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# Skills Tasmania: Exploration project on reporting Language Literacy and Numeracy outcomes using finer gradations of the Australian Core Skills Framework, ACSF

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# **Contents**

## Skills Tasmania: Exploration project on reporting Language Literacy and Numeracy outcomes using finer gradations of the Australian Core Skills framework, ACSF

# Overview of the scope and purpose of the Project

The project examined current use of the ACSF in literacy and numeracy programs in Tasmania, in particular the Employer Pledge Program (now known as the 26TEN Grants Program - Employer Stream). The core of the project was to explore options and make recommendations on how to report progress at finer gradations of the ACSF rather than measuring by whole levels alone.

The report concluded that there was enough evidence and support to consider reporting progress at finer gradations within an ACSF level rather than just between levels. The report recommends that Skills Tasmania discusses the options outlined in Table 1 on page 15 with a range of experienced and relevant personnel and consider trialling some or all of the options. Extending the focus of the trial beyond Tasmania to the national arena is also recommended.

### Methodology

Research for this section of the report examined Australian and international studies that considered ways in which progress in adult Language Literacy and Numeracy, LLN, learning could be best effected, described and measured and what factors in delivery could be shown to reliably lead to progress. The results of this research are discussed below and key resources are listed as a bibliography in Appendix 1.

Interviews with key stakeholders including relevant government staff and program managers were undertaken to ascertain what is currently done to record progress. Focus groups of teachers and program managers from the major LLN training providers were held at Devonport (a.m. 11/07/2013), and Hobart (a.m., p.m. 12/07/2013)[1]. Focus groups discussed particular delivery contexts, current methods used to record progress including the use of the ACSF.

# 1. Background: studies of LLN delivery and reporting progress

### What constitutes progress in adult LLN

A wide range of outcomes are perceived to signify progress in adult LLN learning, including attainment of certificates, transition to further education or employment, and increasingly, to attitudinal and behavioural changes such as growth in confidence and autonomy.

Over the spectrum, adult LLN progress may be specifically indicated by a range of outcomes including:
- successful course entry or exit;

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[1] See Appendix 2 Record of Attendance

- gaining a specific qualification such as a white card or a drivers' licence;
- enhanced performance in a workplace;
- enhanced ability to engage in the community;
- enhanced ability to maintain an autonomous and self-directed life
- growth in confidence and self-esteem
- performance in tests referenced to a school grade level as happens in the US;
- improved performance in for example, dedicated reading or grammar tests;

While these outcomes may be of enormous benefit to the individual learner and to society, many are difficult to quantify as measurable LLN gains. The picture is made more complex by the diverse range of delivery contexts from which they arise. Stephen Reder [2] makes the point that while LLN interventions may not result in short term measurable gains, they frequently result in longitudinal changes in literacy practices (e.g. reading the newspaper, reading to children) which result in significant LLN gains over time.

One of the implications arising from this complex picture is that it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of programs delivering LLN and to analyse the significance of the components of delivery that make them effective. The view of Comings, below, is reflected in a range of other international studies researching adult LLN delivery and assessment.[3]

*Research and evaluation only works well when the expected outcomes of education are clearly defined. Without a clear definition of the outcomes and good tools to measure those outcomes, the validity (how closely the study measures the outcome) of a study's findings may be suspect. (Comings 2003)[4]*

## Benchmarks are currently being used: Measuring and tracking LLN progress using the Australian Core Skills Framework

The Australian Core Skills Framework enables outcomes from a diverse range of delivery contexts to be referenced to specifically benchmarked LLN performance levels. LLN performance in a given outcome can be mapped to the ACSF using detailed performance features prescribed for each ACSF level, thus enabling consistent reporting of gains whatever the delivery context. This in turn enables individual outcomes to be objectively reported and progress to be tracked over specified time frames.

The ACSF's role as a central reference for identifying and reporting LLN progress is recognised by Looney's 2008 OECD study of teaching, learning and assessment for adults. In comparison to international models, she considers the ACSF (which was developed from the National Reporting System, NRS) to be uniquely placed to offer refined measurement and reporting of learning gains including those for learners who do not complete their training or who do short

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[2] Reder, S, (2011), Some thoughts on IALS measurement validity, program impact, and logic models for policy development, Page 3,
[3] See the work of Benseman, Sutton and Lander (2005); Looney (2008);Torgerson et al (2004)
[4] Comings, J, (2003). 'Evidence-based education: a perspective from the United States.' Paper presented at NRDC/CCER international conference, Nottingham, March, Page 9

courses. In addition, "*A key advantage of the Australian NRS (i.e. ACSF) is that it links the teaching process with learner gains*."[5]

Historically, the focus on identifying ACSF LLN gains has been to locate and track learner performance as it progresses from one benchmarked level to the next. Whether this is done at core skill level or by specifically addressing the indicators within the core skill, movement from one level to another represents significant gain in a particular LLN core skill. While considerable detail is provided to locate performance at each level, the levels themselves represent broad jumps in relation to each other.

