TVET
AUSTRALIA

NATIONAL QUALITY COUNCIL

FOUNDATION SKILLS
IN VET PRODUCTS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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Contact

Disclaimer

Acknowledgement

Contents

Explanation of Terms

Terms that are in general use in the VET system have been used with specific intent in this document. The explanations below are provided to clarify the writers' intended meaning when these terms are used.

Training Packages has been used to encompass both endorsed and non-endorsed components of Training Packages. Where a particular Training Package component is intended it is referred to explicitly, e.g. competency standards.
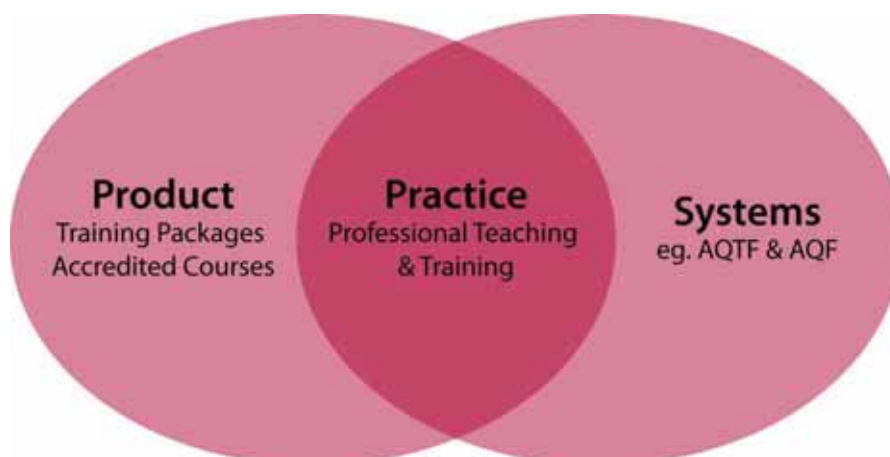
Product design cycle is a term to describe the development, quality assurance, continuous improvement and implementation phases of Training Packages as products. The product design cycle may be more commonly understood by some VET stakeholders as the Training Package development and endorsement process which encompasses implementation, feedback and then continuous improvement.

Foundation Skills encompass both the Core Skills (of reading, writing, oral communication, numeracy and learning) described by the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF), and Employability Skills. Foundation Skills include language, literacy and numeracy (LLN). Foundation Skills exist on a continuum from very basic skills to highly-developed and specialist skills.

Language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) refers to capability in English language, speaking/listening, reading, writing and use of mathematical concepts. These skills are described over five levels by the ACSF. In this document this term has frequently been used separately from Foundation Skills because these skills are often identified separately from Foundation Skills and Employability Skills in Training Packages and accredited courses.

Background

This report comments on the design of Training Packages in relation to the effective delivery of Foundation Skills. While attempts have been made to isolate only design issues, it is not always possible to clearly delineate between the intersecting aspects of the policy picture. The emphasis of this report is on product, but there are issues around both practice and systems that would need to be addressed to ensure that Foundation Skills are effectively delivered. Although some practice and systems issues will have been identified, it is not the purpose of this paper to fully explore the effect of these issues on Foundation Skills delivery.

1. What barriers to effective delivery of Foundation Skills exist in the current design of Training Packages?
And where are these barriers created or exacerbated within the product design cycle?

Since the inception of Training Packages there has been a requirement to embed language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) into them. Advice provided to Training Package developers in 1997[1], and consistently restated in numerous publications since, including initial versions of the *Training Package Development Handbook*, was that:

- the LLN required for workplace tasks needs to be explicitly identified and described in Training Packages

- the level of LLN skills included in Training Packages must not be higher than the LLN skill level required for competent performance in the workplace

- the National Reporting System (NRS), now revised and renamed the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF), can be used to consistently describe LLN skills at five different levels

- LLN content can be included in Training Packages in a variety of ways, in the elements, performance criteria, range statements, and evidence guide and/or in stand-alone LLN units of competency.

Since 2005 the Training Package Development Handbook has not contained this level of information about the incorporation of LLN.

A variety of mechanisms has been used over the last decade to ensure that Training Packages are developed to include LLN. These have included:

- pilot project funding for Industry Training Advisory Bodies (ITABs) to integrate LLN into early Training Packages

- resources and advice for Training Package developers

- awareness raising activities for industry bodies

- equity advisory arrangements.

