



## Providing literacy assistance for job seekers—a new programme

In April and May this year, the Literacy and Numeracy Section of the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) released a Consultation Paper: *A New Programme to Provide Language, Literacy and Numeracy Assistance for Job Seekers*. The paper and consultation meetings conducted in most capital cities canvassed proposed changes to the Literacy and Numeracy Programme prior to the tender being advertised later in the year for contracts for 2002 - 2005.

The most significant change to be considered was the way in which the Advanced English for Migrants Programme, a labour market programme formerly administered by state and territory training authorities, could be amalgamated with the Literacy and Numeracy Programme. Other items considered fine tuning and improving the Literacy and Numeracy Programme that has been running since 1998.

ACAL co-ordinated a written response on behalf of members through the following process:

- circulating discussion paper for written comment
- input from state and territory associations via



2001, the beginning of a new millennium, is an appropriate time to reflect on past policies and practices and plan for a new future. These processes will require the collaboration of post-compulsory practitioners, researchers, managers and others with a particular interest in adolescent and adult literacy and numeracy to ensure that access to appropriate learning is available at a cost that can be met by everyone. The ACAL/QCAL national conference will offer opportunities for such collaboration to occur.

ACAL in collaboration with QCAL presents the

**NATIONAL CONFERENCE**  
**1—3 November 2001**  
**Park Royal, Surfers Paradise, Queensland**

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- Discussion by national teleconferences
- Collation and drafting of a response

The response raised some general issues affecting provision such as:

- conceptualisation of language, literacy and numeracy in the programme, distinguishing features of the target groups and implications for appropriate curriculum;
- client eligibility issues; and
- issues related to audit and verification

Read how ACAL responded to the DETYA consultation paper in the following pages. An electronic version of the ACAL response is also available on the ACAL web site—[www.acal.edu.au](http://www.acal.edu.au)

# ACAL response to DETYA consultation paper

As the peak association for the adult literacy field in Australia, ACAL has circulated the Department's consultation paper, *A New Programme to Provide Language, Literacy and Numeracy Assistance for Job Seekers*, April 2001, and sought input from each of the state professional affiliated bodies as well as members of the Executive through collated responses from meetings and teleconferences.

## Definitions and terminology

The consultation paper and the Department in general use terminology relating to adult literacy, numeracy and basic education and English as a second language provision that is unfamiliar and confusing to those in education.

The terms 'language' and 'literacy' are used interchangeably to denote both target group and forms of provision and macro skills being learned. ACAL recommends that this terminology be clearly articulated in the tender documentation and programme administrative guidelines.

The eligible client target groups could be better described. The following is one suggestion:

- Immigrant job seeker with a language background other than English with overseas qualifications
- Immigrant job seeker, who has a language background other than English (LBOTE) and no qualifications
- Indigenous job seeker whose first language is not English
- Jobseeker (denoting an English Speaking background)

## Level of funding

The initial allocation to the LANP in 1998 was \$139m and the consultation paper states that the proposed combined amount is \$138.7m. It is noted that during the consultation meetings, it was stated that the amount was to be \$143m. While it is understood that this may take into account the fact that the programme was significantly under-spent, ACAL believes that careful consideration should be given to the reasons for this under-use.

## Curriculum options: ESL, Adult literacy and language (ESL and literacy) support for vocational courses.

The intervention courses to assist these clients are also varied. The consultation paper and other government papers frequently imply that 'language' is a type of programme. Pedagogies are different and determined by language background: English or not English

### Target groups 1 and 2 (not English)

People whose first language is not English require a pedagogy called English as a Second Language. There are people with specialist ESL qualifications and courses designed around this methodology. These teacher qualifications and curriculum designed around this pedagogy are not suitable for those whose mother tongue is English.

### Target group 3 (may be English) 4 (English)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are born in Australia but their first language may or may not be English. People born in Australia, whose first language is English irrespective of their ethnic background also need support with 'language'. The emphasis is usually on reading and writing but also on listening and speaking skills.

### Target group 2, 3 and 4 (education background)

There is also a broad target group that has similar characteristics but different language backgrounds, that is, adults who have little or no formal education or credentials and sometimes unhappy experiences of formal learning. This group can cover people from all language backgrounds. Provision for this group needs to address basic or general education content including mathematical knowledge and processes, as well as second chances in other parts of what would usually be provided in schooling. This can include general vocational skills

It is generally accepted among ESL and Literacy educators that all people, but particularly adults, learn best when they are engaged in using language in a practical context. In both fields socio linguistic theories hold that the interplay between social purpose and linguistic structures shapes the way we construct text and interact socially. These theories are reflected in the content and pedagogy of accredited curricula available. The curriculum offered is therefore usually contextualised in some social activity rather than being structured around the macro skills of reading, writing, numeracy, listening and speaking as discrete and separate skills.