Through this process serves well in a training environment where programs can devote many contact hours to LLN learning over an extended time frame, such as the SEE program, it does not work so well for the significant number of LLN programs delivered with limited contact hours, of very short duration or for very focussed delivery of specific LLN skills.

The increasingly diverse provision of LLN and the move towards embedded, highly contextualised LLN often delivered in limited contact hours over a short time frame, means that measuring gain by identifying movement by ACSF levels alone is not appropriate for a range of provision.

## Optimum provision for LLN acquisition: The best way to get progress

Perhaps the most common finding from research in this area is that identifying the best way to get optimum progress is not straightforward. This is partly because:

- The diversity of needs, perspectives and provision makes it difficult to ascertain the best way to produce outcomes
- The circumstances leading to learner gains are the result of interplay of multiple factors. For example, it is difficult to quantify optimum contact hours to deliver outcomes because contact is intrinsically linked to pedagogical approaches, the nature of learners, the content and structure of the course of learning and the way these factors operate in a given delivery context
- There are no commonly agreed criteria for measuring progress, nor is it appropriate that one measure be uniformly applied.

Perkins[6] notes:
*Are these various approaches effective in improving learners' literacy and numeracy skills? Does one combination work better than others for some target groups and if so why? Is there a best way? We simply do not know. While the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program and the Workplace English Language and Literacy Program use the National Reporting System (ACSF) for Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy to track progress, until recently, data from these programs were not collected in a way that made it possible to identify training impact. While individual institutions and trainers in other programs employ a range of methods to demonstrate progress over time, there has been no national take-up of the National Reporting System or of another agreed approach to measurement that would shed light on learner outcomes. Most of the research*

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[5] Looney J, 2008, *Teaching Learning and Assessment for Adults*, Page 69
[6] Perkins K, 2009, *Adult Language Literacy and numeracy: Research and Future Directions,* NCVER, Page 16

*in this area has focused on gathering the perceptions of learners, trainers, and employers on learner gain (often very positive), but there is little data available that provide robust evidence of the impact of various programs or allow a comparison to be made between different approaches.*

What *is* known is summarised by Perkins[7] and more comprehensively elaborated in the research of Benseman, Sutton and Lander (2005)[8] whose review of international research used rigorous criteria to identify factors 'likely to contribute to learner gain'. These findings presented below, are supported by other notable perspectives, among them the work of Torgerson, et al (2004) Comings (2004), and McPherson (2008).

## Contact hours and frequency and duration of contact likely to lead to learner gains

### (a) Deliberate and sustained acts of teaching

Deliberate and sustained acts of teaching, clearly focused on learners' diagnosed needs, with high levels of participation (more than 100 hours) have proven to be effective in achieving progress. (Benseman, Sutton and Lander (2005)[9].

This is echoed in Comings' (2003)[10] US evidence, whose study looked at time frames required for most adult LLN learners to progress one grade level (as opposed to the finer levels of progress.) *"Learners need to attend at least 100 hours of instruction to make progress equivalent to one grade level (after 150 hours the probability of making this much progress is 75 per cent)."*

The intensity and regularity of distribution of contact hours over time is also important, although the details are less clear as progress is tightly linked to other variables, such as the LLN levels of learners, or the focus and contexts of the course. One study found that learners made less gain once they received more than 9 hours teaching per week. Intensity of courses is thought to be an important factor influencing the rate of learner LLN progress.

### (b) More contact hours for lower level students

The publication *Effective Basic Skills Provision for Adults[11]* (Basic Skills Agency, 2000) estimates, "The number of learning hours (including direct tuition, assessment, supervision, guidance and tutorial support) required for learners at different levels of attainment to achieve competence in any one level" are:

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[7] Perkins, Page 16

[8] Benseman, J, Sutton, A & Lander, J 2005, *Working in the light of evidence as well as aspiration: A literature review of the best available evidence about effective adult literacy, numeracy and language teaching*

[9] ibid

[10] Cited in Torgerson, Brooks, Porthouse and Burton, *Adult literacy and numeracy interventions and outcomes: A review of controlled trials,* Page18

[11] Basic Skills Agency, 2000, *Effective Basic Skills Provision for Adults* p 19. Specific reference to this data *cited in a number of studies, including: Benseman Sutton Lander,* (page 36) *and Togerson* (page 18)

| Below entry level | 330-450 hours |
|---|---|
| Entry level: | 210-329 hours |
| Level 1 | 120-209 hours |

In reviewing these findings, Benson, Sutton and Lander make the point that according to these estimates learners would need in excess of 660 hours minimum to progress from below entry level through to Level 1 and possibly as much as 1000 hours (although the period of time over which this might occur was not discussed).