As Training Packages have evolved into more sophisticated products than the initial versions, the integration of LLN has also improved. Because there is some overlap with LLN skills, the incorporation of employability skills has also encouraged greater identification and inclusion of LLN in recent Training Packages.

As a result of these ongoing efforts, Foundation Skills (including LLN) have been reasonably well included in current Training Packages. However, this does not mean that Foundation Skills are always effectively delivered. The *VET Products for the 21st Century* project has the potential to address some of the barriers to the effective delivery of Foundation Skills. Five broad barriers that Training Package design may impact are:

- Limited industry awareness of Foundation Skills

- Inconsistent approaches to Foundation Skills in Training Package development

- Lack of system capacity to build Foundation Skills across all AQF levels

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[1] Fitzpatrick L. and Roberts, A. (1997) Workplace Communication in National Training Packages, a practical guide: Developing English language, literacy and numeracy inclusive National Training Packages, DEETYA

- Lack of consistency in how Foundation Skills in Training Packages are interpreted and delivered
- Limited access to LLN skills in delivery

1.1 Limited industry awareness of Foundation Skills

The VET system's industry-driven model means that Training Packages can only describe the competency standards that industry stakeholders identify as necessary. While there does seem to be a growing industry awareness of Foundation Skills (generic skills, soft skills, employability skills, etc.[2]), these skills are not generally at the forefront of employers' minds.

Employers and other industry stakeholders drive the development of Training Packages and competency standards and if they are not aware of the need for more or better coverage of Foundation Skills then they will not be addressed in Training Package development. If ISCs only take the lead from industry stakeholders without also attempting to increase industry/employer awareness or understanding of the critical importance of Foundation Skills within all occupations, the significance of these skills will continue to be overlooked.

The focus of Training Package consultations is often on the technical skills required in the workplace. Foundation Skills are not always identified through this process. Industry Skills Councils should have a role in helping to raise industry understanding and awareness of issues such as Foundation Skills and highlighting how they affect workforce development. There have been some efforts by ISCs[3] to raise employer awareness of Foundation Skills, but these have primarily involved advice on the implementation of training programs, such as the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program, not the development of Training Packages.

Limited industry awareness of Foundation Skills is a barrier to the effective delivery of Foundation Skills. While this barrier does not arise from the Training Package design cycle, it influences the development and continuous improvement phase[4] and the implementation phase of the cycle.

In the development and continuous improvement phase, industry stakeholders determine Training Package content. These stakeholders are often not fully aware of the significance of Foundation Skills to their workforce, or to the low-level reality of the Foundation Skills of the Australian population, and so Foundation Skills content can be unwittingly, or deliberately, overlooked. In addition, Industry Skills Councils and the Training Package development section of DEEWR have given only sporadic attention to this issue and have done little to raise industry awareness of Foundation Skills.

In the implementation phase, industry demand for skills and qualifications influences the delivery decisions of registered training organisations (RTOs). If employers are not aware of the need to build Foundation Skills in their workforce then they will not expect RTOs to focus on this during delivery. Employers are often unaware of the benefits of integrated delivery and therefore unable to request it. However, many employers who have accessed the WELL program have witnessed the benefits of integrated delivery and have become more informed consumers who are willing to invest in Foundation Skills development in further training.[5]

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[2] As seen in the 2002 ACCI/BCA development of Employability Skills, and more recently in the Ai Group National Workforce Literacy project.
[3] Including the promotional and awareness-raising activities of the ISC WELL Network funded through DEEWR's WELL program.
[4] Note: ISCs generally now regard 'development and continuous improvement' as a single step in the design cycle.
[5] WELL (2006) Evaluation – Study of WELL Projects. Final report September 2006.

1.2 Inconsistent approaches to Foundation Skills in Training Package development

Although considerable advice has been provided on embedding LLN in Training Packages since their inception, since the demise of the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), the comprehensive advice provided in the *Training Package Development Handbook* has been significantly minimised. In the development and quality assurance of Training Packages there appears to be a tendency among policymakers to treat LLN in the same way as every other topic that is not specifically vocational. The overarching rule that seems to be applied is: if topics such as green skills or OHS or innovation don't have individual advice within policy documents, then LLN should not be singled out either. On the surface this appears logical, but LLN skills are not equivalent to other generic or non-vocational topics. LLN skills underpin *all* other skills (including green skills and OHS and innovation).

