**Youth Literacy and Numeracy - Our Mutual Obligation**

*by Erica Daymond*

Since January 1998, young people between the ages of 18 and 24, who are actively seeking work and have been receiving a Youth or Newstart allowance for six months, have been required to participate in an additional activity under the Commonwealth Government’s principle of Mutual Obligation. Literacy and numeracy training is one of the approved activities. Following the recently announced changes to the Literacy and Numeracy Programme, this option, which previously was voluntary, is now compulsory for people assessed as having inadequate literacy and numeracy competencies. The program has now been opened to other employed groups.

With the assistance of the Adult Literacy Programmes Section, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, ACAL conducted the fourth in a series on national consultative forums addressing issues on adult literacy and numeracy.

The forum held March 19 in Brisbane addressed issues emerging from the most recent attempt by the Commonwealth Government to provide adult literacy and numeracy training. Providers, vocational education and training officials, Centrelink and DETYA staff, academics, union representatives, and youth and welfare policy activists gathered from all over Australia for the one-day event.

The forum, ‘Youth Literacy and Numeracy Our Mutual Obligation’, was originally intended to pick up two aspects of particular concern: the specific needs of 18 - 24 year olds at whom the programme was initially directed, and the concept of ‘mutual obligation’ underpinning young people’s participation in labor market programs.

Parliamentary Secretary, the Hon Trish Worth, assured the audience of the government’s commitment to improving literacy and numeracy. She outlined a range of government initiatives, primarily in the school sector but also for the young unemployed.

Ms Cathy McKay, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, outlined the rationale behind Mutual Obligation and talked about the difficulties of providing basic literacy and numeracy assistance to those job seekers whose skills are below the level considered necessary to get and keep a job (see ‘Mutual Obligation: Eligibility and Compliance’ page 3). The changes to the programme announced by the Prime Minister in the Federation Address in May this year are also detailed in this issue (see ‘Strengthening and Extending Mutual Obligation’ page 9).

John Freeland, Executive Director, Evatt Foundation, gave the keynote address at the forum providing a broad overview of youth labour market and education policies in Australia over the past three decades. Research has shown that today’s ‘at risk’ youth are relatively more disadvantaged than their equivalent group was in the 1980’s (see "Young People: Mutual Obligation of continued overleaf

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Active Citizenship?” page 6). Despite this, specific programmes such as Jobskills, LEAP and NWO’s have been abolished. These three programmes were key elements of the Working Nation strategy. As well, Skillshares were ‘cashed out’. Freeland was critical, too, of the replacement of the 50 year old Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) with a market driven, low cost alternative. As well, he commented on how the goal posts have been changed when considering the apparent effectiveness of training assistance and job placement services.

John Freeland (Evatt Foundation) pointed out in his address to the forum, that for many unemployed youth literacy is not always the issue that needs to be dealt with first (eg. drug dependency, abuse, homelessness . . . ) And the question must be asked: "How do you solve a failed education system in 400 hours, let alone deal with the layers of barriers that make up the fabric of a young person’s life."

Literacy providers and Centrelink staff reported to the forum that Mutual Obligation, although purporting to be progressive and necessary, has had a surprisingly low take-up rate. This and other difficulties are described in the article ‘Mutual Obligation: A Provider’s Experiences’ by Lois McManus (see page 5).

The forum utilised the experiences and opinions of literacy and numeracy providers; representatives from DETYA, ANTA, Centrelink, and youth and social justice agencies; and university lecturers and researchers to develop a list of recommendations for ACAL to offer DETYA seeking greater consultation and collaboration between teachers, parents, communities, schools, industry and students. (see page 8)

Has anyone asked the students what solutions they would like to see? It is time to move away from one-dimensional homogenous approaches to classifying people and literacy issues, to begin to work towards programmes that position literacy as increasing opportunities for life-long learning, as maximising life choices, including employment in a rapidly changing society.

Acknowledgement must be made to DETYA for underwriting production of this publication. Readers of ‘Literacy Now’ will note that it has ceased publication.

Acknowledgement must also go to Alistair Crombie for making available his excellent article explaining in plain English the GST as it will affect non-profit organisations such as ACAL. May I commend it to you.

In this issue

by Jennie Bickmore-Brand, ACAL President

This publication continues to challenge the recurring theme where literacy is constructed as in crisis in Australia and indeed as the major cause of social upheaval and social and economic decline. Coupled with this argument is that by focussing on the literacy of the young and unemployed through such programmes as Mutual Obligation, the government is addressing and solving a range of social problems from delinquency and crime to unemployment. Although links can be drawn between literacy and socio-economic practice, they are complex and literacy cannot be constructed as the primary factor affecting change. If it were then it would be easy to imagine how increased literacy rates would solve unemployment.

Another theme in this publication is the way youth is constructed in the rhetoric surrounding the Mutual Obligation programme. The tone has been set in John Howard’s oft-quoted statement "Refusing to learn how to read and write will deny young people the full dole". Young people, it can be inferred from this, are not only unwilling to learn but need the threat of losing their unemployment benefits to force them to learn.

Casting them in this context serves only to undermine public confidence in unemployed youth. The messages the unemployed receive are that they are unmotivated, and not to be trusted to make appropriate choices.

