consistent, quality services.

Additionally, for many different reasons, the clients of these industries may have difficulty communicating in English. Clients of the CS&H industries can be vulnerable, ill or confused. They may be disengaged from society and have a constellation of needs – housing security, substance abuse, mental health, disability, abuse survival – often including LLN needs. Responding to the needs of these clients adds an extra layer of complexity to the LLN skills required by the CS&H workforce.

### KEY DRIVERS

Drivers for an increased focus on LLN in the CS&H industries are an increasingly diverse workforce, and intensifying requirements for quality and compliance.

#### Increasingly diverse workforce

The centrality of the health and community services to all communities means that members of all Australian communities are represented in the CS&H workforce. The industries include workers from remote Indigenous communities, inner city homeless shelters, and recently settled migrant communities of all nationalities. The CS&H workforce includes many people for whom English is a second, or third or fourth, language. Some of these people may also have had limited education in their first language. The workforce also includes English speakers with a limited educational background.

While this diversity and connection to community is one of the great strengths of the CS&H industries, it also brings a diversity of LLN issues that impact on the ease with which the workforce can develop new skills and adapt to change.



Community Services & Health  
Industry Skills Council

THE COMMUNITY SERVICES & HEALTH  
INDUSTRY SKILLS COUNCIL IS RESPONSIBLE  
FOR THE FOLLOWING TRAINING PACKAGES.

CHC08 Community Services Training Package

HLT07 Health Training Package

#### Intensifying requirements for quality and compliance

CS&H workers may have poor English speaking and writing skills for a variety of reasons, but in all parts of the industries the LLN skill demands are increasing. Clear oral and written communication are critical for complying with legislative reporting requirements and for ensuring quality of care – and in the CS&H industries maintaining accurate records and correctly interpreting work instructions can also be a matter of life and death.

The increasing LLN demands of the Health industry have been reflected in a new requirement for Registered Nurses and Enrolled Nurses to achieve an academic level 7 of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) to obtain registration in Australia. Until July 2009 the IELTS requirement had been 6.5 for some units. This change, while possibly ensuring higher LLN skills in the workforce, will potentially restrict the recruitment of Registered Nurses from the international labour market and exacerbate skill shortages.

## CHALLENGES

Although the importance of LLN skills is widely recognised by Community Services & Health employers there are significant obstacles to upskilling the workforce. Access to appropriate funding and expertise are the primary challenges.

### Limited funding for training

Many Community Services & Health employers are not-for-profit or reliant on government funding. When budgets are tight prioritising workforce development is difficult, and unfortunately in the CS&H industries improved outcomes as a result of training do not necessarily lead to increased income or reduced costs. Client satisfaction or welfare is not always directly related to service funding levels, unlike in more profit-driven industries, and so the improvements in service delivery that result from training are not financially rewarded.

### Limited access to LLN expertise

Through the WELL Broking Program, the ISC has noted a lack of qualified LLN trainers and registered training organisations with scope to deliver LLN in the CS&H industries. It has also become apparent that the WELL training model does not always match the way in which employers would like to develop their workforce.

### Restrictive funding models

The CS&HISC Training Packages developed in consultation with industry clearly indicate the levels of LLN required within the workplace. Although many employers would like to use programs that integrate LLN skills into the vocational component of the training, funding mechanisms do not allow this to happen easily.

## CS&H ISC RESPONSE

### Embedding LLN in qualifications

In response to feedback from industry, LLN has been recognised within CS&HISC Training Packages as an industry-wide issue for both those undertaking training and for the industries' clients. LLN skills are being made more explicit in Training Packages to ensure that training providers delivering CS&H units will build LLN into their delivery. An elective unit of competency for Community Services Workers working with clients with LLN needs has been proposed for inclusion in relevant qualifications. In addition, competencies addressing communication skills and the LLN skills and knowledge required to identify and support clients with LLN needs are under consideration for embedding in the core of a wide range of CS&H qualifications. This approach, to be progressed through a continuous improvement process, will be more far-reaching than a stand-alone LLN unit because it will demonstrate how LLN is integrated into practice throughout the industries.

### Encouraging the development of specialist skills

The CS&HISC is developing units of competency for volunteer literacy and numeracy tutors. These units will form an elective group and skill set in the Certificate III in Active Volunteering. They provide an opportunity for individuals to build their skills and pursue qualification pathways in LLN support, as well as potentially boosting the availability of LLN expertise in the community.

### Supporting Indigenous learners

To support the LLN needs of Indigenous learners working in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health sector, CS&HISC developed a resource kit for the Certificate II in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Care (HLT21307). The comprehensive resource kit was developed in 2008 with WELL funding in 2008 and has been very well-received by learners, RTOs and employers. The content of the kit has been particularly effective for apprentices and trainees in the workplace.

### Raising awareness and sharing knowledge

By participating in the DEEWR funded WELL Broker Program, CS&HISC is working with employers to raise awareness of LLN issues and encourage uptake of government funding for targeted LLN training in the workplace. Information on LLN is also disseminated via the CS&HISC website where research, publication, resource and project information has been compiled for easy access by industry and RTO stakeholders.

## ELECTROCOMMS & ENERGY UTILITIES INDUSTRY SKILLS COUNCIL

The ElectroComms and Energy Utilities industries for which EE-Oz Training Standards is responsible comprise the Electrotechnology, Gas Supply, Generation, Transmission, Distribution and Rail Industries. Broadly these industries are characterised by industry regulation and a strong emphasis on occupational health and safety, significant technical knowledge and skills, structured work roles and continual change in response to advances in technology, work practice and policy.



TRAINING STANDARDS  
AUSTRALIA

EE-OZ TRAINING STANDARDS IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FOLLOWING FOUR TRAINING PACKAGES.

UEE07 Electrotechnology Training Package

UEG06 Gas Industry Training Package

UEP06 Electricity Supply Industry - Generation Sector Training Package

UET09 Electricity Supply Industry - Transmission, Distribution and Rail Sector Training Package

### KEY DRIVERS

Drivers for an increased focus on LLN in the ElectroComms and Energy Utilities industries are difficulty finding acceptable recruits, continually changing work environments and the movement of tradespeople into technical and para-professional roles.