These levels relate to the UK National Standards for adult literacy and numeracy and are presented as estimates only.[12] However, the weighting of more hours for lower level student seems to be supported by other studies such as McPherson's investigation of optimum provision for ESL learners (see below).

(c) Optimum contact hours for progress in ESL learners.

McPherson's[13] study identifies optimum hours and course duration for pre-literate ESL learners:
*"Specialist teachers of preliterate learners were consulted and they were in consensus in their recommendation that a course structure of four hours per day, four to five days per week, in a block (10 – 20 weeks) provides optimal conditions for teaching and learning in preliterate classes (see Table 4 and Table 5). The professional judgment of these teachers is that learners acquire and consolidate new language concepts faster in longer learning sessions scheduled frequently throughout the week. These teachers say that the learning outcomes defined by the CSWE curriculum require frequent, consistent exposure to spoken and written English and in initial courses especially, learners make better progress with frequent, regular sessions of instruction. For consistent progress in learning, they recommend 3 – 4 hours per session, five days per week. However, teachers conceded that many learners in an early settlement phase may find it difficult to attend courses five days per week. This particularly applies to those with ongoing health problems, work commitments, or extensive family commitments*.

McPherson's work includes tables comparing learning efficacy and contact hours.

(d) Low intensity courses most effective for pre literate ESL learners

*Many teachers recommend 'low intensity' courses for preliterate learners on the assumption that early language and literacy development imposes a greater cognitive load, and demands intense concentration that cannot be maintained for longer periods of time. "In the AMEP, course intensity is often defined according to the course hours offered, for example low intensity courses may be four – eight*

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[12] Torgerson, Page 18

[13] McPherson P, 2008, *Modes of delivery for Pre-literate Learners* AMEP Research Centre, MacQuarie University, Commonwealth of Australia, Page 8
http://www.ameprc.mq.edu.au/docs/research_reports/research_report_series/Modes_of_Delivery_R3.pdf

*hours per week, while courses of 20 – 30 hours may be designated high intensity.*[14]

This advice is modified if intensity is defined by content, rather than hours, the implication being that where content is less intense, pre and low level literacy students are less likely to experience cognitive overload.

 *However, specialist teachers defined course intensity not only by the number of allocated course hours, but also by the breadth of course objectives, extent of content to be learned and learning outcomes to be achieved within a defined time frame."*

Thus learning goals and pedagogical goals and methods interact with contact hours and frequency to shape what might be considered optimum delivery for learners and particular learner groups. While McPherson's study focused on pre-literate ESL learners, these findings may have some parallels with native speakers who have fragile learning backgrounds

## (e) Regular attendance

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Condelli's 2003 study found that regular attendance by ESL learners (unspecified level) appeared to be more important than the amount of tuition per week although students attending more hours per week gained more in comprehension.[15]

## (f) No "Quick fix" time = achievement formula for learners with entrenched LLN needs

*Sutton and Lander's study makes the point that many learners have already had a decade of schooling, sometimes including some additional specialist remedial tutoring. Despite this amount of tuition, some learners have not made sufficient progress in their LLN skills; changing this situation will not occur easily or quickly in the great majority of cases. When the tuition is not intense (e.g. one or two hours a week in many cases i.e. 40-80 hours total per year) the challenge is even greater for learners and teachers.*[16]

For these students, many of whom have come up through the school system with entrenched literacy needs, progress is likely to be driven by other factors than contact hours, such as improvements to self-esteem and breaking down other learning barriers. It may be more appropriate to provide learners with LLN support to meet other learning goals, which they find motivating and meaningful, rather than offering stand-alone LLN support.

## Other factors shown to be effective in generating progress
Studies identified a range of other factors confidently found to be important to achieving LLN gains. These factors are identified in the work of Benson, Sutton

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[14] McPherson Page 8

[15] Cited in Benseman, J, Sutton, A & Lander, J 2005

[16] Cited in Benseman, J, Sutton, A & Lander, J 2005

and Lander, endorsed and summarized by Perkins and supported by other studies such as Looney and Torgerson.[17]

## Teacher expertise

- skilled teachers who can identify learners' strengths and weaknesses in speaking, reading, writing and numeracy

- explicit, structured teaching of reading by teachers well trained in the reading process, who are skilled at identifying reading difficulties and well versed in the use of appropriate teaching strategies to address them

- teachers having adequate non-teaching time for planning and professional development

## Content that is meaningful and relevant to learners

- curriculum that is linked to the authentic literacy events that learners experience in their lives. An authentic curriculum appears to lead to a gain for learners in family literacy, for ESOL learners and for mainstream LLN learners (supported by more tentative findings that an authentic curriculum assists in achieving learner gain in workplace and prison programs).
- writing programs that use texts based on expressing learners' experiences and opinions

- learners engaging in 'embedded' courses where basic LLN skills teaching by a trained practitioner is 'embedded' in vocational and other training are more likely to persist and have higher success rates than learners on 'non-embedded' courses.[18]

- family literacy programs that have a clear focus on literacy/numeracy development.