The voice of one Centrelink client interviewed on video for the forum reported, "I just didn’t know what the workforce was going to bring. It is really touch and go . . . You have to be in the know in order to get a job no matter how qualified you are . . . I need the money ($100 a fortnight) so my inspiration doesn’t just fall through the floor."

John Freeland (Evatt Foundation) pointed out in his address to the forum, that for
Cathy McKay (DETYA) from her address to the forum

Let me briefly remind you of the rationale behind mutual obligation. Mutual obligation commenced on 1 July 1998. It is about improving young people’s job prospects and competitiveness in the labour market and encouraging their involvement with the community that supports them.

It is about encouraging young people to look for work more actively and to participate in activities which will improve their skills and work habits.

• young people have a choice of ten activities:
  part-time work; voluntary work; education and training; voluntary relocation to an area of greater employment prospects; Literacy and Numeracy training; Work for the Dole; Job Placement, Employment and Training Programme; Job Search Training; Intensive Assistance, and Green Corps.

• some young people combine part time work and voluntary work to meet their mutual obligation.

Not all young people are required to undertake a mutual obligation activity, for example those who are currently participating in Intensive Assistance or those who are exempt from job search requirements because they are in full time education or ill, etc.

• people who live more than 90 minutes commuting time from a mutual obligation activity are also exempt. However, they can volunteer to undertake literacy and numeracy training by distance education.

Centrelink advises all new customers about the requirements of mutual obligation when they first apply for benefits. If they are still receiving benefits at six months and are not exempt, they participate in a mutual obligation interview.

Centrelink also monitors job seekers’ compliance with mutual obligation requirements and may apply standard activity test penalties if these are not met. These are:

• 18% reduction of payment for a period of 26 weeks for the first activity test breach in a two year period;
• 24% reduction in payment for a period of 26 weeks for a second breach in a two year period; and
• an 8 week non-payment period for any further breach in a two year period.

First change to Literacy and Numeracy Programme

This brings me to the first of the changes made to the Literacy and Numeracy Programme — the possible direction by Centrelink of mutual obligation clients who have a literacy and numeracy need into literacy and numeracy training:

Until the changes announced on 28 January, 1999, young people had a choice as to which mutual activity they would undertake. As you may be aware, relatively few young people have chosen literacy and numeracy as their mutual obligation activity, in spite of the fact that all the research studies confirm that for many unemployed young people, lack of basic literacy and numeracy skills is a major barrier to employment.

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There are obviously a number of factors involved here, including:

• a reluctance on the part of young people to admit to having literacy and numeracy needs;
• literacy and numeracy training is longer than other mutual obligation activities (up to a year seems an eternity at that age – to me it is hardly a blink);
• many young people who did not gain the requisite skills at school are fearful of going through a similar experience again.

The first change that has been made is about ensuring that those people in the mutual obligation group, who are identified as having a literacy and numeracy need, take advantage of the assistance which the Government has made available to them.

• Being identified as having a literacy and numeracy need effectively means a job seeker has self-identified through their response to the questions which are asked of them at their first interview with Centrelink, or Centrelink may have asked them to fill in a literacy screening questionnaire, or may have noted that they might have a literacy need.

Those who are identified as having a need can be directed to undertake a pre-training assessment with one of our contracted providers.

• If the assessment indicates that they do have literacy and numeracy skills below National Reporting System Level 3 and that they could be expected to improve those skills measurably by participating in training, then they will be required to undertake training.

Those job seekers who are found to have skills above the required level, or those found to have a severe learning disability or some other barrier to improving their skills with training, will not be forced to undertake training or penalised in any way.

Likewise, job seekers recommended for training who do not improve their skills to the degree anticipated will not be penalised in any way.

Some of the breaching penalties I mentioned earlier, may be applied to job seekers who refuse to undergo an assessment when directed by Centrelink to
The ALNARC developed out of the former Adult Literacy Research Network (ALRN). The newly constituted consortium is funded by ANTA through DETYA for a period of 12 months. Each state has a Centre with a Director/Co-directors and co-ordinators or research officers.

ALNARC will have a range of functions which will include:

- undertaking up to two national research studies in areas developed in collaboration with ANTA and DETYA
- undertaking state research activities in conjunction with other stakeholders
- assisting in PD activities regarding applications and implications of research
- preparing publications
- conducting a national forum on adult literacy and numeracy research

In 1999 each state will carry out complementary research on different aspects of two projects: 1. To examine the implementation of Training Packages and the effect of inclusion of literacy and numeracy; 2. To investigate effective and responsive literacy and numeracy provision for groups with identified special needs or circumstances.

Towards the end of 1999 or early in 2000 a national ALNARC Forum will provide an opportunity for state research centres to report on outcomes of the different aspects of the research projects undertaken through ALNARC funding.

A National Advisory Committee has been established to oversee the completion of the two national projects being undertaken by ALNARC. Membership of the Advisory committee is made up of the state Directors and representatives from ANTA, DETYA, ITABs and ACAL.

ALNARC has a national office hosted by the School of Education, Victoria University, Footscray with a National Manager, Beverley Campbell. A national web site is being developed. For further information about ALNARC please contact Beverley on 03 9688 5085, Fax: 03 9688 4646 or email: beverley@dingo.vut.edu.au

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Do so, or to those who have been assessed as suitable for training, but refuse to undertake it.