#### Difficulty finding acceptable recruits

Due to the high level technical and safety requirements of the workplace, workers in the ElectroComms and Energy Utilities industries are expected to have the LLN skills that will allow them to operate effectively. Employers have reported a lack of applicants with the required aptitude and level of LLN skills for entry into the industry.

#### Continually changing work environments

ElectroComms and Energy Utilities workers, regardless of sector or discipline, work in highly technical and continually changing environments. Science and technology continue to influence existing products and trigger new processes and equipment to meet global and local community demands. The industries need workers who can apply their knowledge and skills, communicate ideas both orally and in writing, control highly technical equipment, critically assess and appraise situations and apply creative, diagnostic and problem solving techniques on a day-to-day basis, whilst simultaneously keeping up with technological advancement. Sound LLN skills are needed to underpin and enable the ongoing development of this level of workforce capability.

#### Pathways into technical and para-professional roles

After working as qualified tradespeople for a number of years, many workers in the ElectroComms and Energy Utilities industries seek technical officer and para-professional positions. In addition to the advanced technical skills and knowledge required, technical officers and para-professionals need advanced written and oral communication skills, workplace leadership and management skills. They also require highly developed capability in mathematics and physics. Building LLN skills is therefore an important aspect of effective transitions from tradesperson to other roles within the industry.

### CHALLENGES

#### Continual workforce upskilling

Changes in technology, work practice and policy are continually demanding new skills of the ElectroComms and Energy Utilities workforce. However, the demographic composition of the workforce in a number of industries can impact on the ease with workers can be upskilled. Many of the industries have:

- a high proportion of mature aged workers who may not have studied for many years
- significant numbers of workers from non-English speaking backgrounds
- workers who have a background of limited educational attainment or opportunity.

## EE-OZ TRAINING STANDARDS RESPONSE

### Promotion of WELL training

In 2010 EE-Oz Training Standards was funded to act as an industry broker for the WELL program. In undertaking the broking role, EE-Oz worked with employers and other stakeholders to identify LLN skill needs and develop WELL funding applications. This work will continue in 2011 and facilitate the commencement of 220 participants in LLN training customised for workplace needs.

### Development of support resources

EE-Oz Training Standards has developed a range of resources to support ElectroComms and Energy Utilities workers and enterprises with specific workforce development challenges that occur at different stages of career progression.

The online *Pre-apprenticeship Self-assessment Tool* provides potential apprentices with an understanding of the language, math and science knowledge and skills they will need when they enter the Electrotechnology trades and advice on how to improve their skills if necessary. Once learners are undertaking an electrotechnology training program, the *Electro Critical Resource Suite* helps them with their LLN skills by identify skill gaps and relevant support resources.

*Algebra equals* is an online resource based on the numeracy demands encountered when undertaking an Australian Apprenticeship in Certificate III in Electrotechnology Electrician. The *WELL Readiness* resource targets tradespeople progressing into technical and para-professional roles. The freely available web-based resource acknowledges that need a very different suite of LLN capabilities is needed for this transition. It is designed to help industry organisations support employees who want to undertake Diploma and Advanced Diploma qualifications in Electrical Engineering or Power Systems.

Currently under development is a new online resource to assess and identify gaps in ICT capabilities for people wanting to engage in e-learning programs. The resource will be designed to meet the needs of electricians, electronics and telecommunications trade workers, construction, distribution and production managers, and labourers in the residential building construction, electricity transmission and electricity distribution industries.

EE-Oz had previously adopted the National Recording System (NRS) into its Training Package and supports the inclusion of the five core skills described by the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF). A pilot is currently being undertaken by EE-Oz for the Adult Literacy Section within DEEWR to map the five core skills and contextualised exemplars to a selected thirty-five Units of Competency.

## FORESTWORKS

The forest, wood, paper and timber products industry comprises forest growing and management, harvesting and haulage, sawmilling and processing, timber product manufacturing (predominantly building and packaging products), wood panel/board production, pulp and paper manufacturing, and timber merchandising. In some cases, operations from a number of these sectors occur at the one site, within the one company.

The industry is predominantly regional, with a strong culture of connecting with the communities in which the industry is based. While productivity and profitability may drive the industry as a whole, for many within the industry there are wider concerns. These concerns relate to developing skills to improve problem solving abilities, verbal communication and interpreting written reports. It is notable that in this industry, successful outcomes from LLN projects may be reported as:

- A worker is safe.
- A worker can go home at night and read a book to their children.
- A worker can continue to learn.

### KEY DRIVERS

Drivers for an increased focus on LLN in the forest, wood, paper and timber products industry are safety, changing technology and sustainability.

#### Staying safe

For the forest, wood, paper and timber products industry safety is a key issue. Tree felling activity, log haulage, the use of chemicals, heavy machinery, computer-controlled high speed timber processing equipment and fire fighting equipment have the potential to be hazardous. It is essential that all workers have the skills to identify, understand and follow operating and safety procedures.

#### Changing technology

Increasingly, computer-based equipment is used in processing plants and in forest management. The standard of technology is also becoming more sophisticated, with robotics, GPS tracking and micro chips being used from tracking logs to ensuring chain of custody certification, through to designing and building timber products and paper. Communication within the industry is increasingly taking place via email and other technologies. Workers will require new skills to enable them to interact with and operate computer-controlled equipment and to interpret computer-generated instructions.

#### Sustainability

The industry has a long involvement with sustainability issues and practices and the level of reporting under industry systems continues to increase. Environmental management systems are expanding to include development of a carbon inventories and reporting systems, together with the compliance requirements for certification schemes. This proliferation and diversification of reporting will demand complex LLN skills from workers at all levels of the industry.



FORESTWORKS IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FOLLOWING TRAINING PACKAGES.

FPI05 Forest and Forest Products Training Package

FPP01 Pulp and Paper Manufacturing Industries Training Package

## CHALLENGES

### Impacts on productivity

Productivity is the key concern for enterprises – where productivity suffers, there are barriers to participation in training. For enterprises operating in regional and remote areas, accessing LLN training can be difficult due to the distance from where most LLN specialists are located. Solutions that involve making adjustments to workplaces and work activities, such as plain English signage and awareness-raising activities, are often preferred over structured LLN training programs.