The accredited courses on offer reflect these theories. There are courses that pick up on low literacy and oral communication combined with general education as well as courses that link literacy and oral communication practices with various specific vocational areas either as pre vocational courses or to cross credit to professional qualifications.

## *Macro skills*

In terms of what is being measured the programme has adopted the macro skills and Indicators of Competence from the National Reporting System (NRS): Reading, Writing, Oral communication (listening and speaking), Numeracy and Learning Strategies.

It would be useful to use these definitions rather than those of the OECD since they relate directly to the measurable outcomes proposed for the programme. In the consultation the definition of 'language' is not referenced and the interpretation inferred is of 'oral communication'.

The literacy definition, referenced to the OECD fits with Reading and Writing. The numeracy definition is completely different from what the NRS measures. The NRS measures meaning making, problem solving mathematical knowledge and representation and not just arithmetic operations [NRS: 16]<sup>1</sup>. The NRS definitions are inclusive of Auslan and technological support.

Not all the target groups require development in all five macro skills. This point needs to be considered in relation to recommendations about outcomes.

The WELL programme demonstrates that 'language development' using the NRS measures can be done in conjunction with vocational training and that the NRS covers using technology such as computers.

## *The nature of Independent Verification and relationship to moderation*

The paper lacks specific content about the nature of current Independent Verification services or relationship with moderation.

Verification is being retained in the programme despite the fact that providers must operate within the quality assurance structure of the revised Australian Recognition Framework (to be implemented in July 2001) which requires quite stringent audit processes related to assessment. The rationale is that there is a need to check the integrity of assessments in a whole service contract. State auditing, as per RTO quality assurance, should ensure the integrity of assessment in relation to the accredited curriculum but it will not provide information on integrity of assessment in relation to the NRS as this is not a recognised credential in the NTF.

Participation in moderation has previously been a condition of contract but difficult to monitor. There is some question about what is moderated, assessment within their accredited curricula

<sup>1</sup>Coates, Fitzpatrick, McKenna and Maken, *National Reporting System*, DEETYA and ANTA, 1994/5

framework or against the NRS. It is more likely that state resources support the former. The Department has provided additional contracts for moderation against the NRS. Is this practice to continue? There is still a need to check consistency of interpretation and rating against the NRS.

Providers have expressed resentment in a number of forums in which ACAL members have participated about the requirement for independent verification which, they say, questions their professionalism.

The nature of Independent Verification in the current contract remains unclear. There have been three service providers who have not agreed on a methodology and there has also been a slippage to interpret verification as a form of professional development. There are inherent conflict of interest issues in this interpretation. How can an independent verifier check on documentation on behalf of the department while simultaneously providing professional development to support successful compliance?

There are also conflict of interest issues inherent in allowing Independent Verifiers to contract for delivery. Operating as an IV gives unprecedented access to commercially confidential practices of competing providers.

ACAL requests a clear definition of the nature of the service, verification and/ or moderation, that is to be contracted, and that this service be regarded as completely separate from delivery. The qualifications and experience of those able to carry out this function also need to be addressed more fully.

## *Linkage with Centrelink and providers*

The preference for a single provider per Centrelink emerged during the consultation meetings but is not referred to so explicitly in the paper. While it is obviously administratively simpler for Centrelink to deal with one provider, ACAL feels that small community-based and specialist providers will be disadvantaged if this preference prevailed particularly if the programme is extended to include the AEMP.

Perhaps the tender documents could expand on this issue and also deal with consortium arrangements involving referral arrangements to specialist provision in regional centres and taking advantage of smaller and specialised providers. This is particularly the case if a single whole of service model is adopted.