Things to bear in mind:

- Centrelink is not determining whether or not a job seeker needs literacy and numeracy training or would be able to benefit from it, they simply try to screen out those who might be in this category and send them for a professional assessment.
- While it is not generally thought good educational practice to force a person to learn, I would suggest that such reluctance could be mitigated to a certain extent by a skilful assessor during the assessment who could convince the job seeker that they could help them to improve their reading and writing. In addition, it might be the case that a trainee finds during the first session of training that they do actually make some improvement, however small, and feel encouraged to continue with the training.

Second change to the Literacy and Numeracy Programme

This is the less publicised, but perhaps more important change: Job seekers outside the mutual obligation group can now access literacy and numeracy training if they meet certain eligibility criteria. These include:

- being required to meet an activity test (which essentially means they are on Newstart Allowance or Youth Allowance) or being a sole parent participating in the Jobs, Education and Training Strategy (JET); and
- being assessed as having skills below NRS Level 3 and the ability to improve these measurably with training.

This essentially means that job seekers of all ages, and any duration on benefit, are eligible to access the training if they meet the skill and ability to improve requirements and are also required to meet an activity test. For all job seekers outside the mutual obligation group (18-24 years and 6 months on benefit), participation is voluntary.

Extensions to Mutual Obligation Programme Announced in May

From 1 July 1999 the requirement to undertake a mutual obligation activity has been extended to job seekers aged 25 to 34 who have been unemployed for 12 months. Previously this requirement applied only to young job seekers aged 18 to 24 who had been receiving unemployment payments for six months.

The range of activities which job seekers can undertake to meet their mutual obligation requirements has been expanded to include the Community Development Employment Programme, the Jobs Pathway Programme, the New Apprenticeship Access Programme and the Advanced English for Migrants Programme.

While job seekers in the age group 18 to 34 remain unemployed, they will be required to undertake a mutual obligation activity each year. Job seekers subject to mutual obligation arrangements who have a literacy and numeracy need can be directed by Centrelink to undertake a professional literacy and numeracy assessment.

If they are assessed as having skills below National Reporting System Level 3 and able to make a measurable improvement in these skills with up to 400 hours of training, they will be directed to undertake literacy and numeracy training as their mutual obligation activity. This could mean that some young unemployed people are required to undertake literacy and numeracy training more than once. However, this would only occur if it was considered that the job seeker could further improve their skills towards, or to, the level considered necessary to get and keep a job.
Mutual Obligation: A Provider’s Experiences

Lois McManus was appointed to deliver what was then known as Mutual Obligation Literacy and Numeracy training in September 1998. The following article outlines some of the practical realities facing providers.

SMYL Training is a not-for-profit organisation based in Fremantle. The organisation had operated as a state government funded labour market programme for more than a decade. By 1998 they had had some involvement in offering literacy programs within labour market programs such as LEAP but had not provided stand-alone literacy programs.

My background is in primary teacher training, Aboriginal education, prisons education and SkillShare adult literacy programs. Like most practitioners I was aware that with the demise of most Federal-funded literacy programs, the Mutual Obligation programme offered the only real opportunity for employment for ALBE teachers and was about to become the largest avenue by which adults could access literacy assistance. I was inspired by SMYL’s commitment to establishment of a new arm of their training organisation; I started with a contract and an empty room.

My first task was to market. I needed to help Centrelinks to enthuse 18 - 24 year olds into returning to "school". In my experience they can be a difficult client group to attract. Their own negative school experiences are very fresh in their memories and they have not had time to develop a strong motivation to learn.

The literacy programme was a voluntary option for 18 to 24 year olds who had been unemployed for 6 months. Centrelink staff would have to "sell" the option to clients, so I had to "sell" the idea to Centrelink. With four delivery sites SMYL was dealing with nine Centrelink offices. I found that many Centrelink staff were former Department of Social Security staff and were unused to dealing with the public, making observations and assessing clients skills and abilities - so the marketing programme was very much an educational programme as well.

Problems soon began to become apparent. At several Centrelinks the staff were crying out for a programme to which they could send recent migrant arrivals, others had "women returning to the workforce" who needed assistance. These were not eligible if they were over 24 years old.

I was spending as much time knocking back enthusiastic clients who were ineligible as I was spending trying to sell the programme to the few eligible clients. Eligibility was limited by length of unemployment as well as age. Several Centrelinks told me their procedures meant they were most likely to identify literacy problems at the JSOI, the one-on-one interview when the client first registered - but the client was not eligible at that point. The Mutual Obligation seminar, which took place after 6 months unemployment was often a group seminar and was proving an ineffective means of encouraging participation in Literacy programs. Most importantly, Centrelink staff were saying that the JSOI procedure was actually channelling clients with literacy problems away from literacy programs and into Flex-3.

SMYL Training responded by seeking funding from other sources to fill the gap for those clients who were not eligible under the Federal program. By 1999 we had funding which allowed us to offer classes to those people who were self-identifying as needing literacy assistance while we waited for the Mutual Obligation glitches to be ironed out. My drive for Mutual Obligation referrals was less than successful.

After 4 months I had 8 eligible referrals - to four separate sites. I could have felt really bad - but I had some indications that nationwide the trend was not any better.

In February 1999 the programme was extended to all Newstart, Jobsearch and JET clients. It began to look like something that could actually respond to the real needs that exist in the labour market.