### Fit for purpose LLN skill development

Many sectors within the industry employ workers, including Indigenous Australians, with limited formal educational backgrounds. In addition, some industry workforce labour and skill needs have been addressed through the recruitment of people with English as a second language, many of whom have limited English language skills.

With responsive and tailored training programs that ensure LLN requirements for learning and assessment tasks do not exceed the levels required for vocational competency (for example, workplace based skill assessments that require limited reading or writing), this workforce has been able to achieve required workplace competencies up to Certificate III level. However, the LLN obstacles that remain can prevent these participants from articulating into higher level qualifications.

### Identifying and addressing LLN needs

Another challenge to the implementation of effective LLN skills development solutions is the difficulty of identifying workers with LLN needs, as workers are often reluctant to reveal that they have a lower level of LLN skills. Supervisors within the industry may, themselves, have LLN barriers and are therefore not aware of the skills of their workers or are unable to support them. As the industry is predominately based in regional Australia, this can limit access to RTOs with LLN expertise. Most of the RTOs in the ForestWorks training provider network are small enterprises focusing on technical expertise. The majority of the trainers hold as their highest qualification the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, and would require enhanced capacity to assist learners with LLN issues.

## FORESTWORKS RESPONSE

### Assessment flexibility

Alternative assessment methods, including filming, recording and oral assessments, are used for many ForestWorks competencies to allow assessors the flexibility to accommodate a candidate's LLN skills. A number of training support materials have also been developed to provide visual and interactive learning options for participants. CDs incorporating images, PowerPoint presentations and audio soundtracks have been developed for chainsaw operators, forest harvester operators and OHS and environment aspects of forest management operations and harvesting.

### Improving awareness and learning support in the workplace

Several projects have been conducted to improve awareness of LLN issues in the workplace and to develop ways in which the work environment can be adapted to address these skills shortages. One such project was to adapt signage for standard operating procedures (SOPs) on sawmilling equipment. The SOPs were written in plain English, with digital photographs for illustration, and were concentrated on equipment most likely to cause injury. The project enhanced onsite training and assessment, and reduced the levels of accidents due to workers not having adequate site safety procedures. Another project utilised workplace mentors so that the training was ingrained in workplace activities, providing a link between current skills, required skills and emerging skills.

Forestry Tasmania (RTO), with ForestWorks support, is working with remote communities in the Northern Territory to provide training in the harvesting and processing of timber on a small portable sawmill. Accommodating the LLN skills of the participants has involved revising production sizes of timbers into multiples of five, for example from 92mm to 95mm, to better support workers' numeracy skill levels.

### Industry skill development

ForestWorks is participating in a newly created National Training and Skills Development panel operating in a national, multi site company. It is a collaboration between the company, unions and the ISC, which will be responsible for implementing both industry-based skills and essential skills. The panel seeks to harness the productivity potential of investment in skills and the alignment of training with other business priorities. A key priority for this initiative is to improve the LLN skills of the workforce and to empower employees to lift their future skills and take on new job roles. This approach is considered as an industry best practice model and is being used across the seven industry sectors to inform other companies.

## GOVERNMENT SKILLS AUSTRALIA

Government industry sectors include correctional services, local government, public safety, public sector and water. Together they employ a vast workforce that is represented in all geographic areas across the country. Although there are significant differences between the sectors, generally they draw on a skilled workforce with highly developed LLN skills. The government and community safety industries tend to have a strong training culture that supports the continual updating and refreshing of required skills.



GOVERNMENT SKILLS AUSTRALIA IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FOLLOWING FIVE TRAINING PACKAGES.

CSC07 Correctional Services Training Package

LGA04 Local Government Training Package

NWP07 Water Training Package

PSP04 Public Sector Training Package

PUA00 Public Safety Training Package

### KEY DRIVERS

Drivers for an increased focus on LLN in the government and community safety industries are an ageing workforce, articulation into higher education and the introduction of new technologies.

#### An ageing workforce

The ageing of the Australian workforce is putting pressure on employers to attract and retain older workers. Many sectors of the government and community safety industries have put specific strategies in place to recruit mature-aged workers, but upskilling or enhancing the LLN skills of these workers can be critical for ensuring their effectiveness in the workplace.

#### Articulation into higher education

Many older workers in the government and community safety industries were initially trained on the job and do not possess formal qualifications. Gaps in the LLN skills of these workers may become apparent if new training or development requirements, such as those needed to implement new systems, processes or technologies, are introduced to the workforce. These LLN skill gaps can restrict the ease with which experienced and knowledgeable workers can articulate into higher education, often impacting their opportunities for career progression.

#### The introduction of new technologies

Rapid changes in technology demand ongoing upskilling and professional development in the government and community safety industries. For example, in the water industry the use of SCADA systems, meter reading devices and laptops on site has significantly altered the skills required in the workforce.

An increasing focus on sustainability in the government and community safety industries, most notably in the water industry but also in local government, has also increased demand for skills and knowledge in the mathematics and science needed for environmental testing and analysis.

## CHALLENGES

### **Increasing workforce diversity**

Many sectors within the government and community safety industries place importance on employing a workforce that reflects the diversity of the Australian community. As a result the industries recruit significant numbers of migrants and Indigenous workers. Approaches to workforce development need to take account of the diverse LLN skill levels of the workforce – this is also an important issue in the volunteer sector of the public safety industry where learners come from a wide variety of educational backgrounds.

### **Uneven skills across the industries**

Because the government and community safety workforce generally has high levels of LLN skill, industry leaders and workforce planners may assume that LLN issues do not exist in the workplace. However, some sections of the workforce, such as outdoor personnel in local government and the water industry, experience significant LLN issues. Based on industry consultation, Government Skills Australia has estimated that more than half of workers in these occupations require some form of LLN development.

## GOVERNMENT SKILLS AUSTRALIA RESPONSE

### **Industry liaison**

The Government Skills Australia workforce development team and industry liaison officers are in regular contact with employers, employee groups and RTOs on critical workforce skill issues, including LLN. Information gathered through these contacts informs the ISC's work on the development of training products and strategies and the provision of advice to relevant government bodies.

### **Training Package enhancement**

In consultation with the water industry, Government Skills Australia conducted a functional analysis of the Water Training Package to identify any existing gaps. Knowledge of mathematics was identified as an essential underpinning requirement for operators at the Certificate I and II level because without this underpinning knowledge they are unable to progress to higher levels of training. The ISC has now developed a specific maths unit that will be included in the next version of the Training Package to ensure essential industry skills are developed in the workforce.