## Pedagogical approaches

- English as second language programs structured to maximise oral communication, discussion and group work

- programs that deliver clearly structured teaching using a range of methods. Provision needs to occur in a range of contexts that: meet learners' needs; that allows for learning plans for every learner; and where those plans are related to regular assessments and reviews with learners.

## Ongoing Assessment

- ongoing assessment that takes into account the variation in learners' skills

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[17] See Appendix 1 to identify and access these works

[18] Basic Skills Agency (2000). *Effective Basic Skills Provision for Adults,* Page 25

across the dimensions of reading and writing

# 2. Current delivery in Tasmania

## Delivery and measurable skills

*Are the total hours and frequency of delivery in line with good practice approaches that are aimed at developing measurable skills development in adult LLN?*

LLN training and support can be accessed through a diverse number of programs and organisations under the 26TEN initiative.

Many programs provide LLN development within the context of other vocational or life skills training. These programs have broadened access to LLN support and they are highly responsive to participants' immediate learning goals. Their contextualised nature means that particular parameters are placed on LLN delivery and learning. They exist alongside more traditional extended hour vocational LLN delivery programs such as the Commonwealth Government SEE program.

## Workplace LLN interventions

LLN learning within a workplace can be accessed via the Employer Pledge Program (now 26TEN Grants Program – Employer Stream) where an employer pledges to support the development of LLN skills for employees within their organisation. Teachers delivering LLN within this context describe highly targeted "interventions" which address a mismatch between the LLN required for a particular task and the LLN profile of the worker. The goal of the intervention is to allow the worker to develop a particular LLN skill in so far as it enables the worker to complete the work tasks effectively. Delivery can be finely targeted and allows for flexibility as employer needs change.

Time frames for delivery vary: a particular skill may be addressed over a number of hours: *"An employee needed to produce a newsletter and I gave her 4 hours of instruction on Publisher so that she could take up this role within her organisation."*

A common scenario characterising delivery is that of one to one or small group contact using 1-2 hour sessions over some weeks. Examples of this type of delivery currently undertaken are:

### Data entry

This intervention focused on developing data entry skills among a group of employees with low levels of computer literacy.  The intervention enabled this group of workers to move from hand written data to computerised presentation. Teachers felt that this had delivered highly significant gains to these employees and to the company.

*Report writing for the Aged Care sector*

This intervention focuses on enabling Aged Care workers to write accurate informative reports (progress notes) at a satisfactory level for their organization. Workers are identified for the intervention on the basis of previous reports that they have produced. Typically these indicate workers operating at ACSF Writing Level 2 who need to be at least a level higher to write reports at an appropriate standard. Typical hours for this type of intervention are 6 weekly sessions of two hours each, a total of 12 hours.

Workers are provided with the support they need to complete the report writing task successfully. Support involves analysis of model reports at the expected standard of presentation, generation of a report writing resource of key words and phrases which the worker is then taught to access and apply to their own reports. Learning is directed to particular focus areas of writing (Audience/Register) rather than across all the focus areas that constitute a whole level within the core skill of writing.

This type of LLN learning draws on models of good practice in which the learners' contextual needs drive the content and the delivery. Teachers report that after occasional initial suspicion learners are highly motivated to succeed when they see that the skills developed have an immediate and discernable benefit to them. Learners continue to apply the new skills as part of fulfilling work tasks and so reinforce the gains they have made.

Teachers delivering this type of LLN training describe immense satisfaction at enabling workers to fulfill their job roles more effectively. There is also a tendency to measure the success of the intervention by the reaction of employers to improvements in LLN skills and this is once aspect of reporting for Skills Tasmania.

*"Organisation says what outcome they need. After training we go back to the organisation and ask whether their needs have been met."*

Heavy reliance on defining success as meeting an employer's workforce needs could potentially obscure the LLN learning taking place. Nevertheless teachers are using the ACSF to unpack the LLN for the required work tasks and to guide development of learning tasks. While teachers generally value being able to reference their pedagogical practices in this way, the perceived challenge is to find a way to track and report LLN learning where it is not appropriate to identify movement from one level to the next.

*"You can't say that there is an improvement in 12 hours, not an ACSF level."*

## Course content and embedded LLN in contextualised courses

Contextualised courses, e.g. First Aid, White Card, focus on delivering content related to the course outcomes but also aim to support learners by addressing their LLN needs in relation to course completion. Discussions indicate a significant amount of training is offered in this way but it is not clear if LLN is specifically addressed, whether it is embedded or whether it is bolted on. Courses are very short, generally ranging from one to five weeks.