Another factor which had limited participation in the programme was the requirement for eligible clients to be NRS level 1 or 2. No one seemed to know how many clients in this age group would prove to be NRS level 1 or 2. Furthermore the use of the NRS as a placement tool had not been tested and it was unclear how to get an Overall NRS rating. Many of the clients in the 18 - 24 age group who were enthusiastic about classes were those who had not completed year 10 and wished to get that qualification. But could they be assessed as NRS 1 or 2? Given the difficulty of placing people in this programme I didn’t want to exclude anyone if I could possibly find a way to include them.

In WA a team of Centrelink employees was formed to identify clients who could be referred to the literacy program; referrals skyrocketed. SMYL currently has five teaching staff running 8 classes. The challenge has been to set up and equip classes. We have provided basic equipment for delivery of the program. We have the advantage of having designated literacy classrooms.

What we now have is a programme quite different to the original concept. Our client group covers all ages, and all lengths of unemployment. Since February referrals have ranged from 16 to 52 years of age and...
John Freeland, Evatt Foundation, was Keynote speaker at the Brisbane forum. The article that follows introduces the working paper he developed for the ACAL Forum on Youth Literacy and Numeracy. The complete text of paper is available on ACAL website - http://www.acal.edu.au/

This paper will argue that youth policy should have social justice and equity as organising principles, and that the concept of adequately resourcing all young people to participate as active citizens should be the basis for reconstructing the institutional landscape through which young people chart their life trajectories. Such provision must ensure access to the requisite socio-economic and socio-cultural resources to facilitate effective life course decision making and full citizenship participation by all young people.

Young people negotiate their identity and life course in an always already-structured world.

Young people negotiate their way through the complexity of structures, representative forms, images and icons to develop their own cultural groupings and their own understanding of their world - their own world-views. They negotiate the obstacles they encounter in their everyday lives, and they chart their own life paths. They develop their own belief systems and their own subjective identities. These belief systems and subjective identities influence and are influenced by their actions in the physical and social world.

But they do not do these things in a vacuum. They do them in an always already-structured world. The structures range from the form and dynamics of interpersonal relationships in the family and peer group, to the structures of broad socio-cultural-economic institutions. Those structures are ever-changing: being changed by individual, collective and institutional actions which are more often than not intentional and rational (given the resources at hand), but which do not always produce the anticipated or desired result. The structures reflect past intentions and belief systems and carry meanings. They influence both the behaviour and beliefs of all social participants, including young people.

Section Two develops a conceptual framework and theoretical argument informing these propositions. I argue that a prerequisite for developing policies to facilitate young peoples’ structured and structuring problem solving, is the rejection of perspectives which either reduce young people to the status of puppets on the structuralist’s string or alternatively inflate them to self-actualising relativists on the post-modernist’s deconstructing couch. In their stead, we must develop a non-dualist understanding which simultaneously accounts for the presence and effect of structure and individual intentional action. It is argued that the smooth post-war transition from childhood to adulthood has been dislocated for many young people by the long term structural collapse of teenage full-time employment; and that an effective policy response has to be based on an awareness of young people’s propensity to pragmatically solve their own problems with the resources at hand. From this, it is argued that there has to be a broad socio-political commitment to provide the socio-cultural and socio-economic resource base necessary to facilitate young people’s successful transition to autonomous adulthood and active citizenship.

This will be followed in Section Three by an analysis of young people’s changing patterns of labour market, education and training participation, and an identification of those young people who can be said to be at risk of not effecting a successful transition to autonomous adulthood. Some 15 per cent of 15 to 19 year-olds are identified as being at grave risk, but the degree of risk is not evenly distributed across the age group. Rather, a range of structural factors over-
determine the likelihood of individual young people being in this statistical category. A high probability of being at risk is associated with the subjective experience of an integrated complex of disadvantaging factors such as class, sex, race, ethnicity, region, etc.

In Section Four the analysis turns to government policy responses to the identified changes and problems, with the primary focus being on education and training, labour market and income support policies. It is demonstrated that while many of the reforms and programs have been necessary and progressive, and while many constitute elements of a potentially effective raft of policies and programs, they to date have failed to provide the basis for successful transitions by those who are at risk.

Section Five advances a number of social policy reforms designed to more adequately resource disadvantaged young people, their families and communities, and society at large. It is argued that:

- external barriers to unequal access to, and participation in education have to be removed through the provision of comprehensive family and community services and adequate income guarantees for families with dependent children;
- comprehensive educational reforms have to be introduced to equitably resource schools, develop a democratic general curriculum, reform pedagogy, teacher education and teachers’ work, and to decentralise and de-bureaucratise schooling; and that,
- there is a need for comprehensive labour market policies designed to reduce patterns of labour market discrimination, division and inequality, and vocational education and labour market programme provision designed to secure broad based vocational competencies and equitable employment opportunities for all young people.

The complete text of this paper is available on the ACAL web site - http://www.acal.edu.au/

Mutual Obligation:
Using the stick and the carrot

The following views were put in the panel discussion session at the Brisbane forum.

The Welfare Rights Centre is concerned with youth literacy and numeracy in the context of the Social Security Act. People who fail in the education system usually have to face other structural barriers such as disability, homelessness, and family and social problems. The quality of young people’s education is not seen in the context of an under-funded public education system. As well, they are being sent back into the structure in which they ‘failed’ previously. The length of literacy and numeracy courses is also of concern. How do you fit what takes many years in the regular education system into 400 hours? Finally the couching, by Centrelink, of its material in terms of ‘choice’ is illusionary. Penalties for non-operation are severe.