## INNOVATION & BUSINESS SKILLS AUSTRALIA

Innovation & Business Skills Australia (IBSA) has responsibility for activities across six industries including business services, cultural and related industries, education, financial services, information and communications technologies (ICT) and printing and graphic arts. These industries play key supporting and enabling roles in all other industries and are integrated into all sections of the Australian economy.

### KEY DRIVERS

Drivers for an increased focus on LLN in the IBSA industries are demands for higher level skills and an increasing reliance on new technologies.

#### Demands for higher level skills

Many specialist areas within the IBSA industries are reliant on highly-developed and specialised language and literacy skills, examples include library/information services, writing/editing, training and assessment, sales and marketing, project management, software development. High level numeracy skills are specifically required in parts of the financial services and ICT industries.

In the past employers have not been troubled by low levels of LLN skill in the workforce because these industries have historically attracted workers with highly developed skills. However, increasing labour market competition has the potential to reduce the calibre of new industry entrants and employers are now recognising that in future they may need to adopt strategies for building LLN skills within the workforce.

#### Increasing reliance on new technologies

E-business practices and online technologies have been adopted in all sectors of the IBSA industries. Employers recognise that digital literacy is essential in the current industry environment and the ability to use technology effectively for communication and other work processes is regarded as a basic underpinning skill, but for many existing workers these skills are acquired in a haphazard manner depending on their level of interaction with technology outside of work.



IBSA IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FOLLOWING ELEVEN TRAINING PACKAGES.

- BSB07 Business Services Training Package
- CUE03 Entertainment Training Package
- CUF07 Screen and Media Training Package
- CUL04 Museum and Library/Information Services Training Package
- CUS09 Music Training Package
- CUV03 Visual Arts, Craft and Design Training Package
- FNS10 Financial Services Training Package
- ICA05 Information and Communications Training Package
- ICP10 Printing and Graphic Arts Training Package
- ICT10 Integrated Telecommunications Training Package
- TAE10 Training and Education Training Package

While digital technologies are often perceived as simplifying and automating work functions, some workers who have for many years performed effectively in the workplace can be significantly challenged by the introduction of new 'technology-enhanced' systems. Organisations in the printing and graphic arts industry in particular have experienced difficulties in shifting to digital technologies due to the limited foundation skills of mature aged workers in the industry.

### CHALLENGES

#### Small and micro businesses

The IBSA industries are dominated by small to medium enterprises (SMEs), and particularly by micro businesses and single operator enterprises. The industries include a growing proportion of workers who can be categorised as 'free agents': contract workers, consultants, sole operator businesses, casual and temporary employees. Without an employer taking responsibility for their upskilling or ongoing professional development, the skill needs of these workers may not be addressed – and in this environment underpinning LLN skills are less likely to be considered than vocational and technical skills in any development that does occur.

### Identifying digital literacy skills

Although many employers have identified the need for digital literacy skills, this is a relatively new area of skill development and there is not yet a clear understanding of what these skills entail or how best to develop them in a workplace context. Employers and training providers without a sound understanding of LLN can sometimes envisage digital literacy as the purely technical skills required for computer use. Digital literacy, however, is about the ability to use digital technology to produce meaningful outcomes. It requires an understanding of the purpose and possibilities of ICT tools and applications and an ability to think critically about how they are used. It also includes an understanding of related terminology and the ability to communicate with others about technological problems or issues. The artificial separation of digital literacy from other LLN skills is a potential barrier to workforce skill development.

### Availability of skilled providers

There is increasing demand across all industries for vocational training that integrates LLN skills development but access to trainers and assessors with LLN expertise is limited. Despite the incorporation of LLN skills into Training Packages, the development of LLN skills by LLN specialists has largely been kept separate from vocational training. All industries would benefit from an increased availability of vocational trainers and assessors with an understanding of LLN.

### Funding for the development of high level LLN skills

Many sectors within the IBSA industries rely on high level LLN skills but current funding mechanisms do not provide opportunities to develop these skills in the workplace. Funding through the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program targets low level LLN skills and other funding for existing workers targets vocational qualification outcomes. The development of high level LLN skills is not prioritised in the training system to the detriment of the IBSA industries' workforce.

## INNOVATION & BUSINESS SKILLS AUSTRALIA RESPONSE

### Developing training industry expertise

IBSA's Training and Education Training Package contains qualifications and skill sets to meet the needs of the VET workforce. The importance of LLN expertise in the VET workforce has been acknowledged in the Training Package with the recent development of two graduate qualifications for LLN practitioners – Vocational Graduate Certificate in Adult Language, Literacy and

Numeracy Practice, and Vocational Graduate Diploma of Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Leadership.

Uptake of the new qualifications will be aided by DEEWR scholarship funding available for VET practitioners undertaking recognised LLN qualifications. In 2011 IBSA will develop a suite of support resources for the new qualifications.

IBSA is also considering the LLN knowledge needs of the VET workforce more broadly through a review of the Diploma of Training and Assessment and industry consultation on VET workforce needs in relation to LLN.

### Identifying digital literacy skills

As part of a review of the Information and Communications Technology Training Package, IBSA has identified skill sets for digital literacy in consultation with industry stakeholders. The new skill sets will have application for individuals in a wide range of workplace and community settings.

### Meeting learner needs

IBSA does not have a standard approach to the incorporation of LLN into training products, instead stakeholder consultations are used to identify specific needs and solutions on a case-by-case basis. A recent example of this approach was the review of Certificate IV and Diploma qualifications in Business (Governance).

The governance qualifications are designed to build the skills and knowledge of board members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and so the review included extensive consultation with a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in regional, rural, urban and remote communities. For many stakeholders, especially in remote areas, English is the second, third or fourth language spoken and consultations clearly indicated that LLN levels were a barrier to participation in and completion of the Certificate IV.

By working closely with training providers, Indigenous stakeholders and the Training Package developer, IBSA was able to identify and include appropriate LLN expectations and flexible, but robust, approaches to assessment in the revised qualifications. The qualifications are now a better fit with the skill development needs of target learners which is expected to encourage greater take-up and completion.