## *Recommended best approaches to ensuring balanced provision of training to meet needs of disparate clients eligible for the programme (4.1)*

ACAL believes that the two programmes, AEMP

and the existing Literacy and Numeracy Programme are not compatible and should not be amalgamated. There are some compelling reasons for this view:

- The target groups are very different (Refer to discussion on definition and terminology for target groups above).
- The administrative arrangements within each programme have been very different eg, flexible entry works well within Literacy and Numeracy Training but is unsuitable for AEMP where time based, vocationally specific courses are usually conducted.
- Only very large providers will have capacity to provide across the whole range of ESL and Literacy. This will disadvantage small and niche target group providers or force inappropriate curriculum on clients to meet obligations.
- LNT is 'outcomes' driven while AEMP has been course driven.
- The education intent of each programme is very different. One group requires provision at low levels of the NRS related to general education while the AEMP requires provision at the two highest levels of the NRS related to specific professional or vocational content.
- The amalgamation of the programme will raise issues of racial and education discrimination. The selection of some clients for higher level of NRS provision discriminates against English speaking background job seekers on the basis of their language background. ESB clients with low literacy will be limited to outcomes below NRS 3 for access while NESB background clients who already have had access to professional training have access to higher levels of NRS. The OECD states that level 3 (NRS equivalent 3) is a requirement to operate in the workplace.

If amalgamation goes ahead ACAL recommends that the programme be administered in separate streams. ACAL believes there are a number of options for determining streams.

They are as follows:

1. Offer training to all clients coming forward with skills assessed to level 4, avoiding discrimination but creating other problems. This system will put undue pressure on the assessor to recommend appropriate curriculum ESL, general, ESL vocationally specific or literacy general or vocationally linked.
2. Offer two distinct streams:
  - Retain AEMP as a separate vocationally specific programme
  - Offer a Literacy and Numeracy Programme with

providers being able to offer accredited courses suitable to ESB and NESB assessed at NRS 1- 3.

3. Offer an ESL stream and Literacy stream with a full range of provision applicable to both pedagogies (again for equity the full range of access to NRS should be available and with vocational options to both target groups.) Targets can be set for both groups for each Centrelink based on demographic information.

ACAL recommends that numeracy be retained as an integrated part of provision because it is crucial to the general education needs of this target group.

### *Other issues:*

During the consultation meetings attended by ACAL representatives, there were discussions about the 'mid point assessment'. ACAL believes that if this is just meant to be part of ongoing "good practice" then why refer to it specifically? If the Department wants progress reports in the middle of the programme to happen in some systematic way, then it needs to provide specific details.

Similarly offering courses in two modules was problematic. The way courses are planned is usually determined by the curricula which will have defined 'modules'. ACAL would recommend that 200 hour modules not be referred to and that planning courses for individuals be negotiated at the local rather than national level to maintain as much flexibility as possible.

### *Recommendation on eligibility (4.2 - 4.3)*

ACAL supports simplification of eligibility requirements suggested in the paper. That is, to be assisted under the programme, a client must be of working age, registered with Centrelink as a job seeker and, if over 20 years of age be:

- in receipt of a specified income support payment from the Commonwealth regardless of whether they are required to comply with an activity test or are subject to mutual obligation requirements.

In addition immigrant job seekers including recently arrived migrants (in Australia less than 2 years), humanitarian entrants and refugees who are not permanent residents or citizens regardless of whether they are in receipt of an income support payment will access appropriate assistance provided they have

- exhausted their AMEP 510 hours entitlement

In addition to meeting the above eligibility requirement, potential participants must also have been:

- assessed by a contracted provider as being able to measurably improve their Reading,

Writing, Oral Communication, Numeracy and Learning strategies by participating on one of the programme's components.

In addition to the specified income support payment for eligibility, partners of those on allowances should also be eligible.

ACAL recommends eligibility for training be extended from NRS levels 1 and 2 to Level 3. This brings the level into line with OECD recommendations.

### *Recommendations of client access and flexibility 5.1-7*

Please note that flexible entry has been a feature of the LNT and should continue within some guidelines depending on the accredited curricula being offered. These entry points should be arranged between the provider and the Centrelink.

Again modules are a feature of the accredited curricula selected and are not helpful in dividing the training. Providing some feedback to the client and Centrelink on progress and future outcomes is reasonable as long as a formal assessment report is not required.

ACAL supports the extension of hours from 6 to 20 hours, but requests that where 20 hours a week is recommended the client automatically be approved an exemption to job search activities.

We would also wish the Department to note that clients studying so intensely at lower levels of the NRS and those involved in vocational specific training require enrichment and excursion activities such as work experience and access to working on computers in the programme. These types of programmes are more likely to engage clients for the full number of hours but may be more costly. When costs comparisons are made in the tender process the comparison includes the value added components of the training being offered.

ACAL welcomes the decision for access to 400 hours training. However, there is no relationship between 400 hours training and the nominal hours available in relevant accredited curricula.