WRC believes a better option is to use the carrot rather than the stick. More choice in programs, greater flexibility in structure, credit schemes for participants and improved avenues of appeal would help create a more pro-active and positive system.

Suzanne Melville - Welfare Rights Centre

There is a need for a holistic approach to young people and for them to be involved in the decision making process. A research project in Queensland has indicated that, whilst language, literacy and numeracy issues need to be addressed, it is social issues such as abuse, homelessness and drug dependency that must be dealt with first. When these young people are forced into LLN programs, what support mechanisms will there be for them? Cross-sectoral support and strategies are required. Models of best practice, programs that work and help for teachers and providers could lead to more young people being successful in education and training.

Dale Johnston - Youth Affairs Network, Qld

The issue of policy changes and how they affect long-term unemployed young people prompted a project, which saw the interviewing of 80 people who fall into this category. Responses, overall, were critical: "I just need money to get started..." "I’m just getting in deeper..." "There just isn’t (sic) jobs around..." "Centrelink is a drag..." "There are really only two barrels you can get into – work or training..." “I think Centrelink staff are just as confused as we are.”

Suzanne Crowley – University of Tasmania

"Sometimes we need a circuit breaker and that might just be Mutual Obligation so third generation unemployed can get off the merry-go-round."

provider at forum

There is training reform agenda concern in relation to the need for education and training for workers. For example the TFC and CFMEU have been active in advocacy for training and have established their own training companies employing teachers including those for language, literacy and numeracy. Traditionally, in the AEU, there has been some frustration in regard to colleagues in unions discussing educational matters. But things are changing and some key issues, impacting on training and education, are emerging. There has been a collapse in the youth labour market. Between 1991 and 1997, jobs for youth declined from 424000 to 205000. The situation is worst for 18 to 19 year olds with employment rates falling by 51%. Increased casualisation of the workforce has also had an effect. Privatisation (cuts to the public sector) has led to redundancies for many Centrelink staff and increased workloads for those who remain. There is concern that the system will fail if not properly resourced. Literacy has become a political football. The
Recommendations arising from Brisbane forum - March 1999

Issue: Co-operative planning
Lack of cohesive planning between Commonwealth, States and Territories and the field for effective provision. For example,
• Eligible clients in existing programs are not being referred to Literacy & Numeracy Programme. • Flex 3 Providers benefiting from ‘free’ adult literacy and numeracy courses in community when they could be referred to Literacy and Numeracy Programme. • There is no incentive for providers funded under state agreements to refer students to Literacy and Numeracy programme Providers.

Recommendation: 1. National strategy for co-ordinating literacy and numeracy provision between the Commonwealth, States and Territories be initiated by the Commonwealth.

Issue: Consultation
Lack of active collaboration in the evolutionary development of the programme

Recommendations: 2. DETYA to maintain consultation with ACAL, as the peak professional body, for advice on the Programme. 3. DETYA to develop a process of regular consultation with all providers with a clear timetable. 4. DETYA to provide written responses to these recommendations. 5. ACAL to publish DETYA responses to these recommendation in Literacy Link 6. DETYA to include ‘youth’ voice in the development, growth and evaluation of the Mutual Obligation aspects of the Literacy & Numeracy Programme. 7. DETYA to fund an independent evaluation of the Language and Literacy Programme, with input from all stakeholders.

Issue: Lack of communication
• Lack of consistent and adequate information sharing between DETYA staff involved in the and Literacy • Evidence of conflicting advice to providers from various Centrelink officers • Lack of consistent and adequate information sharing between Centrelink and Literacy & Numeracy Programme providers • Lack of communication between DETYA and Centrelink • Lack of communication between providers • Lack of information sharing between sectors

Recommendations: 8. DETYA to promote existing avenues for communication with providers and Centrelink e.g. regional Literacy & Numeracy Programme staff, MO staff and ACAL. 9. DETYA to use fax and email to advise providers of changes and developments within two days of being announced. 10. DETYA regional MO Manager to contact the providers to discuss and clarify changes following receipt of communication. 11. DETYA to support provider networks. 12. ACAL to make available its Web site and publications to carry DETYA information and support provider networks. 13. ACAL to promote dissemination of good practice and discussion of current issues on web site and through Literacy Link 14. DETYA to support the development of cross-sectoral reference groups. See Recommendations 1, 3 & 11. 15. ACAL to foster publication of articles for cross-sectoral distribution 16. ACAL to publish views of other bodies and organisations who can contribute to current debates.

Issue: Implications of changing guidelines
• Concern from current providers about possible contractual variations • Concern from non-contracted providers who made commercial decisions based on original guidelines and are now locked out of this program

Recommendation: 17. DETYA to commission a report from an independent probity consultant.

Issue: Barriers to Access
• Intensive Assistance clients are accessing existing community focussed programs with no corresponding funding • People with a disability are often screened out of the Literacy and Numeracy Programme because they experience additional barriers which often require more flexible and supportive learning environments • Clients experiencing literacy difficulties, particularly at NRS 1, cannot effectively access distance learning

Recommendations: 18. Centrelink to review Intensive Assistance clients currently attending other literacy provision and refer to Literacy & Numeracy Programme 19. Introduction of negotiated arrangements and programme flexibility for those with disabilities who are unable to succeed under the current arrangements. No financial penalties should be experienced by providers who cater for this arrangement. Extra funds in recognition for communication support to be available to providers. 20. DETYA to fund research into the distance learning options within the programme. 21. DETYA fund a forum to explore range of options for distance delivery. 22. DETYA to provide transport support for students travelling distance to access face to face training.