The issues faced by teachers in this area parallel those of LLN workplace delivery. *"You can't get an outcome. You are not going to get a level from this. You can see improvements but can't report them."*

Added to this narrow focus and short time frame, the ability to identify and report LLN gains is obscured by the fact that LLN is not foregrounded in this kind of delivery. In this scenario, achieving a certificate may call upon a fragmented array of performance features across a number of core skills. Identifying LLN needs in learners and consciously addressing them must be challenging in the time frame, aside from tracking progress and reporting gains.

It seems that the purpose of these courses is twofold. Engagement in learning is the primary focus recognising that Learning is one of the ACSF core skills. However, there may be a focus also on addressing embedded literacy skills, e.g. supporting the learner to read key course material, or develop the writing skills associated with forms.

Aside from these challenges, teachers see great value in contextualised courses and delivering the LLN support that enables learners to complete them. Participation often results in enhanced confidence and self-efficacy and a more positive approach to learning, which is sometimes reflected in enrolment in more sustained vocational courses. Teachers furnished specific examples of learners who obtained their White Card and then went on to undertake other vocational training. *"Training allows people to see that work roles involve more than just labouring. It develops how they see themselves as learners."* It is likely that reportable gains will relate to ACSF Learning because of the observable increases in levels of confidence and awareness of learning opportunities that these courses engender.

### Maintenance literacy

Teachers described the important role maintenance literacy programs have in enabling learners with intellectual disabilities to lead more independent and engaged lives. There appear to be slightly extended contact hours in this delivery context compared with the previous interventions described; for example, 10 weekly sessions of 3 hours each. However, hours are only one factor in the challenge of progressing learners' achievement of reportable gains in this context. There generally is a slower rate of progress for these students and much delivery is focused on making sure that learners keep the skills that they have previously learnt. *"Learners do make progress but it is not measurable in the way the ACSF is reported."*
Successful learning is often contingent upon building self-esteem and reducing the negative self-image of being a non-learner and non-achiever. Teachers described the vital role programs which focus on home skills and life skills have for learners. This, in turn, is an enormous benefit to the community.

### Further comments

A further point made about contact hours and measuring progress was that, whatever the delivery context, one contact hour per week - even if over a year and in one to one setting - was unlikely to result in a measurable gain using the ACSF current methods of measurement. *"Realistically there will not be discernable movement if meeting a tutor once per week"*

It is interesting to reference teachers' comments about the challenges of reporting progress in the focussed interventions described above to those from teachers delivering training in the SEE program. Characterised by rounds of training with extended hours (e.g. 200+ hours), the SEE program has a well-established history of measuring and reporting gains against levels of the ACSF. Teachers experienced in delivering this program judged it to be more realistic to track gains by indicator rather than across a core skill, considering that even for a program with extended hours, moving a whole core skill level can be challenging. *"You can't say you've moved a person a whole level unless you have a huge amount of evidence."* SEE guidelines outline the expectation that learners are meant to progress one level in one indicator per 100 hours approximately.   The LINC program in Tasmania also reports gains against progress in an indicator not in a whole level in a core skill.

## Summary

- The diverse range of delivery under the Employer Pledge Program initiative encompasses practices likely to support learner LLN progress; for example, curriculum that is authentic to learner needs, content that is meaningful to learners and delivered over a range of contexts, including embedded LLN.

- Because the interventions are highly targeted and short term, valuable LLN gains are invisible because they cannot be captured as increases at an ACSF level. This was universally felt to be a challenge for practitioners working across the range of delivery contexts.


# 3. Recording Progress in Tasmanian LLN Programs

## How the ACSF is currently used

*What is currently happening regarding using the ACSF to record progress; what is working; what are the constraints of the current system?*

The current way of reporting gains using the ACSF is not working for practitioners delivering highly targeted interventions in the particular workplace or training contexts described above. Typically, delivery results in gains within an ACSF level rather than gains from one level to the next.

Some of the reasons for this have been discussed in Part 2, above, and are summarised here:

- there is not enough time to progress learners' performance from one ACSF level to another;

- such progress is not an authentic goal of this kind of highly targeted delivery, which is often responding to very specific LLN needs;

- it is not appropriate to devise and administer the pre and post training assessments required to show evidence of progression from one level to another. In many instances, this would be confronting to learners, detrimental to delivery and erode the often limited time dedicated to meeting training needs.

Nevertheless, in spite of these frustrations, teachers see the value of the ACSF. Many considered the ACSF to be a user-friendly document and have confidence

in it as an LLN resource. Although they identified a number of ways that they use the ACSF they indicated that any one user tends to home in on only one or two of these. There does seem to be a gap in understanding the full potential of the Framework.