ACAL would also recommend that clients get access to travel allowances as an incentive to participating in the programme to its conclusion. This is a particular issue in rural areas and since fuel prices have risen. ACAL welcomes access to some limited one to one provision as a means of introducing reluctant clients into a programme.

ACAL is very concerned about distance provi-

sion particularly with low level NRS clients, and would prefer the option of one to one before students join a group. Contractors should suggest a mix of strategies in relation to client groups with whom they work. The right mix and costings cannot be determined at the national level for all.

### *Recommendations on defining a successful outcome*

ACAL commends the simplification of outcomes. The outcomes required will depend on the structure of the programme. For a two stream programme, ACAL supports the idea that the client:

- concludes the full number of hours with an increase in at least one indicator of Competence for any 2 NRS macro skills and/or
- gains the outcomes (above), or
- moves to an accredited vocational training course (further education) or to employment.

(For an ESB client at least one of Reading, Writing or Numeracy should be nominated and for NESB clients the Oral Communication should be nominated for progress.)

ACAL considered options for using the Aspects of Communication to give further depth to reporting progress as is the case with the WELL Programme, but in ACAL's view this would complicate the current assessment and reporting practices although there may be some advantages in bringing the reporting structure into line with WELL.

### *Recommendations on effective linkages to other assistance for participants completing their training*

ACAL commends the improved referral process suggested between Commonwealth employment initiatives. However, linkages with state based programmes also need to be established and referral protocols put in place.

There are many job seekers and migrants who are currently enrolled in recurrently funded programmes who are eligible for this programme but there are no protocols with the state for identifying these students. The impact of competitive tendering and payment based on student contact hours is that providers go to great lengths to maintain enrolments at all costs.

There is currently a reluctance to refer clients to Centrelink for referral to a LNT contractor. Given the announcement of training credits in the Budget there may be opportunities for non LN contractors to get financial benefit for placing some job seekers.

Many intensive assistance contractors are



taking advantage of the 'perceived free' recurrent courses. Consequently LNT finds it difficult to locate eligible clients and the state based courses are under pressure.

If referral of eligible clients could occur, recurrent courses could target those in the community seeking literacy assistance who are not eligible for other programmes.

ACAL recommends that any measures that increase collaboration between providers in the best interest of the learner would be supported. The Commonwealth should take the lead in re-establishing collaborative programme planning.

### *Recommendations of requirements on qualifications in addition to the Australian Recognition Framework*

The Australian Recognition Framework theoretically covers all quality assurance issues within the system. Qualifications for teachers in this system are tied to the requirements of the accredited curricula. These are audited by the state training systems. ACAL is aware that many of these requirements are not very satisfactory.

However, this system does not accommodate the capacity of the teacher in regard to applying the NRS nor the teaching of literacy in conjunction with vocational courses. Vocational courses require the workplace assessor and trainer qualifications and competence in the Training Package being delivered. Assessment auspicing arrangements would need to be related to any vocational outcomes being delivered.

There are no national mandatory qualifications for adult literacy teaching. Competency standards were established some years ago but not implemented. ACAL would recommend that teachers employed by LNT contractors have a recognised teaching qualification and in addition have undertaken:

- professional development such as the Adult Literacy Teaching Course, The Adult Numeracy Course, modules of the NSDC pro-

fessional development programmes, or

- completed a post graduate course, either graduate certificate or graduate diploma with units relating to adult literacy and numeracy teaching and assessment

Greater definition needs to be given to the precise Verification service before we can recommend on appropriate qualifications and experience.

ACAL recommends that the tender document outline needs to meet these qualifications as well as an ongoing professional development plan to meet induction for new staff and updating of skills of existing staff.

There is an issue about qualifications and familiarity with the NRS and its application to the LNT. ACAL recommends:

- the combination of qualifications and specific adult literacy professional development in the tender.
- that tenderers should outline PD undertaken re NRS and moderation processes to accredited curricula and NRS.
- plans for ongoing professional development to maintain standard of new or relocated staff to the programme.

### *Recommended new names for the programmes*

Again the structure of the programme may mean you have different names for different components. Some suggestions:

- UK programme is called the *New Deal* (?)
- *New Futures*



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ACAL promotes co-operation among interested organisations and individuals, both government and non-government, by undertaking and encouraging appropriate study, research and action.