Issue: Access into the range of programmes offered by Centrelink
• Mutual Obligation clients frequently require intensive support while on Literacy & Numeracy Programme to assist with personal issues and a range of other barriers that impact on their learning and successful job seeking. • Prioritising between Intensive Assistance and Literacy & Numeracy Programme

Recommendation: 23. Mutual Obligation clients can access Intensive Support alongside Literacy & Numeracy Programme.

Issue: Operational
• A broader range of Centrelink personnel now need to understand the Literacy & Numeracy Programme, eligibility of clients and processes for referral. They need information and training to do this. • Centrelink personnel will be required to identify clients with possible literacy difficulties. They need professional advice and time to do this. • Confusion about invoicing for the Literacy & Numeracy Programme • Lack of consistency in understanding and use of the Literacy & Numeracy Programme forms in relation to the NRS by providers • Concern at the lack of distinction between literacy and ESL in the operation of the programme. Are people with the appropriate experience and qualifications dealing with each group? Are the staff named? • Lack of information about the verification process and how information may be used

Recommendations: 24. Allocation of staff training money by Centrelink to support awareness about literacy and numeracy for Centrelink staff. 25. ACAL to coordinate from within the literacy and numeracy field, the delivery of professional development on identification issues for Centrelink staff. 26. Training provided by DETYA for Literacy & Numeracy Programme providers on accountability and operational procedures with the department. 27. DETYA to fund ACAL to coordinate moderation of the NRS at provider level to ensure a level of consistency of interpretation. Information from moderation to be documented for inclusion in any evaluation or development of the NRS or related resources. 28. Publication of verification requirements and appeal processes

Issue: Marketing
• Negative public perception of the program

Recommendation: 29. DETYA in consultation with ACAL and youth ‘voices’ to promote a marketing strategy for the Literacy & Numeracy Programme that might include • Story line on popular TV dramas that target youth e.g. Home and Away, (covering the whole process from Centrelink to active positive participation in class) • Use of media to cover good news stories from the programme.
Strengthening and Extending Mutual Obligation

The table below places Literacy and Numeracy Training amongst the various mutual obligation options available. (From 11 May 1999 press release - ministerial website.)

From this year, all job seekers who become eligible for mutual obligation will be interviewed by Centrelink to discuss their options for satisfying their mutual obligation and to allow them to make their own arrangements for part-time or voluntary work or to obtain an education or training place.

Those who are unable to meet their mutual obligation in other ways will be required to participate for six months in a Work for the Dole project. Arrangements for some other mutual obligation options are also to be strengthened. Voluntary work requirements will increase from six hours to 12-15 hours a week and part-time paid work requirements will increase from six hours to eight hours a week. This will enhance the benefits that participants will gain from these activities.

It is estimated that by 2000-01 over 300 000 unemployed Australians will participate annually in one or more of 14 options which meet their mutual obligation. (See Table 1.)

As a result, it is anticipated that all eligible unemployed from 18 to 34 will be required to meet mutual obligation requirements each year. At the same time, compliance activity will be strengthened to ensure that all those for whom it is required, meet their mutual obligation in order to continue receiving full benefits.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part-time work 23 000</td>
<td>• A minimum of 8 hours a week for at least 4 months out of 6 months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary work 12 000</td>
<td>• A minimum of 12-15 hours a week for at least 4 out of 6 months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education or training 12 000</td>
<td>• A minimum of 6 hours contact a week in an accredited course. Completion of a course of at least 4 months or a full semester for longer courses is required or supplementation with another activity for shorter courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relocation 2 000</td>
<td>• Movement to another area which has a higher demand for the young person’s skills or significantly higher employment prospects followed by 14 weeks of more intensive job search.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy and Numeracy Training 10 000</td>
<td>• Up to two semesters involving 6-15 hours of activity a week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work for the Dole 50 000</td>
<td>• Length of project (generally 6 months) involving on average 12-15 hours of activity a week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Search Training 6 000</td>
<td>• The length of the course (usually 3 weeks) followed by 14 weeks of more intensive job search.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensive Assistance 156 000</td>
<td>• Up to two years of individualised job preparation and support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Placement, Employment and Training (JPET) 500</td>
<td>• The length of the programme with contact hours per week varying depending on individual need. Young people who cease to participate in JPET before the end of 26 weeks will need to undertake another mutual obligation activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Corps 400</td>
<td>• do not have to satisfy mutual obligation requirements while receiving a training allowance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Development</td>
<td>• Young people who cease to participate in JPP before the end of 26 weeks will undertake another mutual obligation activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Prog. 18 500</td>
<td>• Completion of the course which is generally 6 months. Job seekers who cease to participate in training before the end of 26 weeks will need to undertake another mutual obligation activity. Clients must be otherwise eligible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs Pathway Prog. 10 000</td>
<td>• Completion of the course which is generally 6 months. Job seekers who cease to participate in training before the end of 26 weeks will need to undertake another mutual obligation activity. Clients must be otherwise eligible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Apprenticeship Access Programme 5 000</td>
<td>• Completion of the course which is generally 6 months. Job seekers who cease to participate in training before the end of 26 weeks will need to undertake another mutual obligation activity. Clients must be otherwise eligible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced English for Migrants Programme 1 700</td>
<td>• Completion of the course which is generally 6 months. Job seekers who cease to participate in training before the end of 26 weeks will need to undertake another mutual obligation activity. Clients must be otherwise eligible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL 307 000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Carrot or Stick? continued from page 7

media continues to attack literacy standards and the debate has been used in the war to privatise the public sector. Another facet is the competitive education and training market. Tendering has resulted in casualisation of the work place, a decrease in wages and conditions, and a lack of collaboration between providers, undermining professionalism and the overall provision of resources.