Currently the key ways the ACSF is used in Tasmania are to:

- benchmark an individual's core skill performance

- analyse the LLN requirements of workplace roles and specific tasks

- inform curriculum content and learning activities to meet these requirements

- gather evidence of progress within levels using the various components that describe an ACSF level, such as evidence from a particular focus area, performance features or the performance variables.

Many teachers stressed the importance of outcomes such as increases in confidence, which they felt could not be sufficiently identified or reported in the ACSF. There may be an underuse of the Learning core skill to report these gains, especially where these outcomes are related to growth, enhanced capacity to engage in teamwork, learning confidence, knowledge of learning processes or identification of training goals.

## Needs of Industry and funding bodies

*What is the extent of congruence/anomaly between what the funding bodies need and what industry requests in the provision of adult LLN?*

Practitioners were aware of the possible disparity between what employers wanted as an outcome of LLN interventions and what funding bodies required. For example: *"Feedback from employers is that they don't want evidence that an employee has moved a whole* (ACSF) *level. They only want what is relevant to their business needs".*

In LLN delivery that is highly contextualised to the needs of industry, one legitimate measure of success is how well employer needs are fulfilled. Perhaps because independent measures of progress are difficult to report (such as the ACSF with its current requirements of one level improvement) there can be a propensity to measure success almost completely by employer reaction. This tendency was reflected by comments in the focus groups (e.g. comment quoted under Workplace Interventions, Part 2, above). It is implied in the comments of this practitioner, for whom the frustration of not being able to show gains against the broad levels of the ACSF led to a desire for a tool that would *"…let you pick up or measure improvement directly against workplace performance. Is the ACSF the right tool for the job?"*

Yet the need for funding bodies and program planners to get a satisfactory picture of the nature and extent of LLN progress taking place remains. As was described above, most practitioners have faith in the ACSF as a resource to inform their delivery and value it as a mechanism for measuring gain even if these gains cannot be officially reported.

All three focus groups provided possible ways that the ACSF could be used to show gain in LLN within the context of workplace performance and other very targeted LLN delivery. Groups identified and discussed the advantages and

disadvantages of different options for tracking and reporting progress within an ACSF level. These options, described in the table on page 14, allow measurement and reporting of LLN gains using the various components that locate performance within an ACSF level.

## Need for additional moderation and/or validation?

*Do the results indicate a need for moderation and/or validation in the use of the ACSF to record progress?*

Knowledge of the ACSF ranges from those who are very confident in using it as a reference tool for developing tasks, for informing curriculum, designing assessment and reporting progress, to those who are fairly knew to the LLN training field and who would welcome further opportunities to acquire better knowledge. Some program managers reported uneven knowledge of the ACSF among staff, and believed that there was not enough knowledge of the ACSF across the field in Tasmania or sufficient Professional Development to address this.

All staff valued the current access to moderation as a mechanism for creating a shared understanding of performance levels and the factors that underpin them. New teachers particularly valued collegiate support, and all considered the state-wide video-conferences organized by Skills Tasmania and LINC to be an extremely effective means of accessing moderation and sharing understanding of the ACSF.

Practitioners seemed to be aware of the different levels of complexity within the ACSF, but confident knowledge of how this might be applied to measure and report finer gradations of progress will need further development if such reporting is to be accurate and consistent. Practitioners will need to develop a shared understanding of what might constitute acceptable evidence and what kinds of evidence might appropriately demonstrate gain in various delivery contexts. Most felt that more training would be needed if the ACSF were to be used to track changes through a more detailed or focused assessment of evidence within an ACSF level.

The focus groups also raised a perceived need to provide professional development to assist ACSF users in the application of the framework, namely:

(i) Additional training in how to use the ACSF core skill of Learning to report changes in confidence and personal growth may be useful to broaden understanding of the dimensions of reportable progress.

(ii) Increased attention to using the ACSF for a range of purposes other than assessment, e.g. informing curriculum planning, monitoring progress and contextualizing training.

## 4. Other measurement tools

Other measurement tools such as the 26TEN profile kit and the self-esteem and confidence tool were not considered to be helpful for the key purpose of this report, i.e. in providing a mechanism for capturing finer gradations of progress using the ACSF.

## 5. Measuring outcomes using the ACSF

### Is the current way of measuring ACSF outcomes adequate?

As has been discussed, the current way of measuring outcomes against ACSF level movement has been acknowledged as being too extensive for much of the valuable LLN delivery currently taking place. Progress evident to teachers, learners and employers is thus rendered invisible and therefore inaccessible to program evaluation and to funding bodies.

There is a pressing need for centrally referenced, consistent benchmarks to track LLN progress where it is not possible to report movement at the broad performance levels of the ACSF and which can be appropriately applied to specific delivery contexts.

The following table presents options through which this may be achieved. All options have the potential to link reportable progress that is still consistent with ACSF performance levels to the kinds of targeted delivery described in this report. Different options may be more suitable to some delivery contexts, and may not work so well in others.