**Literacy Link** is distributed free to ACAL members. Articles are available online on the ACAL Homepage: <http://www.acal.edu.au>

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# Youth literacy in Albany

by Lynn Galton-Fenzi

*Three years ago Great Southern TAFE in Albany, WA recognised the need to create a specialised programme to cater for the increasing number of young students wishing to achieve Year 10 equivalence. Prior to this time, these students were absorbed into Certificate of General Education courses. It was discovered that melding these students with more mature aged CGEA students was detrimental to both groups.*

**M**ost students are 15 to 17 year olds; none has achieved their year 10 certificate and many have been marginalised by a variety of other factors - family problems and breakdown; alcohol and drug abuse; homelessness; truancy; lack of self esteem and a lack of prior educational success. Classes are from 8.30am to 12.30pm, allowing the students to accept part-time work. Students also have time to meet their other commitments such as Centrelink interviews.

Through word of mouth, we grew to 24 students over the first term. Our first mistake—the group was continuously destabilised as new comers jostled to establish their position in the class and the original students renegotiated theirs. We now have **one** intake of 16 students, with a top up of new students in second semester. Larger numbers mean the course imitates their previous unsuccessful high school experiences.

We decided to keep the lecturing staff numbers small. Andrea Guille and I are the lecturing team. This way we can play mum and dad, debriefing each other regularly. Maintaining pastoral care of students and each other is critical to our own welfare and the wellbeing of the whole group. It is of fundamental assistance to alleviating stresses associated with the daily interaction of dealing with our students.

In the early days we tried to maintain a flexible, adult attitude to attendance and work ethic. Our second mistake—they may be big, loud and boisterous but inside still resides the child in need of structure and boundaries. Our class rules have not changed, but now we have a formal code of conduct which each student is expected to sign on day one. Behavioural problems are also minimised by this approach as we encourage outward displays of respectful behaviour to others in the team.

Another strategy we use to keep students on task and focussed is to allow them to leave early if they have successfully completed the work assigned for that day. As the course is competency based, we insist that students demonstrate understanding of content in the classroom. We let them know at interview, this is the trade off for no exams and tests. By adopting this process we have discovered students will stay on task, which effectively eliminates many behaviour issues.

In the early days, Andrea and I felt overwhelmed at times with the pastoral care issues presented by the students. They can't be ignored because they are huge impediments to learning and require action.

Our own pastoral care is just as important. In class we look at a broad range of techniques which the students could apply to problems they may be having, for example lateral thinking, problem solving, effective communication skills. Ultimately the final decisions should be their responsibility.

We have formed co-operative liaisons with many agencies in our local community including: J-Pet, the local youth crisis accommodation centre, Family and Childrens Services, Health Department, Drug Action Team, Juvenile Action Group, Juvenile Justice Department, Police Department, Police and Citizens Youth Group, several employment agencies, local high schools, Education Department District Office - in particular the truancy officer and the local arts centre. Besides offering invaluable support to both us and the students, many of these agencies are also able to offer preventive educational support programmes, which we have built into our course. We have enjoyed workshops, information sessions, long term courses and a 3 day camp as a result of initiatives established by some of these other groups.

Past experience has shown that many students come to the college without internalised motivation or positive attitudes to themselves or education. The new course "Gaining A Leading Edge" or GALE for short, attempts to address these issues. It runs for one semester only and focuses on developing the student's self confidence and providing an opportunity to taste test a range of other TAFE courses and job options.

Outcomes for the students have been encouraging, with most of last year's groups now either studying mainstream TAFE courses or having returned to complete their CGEA. Of the rest many are now successfully employed.



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## SACAL Conference 2001

**"Literacy and Beyond: the Trends, the Issues and the Possibilities"** Adelaide, Friday 14th September 2001.

SACAL is calling for presentations that:

- Describe innovative programs and practices that have been developed to meet the needs of clients: learners, industry and other training practitioners;
- Identify new opportunities for more effective delivery of adult literacy and numeracy services;
- Explore possible solutions to some of the difficulties currently being experienced by practitioners.

The Conference is being held at Balyana Conference Centre, 46 Strathcona Avenue Clapham. Registration information will be available from July.

Contact Jan Peterson telephone (08) 8226 1158 or fax (08) 8226 1736  
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## Industry Workplace Communication Network

The National ITAB Workplace Communication Network emerged in response to the implementation of the National Training Framework through Training Package implementation. The group has now met three times and during this time, members decided to reinforce collaborative arrangements for the implementation of the National Training Framework by supporting an industry led approach to workplace communication in industry training.

It will work towards the integration of workplace communication activity within National ITABs Strategic Plans and intends to positively impact upon attitudinal and behavioural change in Industry training.

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