Jenny Newcombe – Australian Education Union

An issue for tutors is that there is no clear understanding of what individual working plans are. As well, students often hide their literacy and numeracy skills in order to get Austudy or as an alternative to other jobs.

Providers concerns include the need to network in order to access changes. As well, reporting procedures and proformas require attention. The assessment tool(s) used by Centrelink to determine an individual’s literacy and numeracy needs are questionable.

Linda Ritchie – Wynnum-Manly Employment and Training
It’s ACAL and VALBEC’s 21st birthday and we’re hoping to make it a special one at this year’s conference!

Key themes addressed are language and literacy issues for Youth and Indigenous Australians, Intergenerational issues, and the contextualisation of ALBE within the current social and political environment.

**Registration Rates**

<table>
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<th>Two Days</th>
<th>One Day</th>
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<tr>
<td>Full Rate</td>
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<td>$100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Bird</td>
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<td>$20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members</td>
<td>$20</td>
<td>$10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACFE Providers</td>
<td>$10</td>
<td>$10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flat Rate for students</td>
<td>$100</td>
<td>$50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discounts*  
- Early Bird reg’n closes Fri, Oct 8
- * Yes, it is possible to claim more than one discount.

**Contact:**

VALBEC  
247 Flinders Lane  
Melbourne 3000  
Tel: (03) 9650 6906  
Fax: (03) 9654 1321  
Email: valbec@vicnet.net.au

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**A Provider’s Experiences**

(from page 5)

from 3 weeks unemployed to 14 years since last employed. We have had a rapid increase in referrals of migrants who have completed their 510 hours and are not ready for Advanced English classes. Similarly we have increased numbers of long term migrants who have poor writing skills and entrenched poor oral English. The effect on our programme is that we face additional costs for provision of more diverse teaching materials and we are looking for teaching staff with different expertise than originally expected. However the benefit is that we know we are addressing the real demand for literacy classes and that we are able to stream our classes.

Willingness to attend also varies. Centrelink officers can make attendance in this programme part of the activity test. A large proportion of our clients are extremely pleased to have the opportunity to upgrade their literacy skills, they look forward to classes, they harass me if there is delay in placing them in classes.

The issues for the future include: implementation of the NRS (in WA we are looking forward to some moderation of use of NRS as a placement tool); use of the NRS as an exit measurement in addition to assessment using the CGEA; amount of paperwork; liaison with Centrelink generates a lot of work; and finding qualified staff.

**SMYL Employment and Training**

provides employment services, is a New Apprenticeship Centre, has a Group Training Division and is a registered Training Organisation. SMYL customizes specific programs for employers and communities. SMYL has facilities in Fremantle, Rockingham, Cannington and Broome.

**SMYL Employment and Training - 7 Quarry Street Fremantle, WA 6160.**

phone (08) 9430 4921 mobile 0416 224 190

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Lynne Fitzpatrick, of Communication in Education and Training, speaking at the Brisbane forum on how providers are able to use the NRS as an assessment and placement tool for the mutual obligation programme as well as industry training packages and the WELL Programme.
ANTA Adult Literacy National Project

1999 INNOVATIVE PROJECTS

Tropic Education and Training
Consultants: QLD
Aims to develop a systemic model for addressing literacy needs that impact on the success of the vocational training of apprentices and trainees. Issues to be addressed include: developing organisational systems and processes that minimise difficulties experienced by participants; evaluating alternative models for provision that are culturally and vocationally appropriate; developing skills of trainers both on and off the job. Contact: Margaret Darveniza (07) 4061 3368

Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE: VIC
Joint project involving adult and juvenile corrections systems in Vic, NSW and SA. Aims to identify best practice in language, literacy and numeracy taught within a vocational context. Hopes to inform educational and correctional policy makers on effectiveness of integrated programmes within correctional institutions and to identify opportunities to extend their delivery. Contact: Ken Penaluna (03) 9627 6620

Canberra Institute of Technology: ACT
Conversion of a paper-based product of a 1997 Innovative Project to on-line delivery to increase its potential for use by a wide audience in a range of settings. Contact: Nancy Veal (02) 6207 4060

Dr Helen Fraser: NSW
Two main objectives: an assessment of the current state of pronunciation teaching, and outlining of a unified and coordinated effort towards its improvement; and, the creation of a pilot CD ROM for use specifically in pronunciation teaching for adult learners of English in a workplace context. Contact: Helen Fraser (02) 6773 2128