Please note:  at the time of researching this report the ACSF Pre Level 1 Supplement was only just starting to be used by LLN practitioners.  This supplement addresses the performance variables grid and includes performance features and sample activities.  At pre level 1 the core skills do not include indicators and focus areas.  However, it would be possible to track progress within the level using a number of the options in Table 1 or to indicate progress by movement from pre level 1 to level 1 in any core skill.

### Some suggestions for measuring outcomes using the ACSF

These options were the result of a problem-solving response to the difficulties teachers were experiencing in recording progress. Teachers were open minded about the options, although some felt that reporting of some options, such as focus areas, could become complicated and would require considered application and perhaps mentoring and professional development in order to implement.

A number of options have been outlined here in an attempt to capture all the suggestions and address frustrations with the current reporting.  It may not be feasible or advisable to provide all these options if a change in reporting guidelines is considered.

In terms of Skills Tasmania tracking progress it may be possible to ask those required to report against the ACSF to answer the following questions:

- Was there an   ACSF outcome?   YES            NO

If YES is selected then a drop down menu could appear with the variety of ACSF outcomes listed.  The provider would then identify the type of outcome that the learner or the cohort achieved.  Evidence of this would need to be kept by the provider.

If NO is selected then no further action would need to be taken.

## Table 1 – Some Options for Reporting Progress using the ACSF

| Option | Advantages | Disadvantages | Outcomes | Where applicable |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Option 1: Provide evidence of gain against a **core skill – current way of recording progress** | • Addresses a whole core skill<br><br>• Does not treat parts of the skill as discrete<br><br>• Allows all skill development within a core skill to be acknowledged<br><br>• Allows for development of a number of focus areas and performance features<br><br>• Easy to record | • Difficult to move learners one whole level<br><br>• Does not allow finer gradations of progress to be reported<br><br>• May not allow individual learners' particular strengths or needs to be seen<br><br>• Indicators are not discrete; they are part of the whole core skill | • Allows progress to be identified from one level to the next<br><br>• Addresses the current KPI | • More applicable to delivery modes that include quite a large number of hours, e.g. approximately 200 hours per core skill<br><br>• Works well with learners who are making fast progress |
| Option 2: Provide evidence of gain against **one indicator** in a core skill | • Addresses a number of focus areas<br><br>• Can acknowledge progress in all focus areas of an indicator<br><br>• Easy to record | • Does not allow finer gradations of progress to be reported<br><br>• May not allow individual learners' particular strengths or needs to be seen | • Allows progress of part of the core skill and a number of focus areas to be identified from one level to the next<br>• There are no indicators at Pre Level 1 so could not use this option when reporting progress from Pre Level 1 to Level 1 | • More applicable to delivery modes that include quite a large number of hours, e.g. approximately 100 hours per indicator |
| Option 3: Provide evidence of gain against a predominant **focus area/s** for a core skill<br><br>• How reported: training | • Links focus of delivery and learning to specific reportable performance<br><br>• Could work well at the lower | • Focus areas are not discrete; they are interconnected with other focus areas. It may prove difficult to isolate and report against | • Allows progress to be identified within a level<br><br>• Allows a particular focus area to be identified as a need for the learner, the | • Where specific aspects of a core skill are taught, e.g. interventions that help workers write appropriate progress notes by focusing on |

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| needs could be linked to a focus area/s, e.g. register in report writing (progress notes in Aged Care), and performance measured against progress in that focus area.  Progress would need to indicate a one level increase in this focus area. | levels of the ACSF where focus areas may be able to be treated as more discrete<br><br>• Is an attainable outcome even for quite low total hours of training, e.g. 10 hours | • Requires assessors to make a judgement which incorporates assessment of performance from a number of focus areas and the Performance Variables Grid. This will require a solid understanding of the ACSF<br><br>• Difficult to make work with a group because learners may be at different points within a focus areas | cohort and the employer<br><br>• There are no indicators at Pre Level  1 so could not use this option when reporting progress from Pre Level 1 to Level 1 | aspects of register  for the identified audience |
| **Option 4: Provide evidence of gain in an indicator against performance features**<br><br>• How reported: Use performance grids to identify appropriate features and track changes by highlighting them in the grids.  Evidence would also need to be attached to the highlighted grids | • Creates visual map of progress so that changes can be easily tracked and seen<br><br>• Allows very specific and detailed changes in individual performance to be identified and reported<br><br>• Easy to use but must still be informed by the Performance Variables Grid. | • Too detailed for some purposes<br><br>• Need familiarity with the detail of the ACSF<br><br>• Needs to be supported with evidence<br><br>• Will a minimum number of performance feature increases be required | • Allows progress to be identified within a level<br><br>• Gives a more individual picture of a learner's performance by identifying a spiky profile within levels | • Allows gains to be reported across a wide range of delivery scenarios because not linked to any particular task or text. |
| **Option 5: Provide evidence of gain in a core skill using text types**<br>• How reported:  a text type is identified, e.g. | • Progress linked directly to engagement in identified texts<br><br>• Useful for delivery | • Doesn't allow individual learners' particular strengths or needs to be seen | • Allows progress to be identified within a level<br><br>• Allows for specific needs of the workplace to be | • Wide range of applications, in supporting engagement in specific workplace texts,  e.g. technical |