## MANUFACTURING SKILLS AUSTRALIA

Manufacturing industries are significant contributors to the Australian economy. These industries employ more than a million workers in approximately 250,000 enterprises across the country.

The manufacturing industries have been severely impacted by recent economic conditions, although these impacts are not felt equally across all sectors. Manufacturers today need high-level skills to provide a competitive edge through design, product development, specialist expertise, technology and supply chain skills.



MANUFACTURING SKILLS AUSTRALIA (MSA) IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FOLLOWING ELEVEN TRAINING PACKAGES.

LMF02 Furnishing Training Package

LMT07 Textiles, Clothing and Footwear Training Package

MEA07 Aeroskills Training Package

MEM05 Metal and Engineering Training Package

MSA07 Manufacturing Training Package

MSL09 Laboratory Operations Training Package

PMA08 Chemical, Hydrocarbons and Refining Training Package

PMB07 Plastics, Rubber and Cablemaking Training Package

PMC10 Manufactured Mineral Products Training Package

AUM08 Automotive Manufacturing Training Package

AUR05 Automotive Industry Retail, Service and Repair Training Package

## KEY DRIVERS

Drivers for an increased focus on LLN in the manufacturing industries are the increasing need for continuous skills development essential for a competitive edge and calls for higher skill levels to cope with new work organisation and technologies.

### Continuous skills development is essential

Employers in the manufacturing industries know that continuous skills development is essential for sustaining a competitive edge. Advances in manufacturing technologies and techniques, increasing globalisation of markets, sustainability objectives, and an ageing workforce drive an ever-increasing need to train and retain a more highly skilled and flexible workforce. More recently enterprises are also facing the challenge of tailoring their skills capability to take up opportunities presented by the improving post-GFC economy.

### Demand for higher level qualifications

Employers and industry bodies are demanding workers with high level skills. They have also identified a need for more rapid updating of skills, particularly in areas of changing technology. Broadening and deepening the skills base of the Australian manufacturing workforce is seen as essential for enabling manufacturers to meet the challenges of offshore competition, but has significant implications for the LLN skill requirements of the workforce.

## CHALLENGES

### **Low levels of formally recognised skill**

Despite increasing demand from manufacturing industries employers for higher level skills, workforce data shows that the manufacturing industries workforce has a lower overall level of formally recognised skill than the Australian workforce as a whole. Nearly half of the manufacturing workforce – 529,400 people – are not recognised as holding a post-school qualification, while industry stakeholders claim that 87% of available jobs require a post-school qualification.

Low levels of post-school qualifications are closely correlated with low levels of LLN skill. While that does not mean that everyone without a post-school qualification will need LLN support, a very significant proportion of the workforce is likely to need some LLN support to successfully undertake nationally recognised training.

### **Lack of access to effect LLN support programs**

Low levels of LLN skills in the manufacturing industries, and in the broader Australian population, were documented through the 2006 Australian Literacy and Life Skills survey. Lack of access to timely and effective LLN support programs, for experienced workers and new entrants alike, presents a critical challenge for employers in achieving successful skill development strategies.

## MANUFACTURING SKILLS AUSTRALIA RESPONSE

### **Increasing workforce skill levels across the manufacturing industries**

*Using nationally recognised qualifications to help lift the measurable mean skills of Australia's manufacturing workforce one step in the AQF* is a major objective of the MSA strategic plan for the period 2008-2011. This workforce development initiative responds to widespread calls from industry for higher skills to meet the challenges of new work organisation and enhanced technologies. Improving LLN skills is seen as a critical part of achieving this workforce development objective and is being considered in all of the work of the ISC.

MSA works at an enterprise level to advise and support enterprises and individuals on workforce development activities, focused on skilling/upskilling the workforce. As part of this effort, MSA has developed several new websites with free tools to help with workforce development and career management. The success of these activities will often be dependent on an upfront commitment to effective LLN support measures.

### **LLN skill mapping-supporting our strategies**

In recognition of the low LLN skills of the operative level workforce, MSA mapped the LLN content of selected qualifications in their Training Packages. Certificate II and III level training pathways for the Process Manufacturing and Metal and Engineering sectors were the focus of this work. The mapping process allowed LLN content in the Training Package to be strengthened and clarified and has also helped to identify advice for inclusion in support materials for trainers and assessors.

## SKILLSDMC (RESOURCES & INFRASTRUCTURE INDUSTRY SKILLS COUNCIL)

The resources and infrastructure industries include drilling, mining, quarrying, and civil infrastructure sectors. These sectors employ approximately 530,000 people in a highly regulated work environment. Large companies dominate the mining and civil infrastructure industries, but many smaller organisations are found within the drilling and quarrying sectors.

Despite the much publicised resources boom and shortages in skilled occupations, competition for entry level positions in the resources and infrastructure industries is strong. Individuals who do not have sufficient foundation LLN skills are generally not successful in gaining employment. However, exceptions apply in smaller organisations, where recruitment processes may not be so structured, and in the area of indigenous employment, which is often a significant aspect of large scale mining projects.

### KEY DRIVERS

Drivers for an increased focus on LLN in the resources and infrastructure industries include indigenous employment, increasing use of technology and the development of progression pathways.

#### Indigenous employment

For many mining companies, land leases are contingent on the company employing a certain percentage of Indigenous workers. The employment of Indigenous workers has highlighted the importance of addressing LLN skills within this group. A range of strategies and resources have been developed within the industry to address the LLN skills of Indigenous recruits, to improve employment opportunities and support retention of these workers and to address the skill needs of the supervisors and mentors responsible for supporting Indigenous employees. LLN is recognised as a major barrier to job progression for Indigenous people, and without LLN support employees rarely progress beyond entry level positions. SkillsDMC has worked with companies where employees had identified learning levels as low as primary grade 4 – indicating the level of support necessary to

achieve adequate workplace LLN levels. The provision of LLN support of this magnitude is costly and time-consuming, and often results in the employee spending more time at training than at work.

#### Increasing use of technology and the development of progression pathways

The introduction of new technologies and the general expansion of the resources and infrastructure industries have increased the range of skilled roles available within many enterprises. Higher level LLN skills are often needed for individuals to progress within the industries into supervisory or specialist roles. The tight labour market, particularly in the remote locations in which the industries operate, has increased employers' interest in upskilling the existing workforce. Building higher level LLN skills are increasingly recognised as an important part of effective upskilling.