Community and Youth Sector Training Council Inc: ACT
A team of three Mentors will be situated within three identified sectors of the health and community services industry. They would be trained to Workplace Trainer Category 2 standard and receive additional training in the process of mentoring and facilitating literacy education. Reporting with specific reference on how model could be adapted to other workplaces both within community services and health industry as well as other industries. Contact: Ty Emerson (02) 6257 6321

New Media Network: VIC
CD ROM game – ‘Van Diemen’s Land’. Literacy / numeracy resource and curriculum model that embraces the concept of multi-literacies and promotes an understanding of Australian colonial history. Contact: Robyn Logan (0412) 484 321

Communication in Education and Training Pty Ltd: VIC
Materials to assist providers in using the NRS as a curriculum framework, particularly in relation to recent government initiatives in the integration of language, literacy and numeracy into industry Training Packages and delivery in the WELL programme and Mutual Obligation. Contact: Lynne Fitzpatrick (03) 9326 8369

North Melbourne Institute of TAFE: VIC
Innovative learning strategies to improve the language and literacy skills of NESB youth at risk by linking authentic sports activities with associated communication strategies and texts. The target group is between the ages of 16 and 26 who have incomplete and unsatisfactory experiences of formal schooling. Contact: Frances Coppollilo (03) 9269 1012

Victoria University of Technology: VIC
Adults require high order literacy skills to prepare for training in knowledge based industries. This project will develop and pilot an innovative curriculum model for interactive online learning of these skills, as well as developing online resources. Contact: Virginia Saint James (03) 9284 8294

Ms Catherine Flamsteed: NSW
Develop a resource based on the concept of using games on an interactive CD ROM to teach specific features of Standard Australian English to young Indigenous adults in remote communities. Trialling of method through a prototype game in three remote communities, where Standard Australian English is used infrequently. Contact: Catherine Flamsteed (02) 9300 9038

South West Institute of TAFE: VIC
Two multi media CD ROM (Designing Maths and Sporting Maths) will be developed to support Level 3 competencies in adult numeracy. These become two thirds of a suite of CDs to support Level 3 competencies. Aim is to place Level 3 competencies in contexts which introduce numeracy concepts and skills in familiar ways. Contact: Julie Kean (03) 5564 8961

Summer Hill Films Pty Ltd: NSW
Transfer of 1998 project, ‘Assessment Materials for Literacy and Numeracy Identification and Outcomes Reporting in Vocational Education and Training’ to a visual medium, such as video or CD ROM. Contact: Tony Wickert (02) 9698 5544

Southbank Institute of TAFE: QLD
The aim of this proposal is to extend the work undertaken by language, literacy and numeracy teachers in the health industry by developing a model that is more sustainable than traditional methods of language, literacy and numeracy tuition than that previously employed (where momentum appears to stop when an enterprise based teacher completes a project). It will assess the viability of a resource package for supervisors which will have national applicability through research in both Victoria and New South Wales. Contact: Lynda Hamilton (07) 3244 5493

Kimberley College of TAFE: WA
Development of database to make accessible the details of resources identified in 1998 Resources and Materials for Remote learners project. Contact: Jo Camilleri (08) 9192 1769
Training Packages and Mutual Obligation

Under the principle of mutual obligation, unemployed people are asked to supplement their job seeking activities with the additional activity of language and literacy training. For this to be successful there must be a sense that it is leading to something tangible. Programmes that offer unemployed youth a set of tools to maximise their life choices, including employment and the opportunity for lifelong learning will deliver the philosophical intention of mutual obligation. However, practitioners expressed their belief that programmes that were seen to marginalise literacy training and treat it as a remedial or punitive choice would only suffer rejection from the client group.

There is a shared understanding among practitioners that the best learning takes place in an active and real world context. Therefore, literacy training needs to be embedded in content that is meaningful for the learner. A video developed by Suzanne Crowley representing the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia, featured the only young unemployed person represented on the day.

This young man expressed his concerns about his need for financial support to continue with study. Yet despite the hardship he was experiencing he clearly voiced an enthusiasm and commitment to study and lifelong learning. This ‘virtual participant’ reminded the forum of exactly why we were all there.

Workplace communication is a skill required across all levels of the workplace and training is a lifelong process that enables individuals to constantly build on their existing skills. To equip all Austrians for the world of work there needs to be a coordinated and strategic approach to vocational education and training that includes literacy and numeracy strategies as part of the bigger picture. To contribute to this strategy, ANTA has promoted the integration of language, literacy and numeracy competencies into Training Packages and developed a range of industry specific resources to support fair, valid and reliable learning and assessment approaches.

Because language and literacy competencies are now incorporated into Training Packages it doesn’t mean they don’t exist.

To the contrary, examples of Packages that may have application to a youth market are the Community Services and the Outdoor Recreation Training Packages. These package developers have thought seriously about the best ways to describe the underpinning language, literacy and numeracy competencies within their standards.

Thought could be given to broadening the current agreement between the Commonwealth and the States regarding literacy delivery to include both accredited curriculum and Training Packages as these are increasingly the preferred national model for training and assessment in VET.

For those interested in an introduction to Training Packages these can be found online on the National Training Information Service (NTIS) on the ANTA web site. Practitioners are invited to look at the literacy and numeracy and Key Competency requirements at Certificates I & II across a range of Training Packages and consider customising their delivery using the National Reporting System (NRS) to take account of these skills.

Louise Wignall
Manager,
Workplace Communication in Training Packages Project - ANTA

Australian Council for Adult Literacy

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