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| procedural (for writing a set of instructions) and the training focuses on that text type only | • involving groups<br><br>• Can meet employer expectations<br><br>• Provides specific evidence at ACSF level<br><br>• Provides the opportunity to specify need against a text type and a core skill<br><br>• Easy to locate in an ACSF level and describe progress | • May work in a first round of training but may be difficult to justify subsequent round of training focusing on the same text type<br><br>• Would require progress to be demonstrated in that text type for all indicators and all focus areas<br><br>• Requires solid knowledge of the ACSF | met<br><br>• Allows for cohort goals to be articulated | (instruction manual); regulatory (industry standards list); procedural (standard operating procedures) |
| Option 6: Provide evidence of gain against **level of support**<br>• Describe task and map to ACSF performance variables grid<br>• Assess the level of support the learner needs to complete the task before and after the LLN intervention | • Appropriate where the LLN context, text and task remains the same but where training has enabled the learner to complete the task independently<br><br>• Easy to use and report<br><br>• Provides easily identified gains for employer (increased productivity) | • Could under report or miss other progress if used when delivery allows for gains using other measurement options<br><br>• Is very task specific so reports against a very limited outcome | • Allows progress to be identified when all other factors of a learner's core skill level remain static. | • Workplace interventions which have limited time frames and specific task focus<br><br>• Maintenance literacy |
| Option 7: Provide evidence of gain against **Domains**<br>• How reported: learner would need to demonstrate that skills acquired in one domain | • Allows reporting directly against sample activities<br><br>• Easy to use and report<br><br>• Useful for group delivery | • Doesn't allow individual learners' particular strengths or needs to be seen<br><br>• Requires depth of | • Allows progress to be identified within a level | • Training that allows for demonstration in broader contexts, i.e. workplace gains that can be transferred to personal/community life, |

| were able to be demonstrated in another domain | • Acknowledges improvement in breadth of progress within a level rather than progress to the next level | knowledge of ACSF | | e.g. creates a flyer for workplace and creates a flyer for local sport club barbeque |
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# 6. Recommendations

1. Convene a discussion group to consider the options in Table 1

2. Trial some or all of the options in Table 1.  Trialling will indicate which of the options might work and whether this approach will meet the requirements of Skills Tasmania.

3. Situate the report and the trial in the national arena by seeking the support of DIICCSRTE who have responsibility for the ACSF.  Broadening the research and trialling of possible options to other states and territories will strengthen the veracity of findings from further exploration of this issue.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: References

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**Appendix 2**

**Focus Group Participants**

**Devonport    9 July 2013    11.00am – 1.00pm**

| Name | Organisation |
|------|-------------|
| Alison Horch | TasTAFE |
| Valda Jennings | ALSO Aged and Community Services Tasmania and TCAL |
| Jo Crothers | 26TEN Coalition |
| Jocylyn Cross | TasTAFE |
| Janine Crawford, | TasTAFE |
| Rosemary Smith | Literacy Coordinator, LINC Tasmania |
| Kerrie Blyth | Literacy Coordinator, LINC Tasmania |
| Bruce Milne | TasTAFE |

**Hobart   10 July 2013    10.00am – 12.00pm**

| Name | Organisation |
|------|-------------|
| Beverley Cummings | 26TEN Project Manager, Southern Water |
| Helen Hornsby | ALSO, Southern Water |
| Penny Jerrim | ALSO, Southern Water |
| Hugh Fielding | LINC Tasmania |
| David Rochester | Mission Australia |
| Charlie Oxley | Mission Australia |
| Patricia   Lucas | Mission Australia |
| Robyn McIlhenny | TasTAFE |

**Hobart 10 July 2013    2.00pm – 4.00pm**

| Name | Organisation |
|------|-------------|
| Roger O'Meagher | 26TEN Project Manager, Early Childhood Australia – Tasmania |
| Jenni Anderson | Mission Australia, ACAL President |
| Jo Crantock | ALSO, Getting There Project |
| Tim Polegaj | ALSO, Getting There Project |
| Veronica Fuentes | Literacy Coordinator, LINC Tasmania |
| Lee Veitch | 26TEN Project Manager, Aged and Community Services Tasmania |
| Alison Rogers | ALSO, Aged and Community Services Tasmania |
| Jenny Seaton | TasTAFE |
| Anne Salt | ALSO, Aged and Community Services Tasmania |