SKILLSDMC IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FOLLOWING TRAINING PACKAGE:

RII09 Resources and Infrastructure Industry Training Package

## CHALLENGES

### **Limited access to LLN expertise**

Access to qualified LLN practitioners is a particular challenge for resources and infrastructure enterprises operating in both rural and remote locations. For many employers, LLN expertise is not available locally meaning that support cannot be provided to employees when LLN needs are identified.

Additionally, trainers tend to be either industry experts or LLN specialists and it is virtually impossible to find a trainer with expertise in both areas. Enterprises in the Resources and Infrastructure Industry need access to LLN practitioners who can support the workplace trainers and RTOs on site. This will ensure that the LLN training that is delivered is in the context of the workplace and the job. Enterprises in the Resources and Infrastructure Industry are highly regulated and require all visitors to the site to be inducted prior to accessing operational areas of the site. This in some instances requires all external trainers, including LLN practitioners to be escorted on site at all times. This is often perceived by the enterprise as an additional cost.

### **Employee resistance to identification of LLN needs**

LLN issues often go unnoticed in the workplace. The problems that emerge may be perceived as discipline issues rather than learning issues and can often result in non promotion or termination. For many employees in the resources and infrastructure industries LLN issues are viewed as an embarrassing problem and employees will go to great lengths to hide their difficulties due to fear of termination or ridicule. For this reason, there is often considerable resistance from employees to being taken off the worksite and into a classroom for LLN skill development.

### **Barriers to building supervisor skills**

Although LLN issues are commonly perceived as being at lower levels, in fact LLN issues arise frequently in the resources and infrastructure industries as workers progress into supervisory roles. Many existing employees who may have left school early and entered the workforce as labourers do not have the LLN skills to cope with supervisory roles. However, traditional approaches to learning tend to be resisted by these employees due to historical 'classroom' issues and enterprises have found that giving a training program a title that includes 'language, literacy and numeracy' will often result in low or no attendance.

### **Barriers to matching LLN solutions with workplace realities**

Many employers in the resources and infrastructure industries have trouble releasing employees for training. This is a particular problem for LLN because LLN skill building is an ongoing concern and issues cannot usually be addressed in a few weeks. Fly-in-fly-out trainers have the added challenge of co-ordinating training during shift changes, which are often altered due to worksite commitments resulting in smaller class sizes and lost time.

## SKILLSDMC RESPONSE

### WELL broking service

To help the resources and infrastructure industries access LLN expertise through the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program, SkillsDMC has taken on a WELL broking role with funding from DEEWR. By working closely with employers the ISC has been able to raise employer awareness of LLN issues and funding availability and assist with the identification of effective training solutions. The WELL broker role has proved vitally important for the companies involved as they see the LLN issue as complicated and not their core business. The work of initiating and implementing a WELL training program – writing and submitting proposals, managing and negotiating with RTO's, and coordinating onsite work – would not be possible and would not be done by onsite personnel unless they had a specific LLN role.

### Supporting progression pathways

In recognition of the LLN obstacles that can prevent workers in the resources and infrastructure industries from moving into higher level supervisory roles, SkillsDMC has developed a resource to support the development of workplace communication skills for these workers. *Getting the Job Done* is an interactive CD-ROM based around the daily diary and work tasks of a team leader. The resource addresses the learning needs of workers taking on supervisory or team leader roles and is aligned to Certificate IV qualifications in coal mining, civil construction, drilling, extractive and metalliferous mining.

### Building trainer skills and awareness

With funding through the WELL program, SkillsDMC had developed a practical guide that will help to build the ability of teachers, trainers and assessors to address LLN issues in the delivery of the Resources and Infrastructure Training Package. *Diggin' in* provides practical advice, tools and activities for building learners' core LLN skills in a way that integrates them into the technical skills required in the resources and infrastructure industries. The resource is freely available to enterprises and RTOs.

The WELL broker role has provided a two way learning experience for the trainers and site stakeholders. The position acts as an advisory for all stakeholders including participants, onsite mentors, supervisors, DEEWR project coordinators and RTO's.

The Skills Maximiser™ is a web-based workforce planning tool developed by SkillsDMC to help enterprises and RTOs in the drilling, mining, quarrying, and civil infrastructure sectors with the implementation of SkillsDMC Training Packages. The tool is designed to assist work sites to clearly define their skill needs and to identify any gaps in the skills of their current workforce.

Through the tool SkillsDMC is able to capture industry-wide data on the skill needs of particular workforce groups, such as Indigenous employees and those who have English as a second language. This data will allow SkillsDMC to take account of identified workforce skill needs in their future development of training products and services.

## SERVICE SKILLS AUSTRALIA

Service industries include retail and wholesale services, recreation, sport and fitness, tourism, hospitality and events, hairdressing, beauty, floristry, community pharmacy and funeral services. The industries are dominated by small business with 70% of companies employing fewer than 20 people. Approximately 345,000 businesses in the service industries employ almost 2.5 million people (or almost one quarter of the Australian workforce).



SERVICE SKILLS AUSTRALIA IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FOLLOWING ELEVEN TRAINING PACKAGES.

SIF08 Funeral Services Training Package

SIR07 Retail Services Training Package

SIT07 Tourism, Hospitality and Events

SRC04 Community Recreation Industry Training Package

SRF04 Fitness Industry Training Package

SRO03 Outdoor Recreation Industry Training Package

SRS03 Sport Industry Training Package

THC04 Caravan Industry Training Package

WRB04 Beauty Training Package

WRF04 Floristry Training Package

WRH06 Hairdressing Training Package

## KEY DRIVERS

Drivers for an increased focus on LLN in the service industries are demands for increased computer literacy, interest in improving customer service skills, increasing compliance requirements and attention to the skill needs of Indigenous learners.

### **Demands for increased computer literacy**

The growing provision of services online and the expansion of traditional retail businesses into online stores is creating demand for employees with increased computer literacy. Retail staff are increasingly expected to respond to online customer queries and orders and interact with suppliers via online systems. Service industries employers have reported that older workers tend to struggle more with computer literacy skills than younger staff members.

### **Interest in improving customer service skills**

Customer service skills are central to the service industries and in a competitive industry environment, such as sections of the hospitality industry, they can determine the success or failure of a business. The communication skills inherent in customer service skills are frequently linked to LLN upskilling programs in the tourism and hospitality industries.

### **Increasing compliance requirements**

Uptake of WELL funding for LLN training among service industries organisations has shown that this training is increasingly required to assist employees to understand and meet legislative compliance requirements, such as food safety or OH&S requirements. Small food businesses in particular, many of which are owned by people from non-English speaking backgrounds, have needed training to manage food safety documentation.

### **Attention to the skill needs of Indigenous learners**

Service Skills Australia's *Roadmap to Country* project provided training to support small business development in two Indigenous communities. While the project focused on the skills and knowledge needed to develop Indigenous tourism businesses, the pilot uncovered LLN issues that needed to be addressed for the training to be effective.

## CHALLENGES

### Traditionally low skilled workforce

Barriers to workforce entry in the service industries are low and nearly two thirds of workers in the retail industry do not hold any post-school qualifications. An established culture of low-skills in the service industries may have generated a degree of acceptance of low LLN skills in the workforce. Employers intent on upskilling their workforce for new technologies or newly competitive markets need to challenge and overcome industry expectations of the LLN capability of the workforce.

## SERVICE SKILLS AUSTRALIA RESPONSE

### Support resource development

To assist the development of communication skills in the retail industry, Service Skills Australia developed a targeted support resource for learners and trainers with funding from the WELL program. *The Retail Experience* is a DVD, learner worksheet series and trainer guide that provides practical workplace examples of the reading, reporting and recording skills a retail worker needs to perform. The resource is designed to help learners develop the LLN skills needed to undertake the Certificate III in Retail (SIR30207).

### Building skills and awareness

With funding through the WELL program, Service Skills Australia conducted a three-year, multi-stage project to raise industry and RTO awareness and understanding of the impact of LLN issues, and build the capability to address them.

The *Taking the Lead* project drew together information and advice about LLN in the service industries and made it available to RTOs, employers and other industry stakeholders via the *Taking the Lead* website: [www.takingthelead.com.au](http://www.takingthelead.com.au). The website incorporates an online professional development resource aligned to the Training and Assessment Training Package unit TAALLN401 Address language, literacy and numeracy issues within learning and assessment practice. The professional development resource, *The four steps to taking the lead*, is designed to help trainers and assessors build their skills in identifying and addressing LLN issues in their training and assessment practice.

### Sharing learnings

Service Skills Australia developed best practice information on addressing LLN issues in Indigenous communities as a result of the *Roadmap to Country* pilot project in Indigenous tourism business development. This information has been made available to RTOs and employers via the ISC's website.

## TRANSPORT & LOGISTICS INDUSTRY SKILLS COUNCIL

The Transport and Logistics industries include road transport, rail, warehouse and storage, maritime and aviation, employing an estimated 500,000 individuals directly. While there are a number of large national transport organisations, the Transport and Logistics industry is largely made up of small to medium sized organisations, many of which are family owned and operated. Businesses are dispersed throughout Australia in capital cities, regional, rural and remote locations. Low barriers to entry into the industry mean that it attracts lower skilled workers, often from lower socio-economic groups. Industry analysis has revealed that the Transport and Logistics workforce has lower than average educational achievement and high numbers of migrant workers, especially in the warehousing sector.

### KEY DRIVERS

Drivers for an increased focus on LLN in the Transport and Logistics industries include increasing safety requirements, increasing use of technology and an ageing workforce.

#### Increasing safety requirements

Compliance with increasing workplace safety requirements is demanding higher levels of reading and writing skill from workers within the Transport and Logistics industry. TLISC consultations with industry have revealed that low levels of LLN skills among road transport workers restrict their ability to comply with paperwork requirements as well as their ability to undertake training on new requirements.

#### Increasing use of technology

The use of new technologies, such as GPS and electronic tracking systems, is becoming standard in many organisations within the Transport and Logistics industries. While technologies, such as barcode scanners and navigation systems, can reduce the need for certain types of LLN skill their implementation can also demand new skills. For workers with low level LLN skills learning how to use a new piece of equipment can be overwhelming unless effective support is provided.



TRANSPORT & LOGISTICS  
INDUSTRY SKILLS COUNCIL LTD

TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS INDUSTRY SKILLS COUNCIL IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FOLLOWING TRAINING PACKAGES.

AVI08 Aviation Training Package Version 1

TDM07 Maritime Training Package

TLI07 Transport and Logistics Training Package

#### An ageing workforce

The problems associated with increasing safety requirements and the increasing use of technology are exacerbated in the road transport industry where there is an ageing workforce that has previously not been expected to use higher level LLN skills. This growing cohort of ageing employees now needs LLN support to deal with the safety and technology changes occurring in their workplace.

The interstate transport industry was an easy way to make a living simply steering a wheel. Over the past decade we have seen an increase in paperwork that drivers must fill out, only for the better I might add, with regards to fatigue, speed and chain of responsibility, laws and legislation. Yet most of the workforce remain illiterate which in turn does not help with the training of new laws that they must abide to.

The old adage “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks” is rife in [interstate transport] industry. Older drivers don’t want to know and until they receive a fine or warning letter they don’t care.

*TLISC industry consultation respondent*

## CHALLENGES

### Limited access to LLN expertise

TLISC consultations with industry reveal that there is increasing interest in training that addresses broader workplace skills, such as LLN, and drives further skill development. However, limited access to LLN expertise and advice among enterprises and training providers restricts the widespread take-up of such training. TLISC has identified a need for ongoing professional development to improve awareness of LLN issues in the workplace.

Small and medium sized enterprises in the Transport and Logistics industry do not generally have LLN expertise. Given their workforce profile, these enterprises need considerable support in dealing with the LLN skill needs of their workforce.

### Program and funding flexibility

TLISC has observed that while LLN are generic skills, the nature and priority of these skills changes in line with an enterprise's business activity. New production processes, technologies and work requirements impact on the generic skills required and flexibility needs to be maintained in approaches to their development.

TLISC has also noted outcomes from a project commissioned by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority which found that additional training delivery hours needed to be allocated to students with LLN needs. The large proportion of learners within the Transport and Logistics industry who require additional support for LLN has significant implications for the average learning time applicable to Transport and Logistics qualifications.

## TLISC RESPONSE

### A holistic approach

TLISC is determined to avoid LLN becoming an 'add-on' to its products and services. Instead LLN issues are recognised as 'everyone's business' and all ISC staff can contribute to the development of integrated solutions. TLISC supports the inclusion of the five core skills described by the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) in Training Package qualifications. The ISC has conducted internal professional development activities to build the capacity of ISC staff to use the ACSF as a diagnostic tool for analysing and mapping core skills within units of competency. This is seen as an important mechanism for identifying improvements to the integration of core skills in TLISC training products.

### Building LLN skills and awareness

To ensure that the Transport and Logistics industries have greater access to workplace trainers and assessors with an understanding of LLN issues, the ISC ran a pilot LLN professional development program for workplace trainers in 2010. The program was customised for the Transport and Logistics industries and aimed to further develop the skills of trainers to upskill other trainers in identifying and addressing learners' LLN issues. Through alignment of the program to the unit of competency TAELLN401A *Address language, literacy and numeracy issues within learning and assessment practices*, some participants were able to receive a Statement of Attainment on successful completion of the assessment tasks. Most participants incorporated their participation at the professional development program into their internal performance management and skill recognition process.

TLISC will again host an RTO professional development day in capital cities. The aim of the day is to provide information on TLISC products, programs and initiatives. State-based WELL funding co-ordinators will be invited to participate in the program to raise awareness of local funding opportunities for LLN skill development. Feedback from delegates at previous sessions has been very encouraging and the inclusion of the WELL funding coordinators will strengthen the understanding of funding opportunities nationally.

In another initiative to build the skills and knowledge of training providers within the Transport and Logistics industries, the TLISC e-Library has been made available online. The e-Library provides more than 500 registered users with access to a continually updated collection of items, including more than 100 resources and reports related to LLN.

### **Collaborating with industry stakeholders**

To help Transport and Logistics organisations integrate LLN skill development into workforce development solutions and access program funding, TLISC will take on a WELL broking role in 2011. The TLISC WELL Broker will capitalise on the ISC's strong history of industry engagement to access key personnel within enterprises to develop partnerships and establish WELL training programs.

TLISC is also working directly with a number of enterprises on workforce development initiatives that incorporate consideration of LLN issues within the workplace. One such enterprise is a large multi-national logistics company that has identified literacy and numeracy issues among its warehouse operators. TLISC has explored funding and delivery options for a customised upskilling LLN program that will help casual labour hire workers build their skills to enable a transition to fulltime positions.



## CONCLUSION

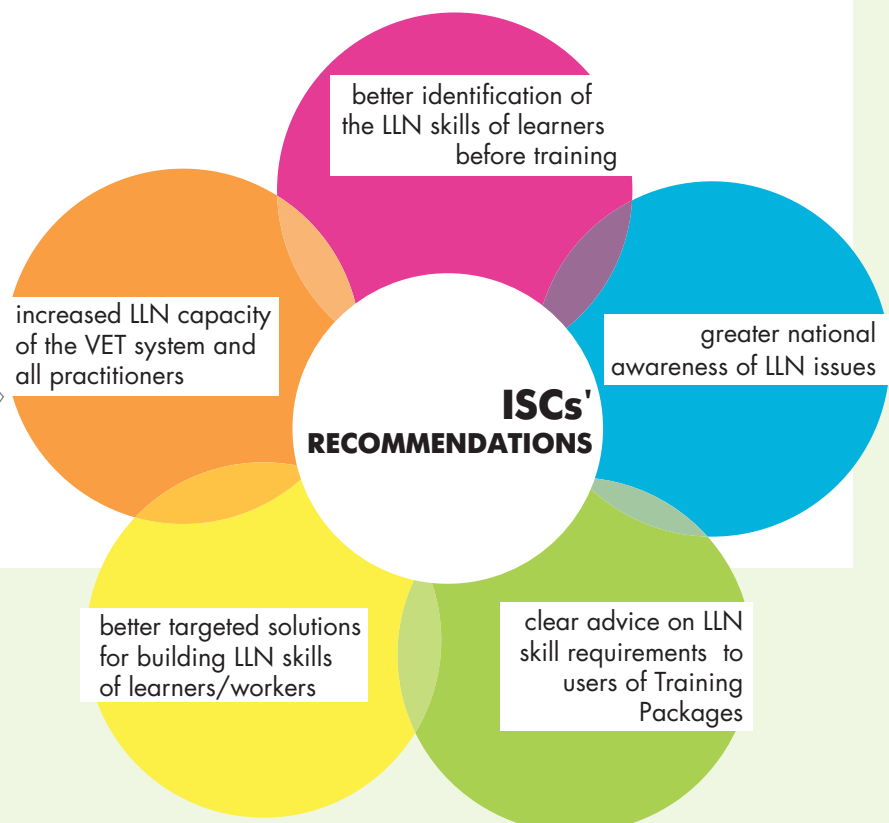
Industry Skills Councils have the important responsibility to represent, define and assist with the skill needs of industry, but very few levers with which to do so. ISCs have developed this statement in order to assist industry and workers to gain the skills they need to keep Australia's economic and social future optimistic. ISCs are in a position to identify workforce LLN issues and possible solutions, but in many cases the solutions are not within ISCs' direct realm of responsibility or control.

The ISCs believe that building the LLN skills of Australians should be a shared responsibility and propose that the Council of Australian Governments should establish an overarching blueprint for action on LLN in Australia 2012-2022.

In addition, within the Vocational Education and Training system, ISCs propose:

- better identification of the LLN skills of learners before training, and targeted funding to address identified LLN skill gaps
- the development of clear advice on LLN skill requirements to users of Training Packages
- the implementation of a strategy to develop greater national awareness of LLN issues, including the de-stigmatisation of LLN skill development
- an increased capacity in the VET system, and all practitioners, to support the LLN skill development needs of learners and workers
- better-targeted solutions for building the LLN skills of workers/learners.

Australia's eleven ISCs urge governments and training providers to continue to acknowledge the importance and urgency of lifting LLN levels, and to work together with ISCs to act on these proposals.









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