The capacity of Training Package developers to identify and describe Foundation Skills (including LLN and the employability skills) determines how effectively they will be integrated. The capacity of Training Package developers is influenced by two factors: (1) their individual awareness/knowledge of Foundation Skills and how they can be dealt with in Training Packages; (2) the priorities and expectations of the contracting Industry Skills Council.

The second factor has already been addressed in point 1 above: if Industry Skills Councils and their industry stakeholders do not identify the integration of Foundation Skills as important, then the Training Package developer will not be contractually required to do any more than meet the requirements of the *Training Package Development Handbook*.

The lack of awareness and knowledge about Foundation Skills among Training Package developers is evidenced in a number of ways:

- A mistaken association of LLN skill level with expectations of different AQF levels can mean that developers believe they have been specific when they have not, e.g. when a developer includes a statement such as 'communicate effectively with others in the workplace' in a Certificate III level qualification they may assume that the AQF 3 level of the qualification will guide Training Package users in their interpretation of that statement, but the oral communication skill level required to 'communicate effectively with others in the workplace' varies considerably between industries from basic reporting and information sharing with colleagues in manufacturing workshops to negotiations with customers in retail settings and the potentially emotionally-charged exchanges in aged care settings.

- A willingness to keep LLN skill descriptions deliberately vague in situations where there may be industrial relations issues around who is, or is not, appropriately qualified to perform various work functions, e.g. 'literacy to understand workplace documents' might be used to refer to reading and interpreting policy and regulation, or to understanding simple safety signs. Where LLN skills are central to the workplace task, these important skills need to be identified so they can be developed in Training Package delivery. This requires them to be referred to more specifically, such as using the Core Skills: reading, writing, oral communication skills, and numeracy

While the incorporation of employability skills into Training Packages has provided additional detail on Foundation Skills, unlike LLN, employability skills are not measured at different levels. Employability skills need to be explained very carefully in Training Packages in order for a Training Package user to understand exactly what level of skill is required for competent performance. Descriptions of LLN skills also need to be careful, but use of the ACSF can provide a mechanism for Training Package developers and users to 'speak the same language' and consistently describe and interpret the exact level of LLN skill intended.

ISC approaches

Although advice based on the ACSF (and previously NRS) has been available to Training Package developers, ISCs have not been required to adopt consistent approaches to the incorporation of LLN. In some cases, such as EE- Oz the use of the NRS and now the ACSF has been an integral part of their Training Package design. In an industry that requires high levels of understanding of maths and physics and the comprehension of technical standards, the ISC has made a considered decision to use ACSF levels in the description of pre-requisites. They use this approach to indicate to providers that learners must have a specified level of LLN skill to undertake some units of competency. This decision has been taken because the risk is perceived as too high for the industry to allow learners with skills significantly below required levels to enrol in trade or technician level qualifications.

EE-Oz has a pilot project with the Adult Literacy Section of DEEWR to map 30 units from three Certificate III qualifications to the ACSF. The ISC believes that this will result in higher quality delivery as it will be clear to RTOs what is required to participate in a Training Package qualification. The approach also allows RTOs to develop appropriate pathway or bridging courses to build learner skills if they are not high enough for entry into a qualification or unit.

In other industries there seems to be a more relaxed approach to the specificity used to describe LLN skills. In these cases there is an assumption that LLN skills can be built within the training program or that LLN skills can be assumed to be present in learners. Greater awareness and understanding of the importance of LLN among TP developers and users is needed as a first step if a broader, more consistent approach to LLN is to be reached.

It was announced in the 2010 Federal Budget that DEEWR will fund ISCs to map qualifications against the ACSF[6]. At this stage it seems most likely that ISCs will be funded individually for this work. The terms of each Funding Agreement, including methodology, are yet to be negotiated. DEEWR expects that any work in this area will need to take account of the EE-Oz mapping pilot so there is likely to be a long lead time before these agreements are in place.

> *Inconsistent approaches to Foundation Skills in Training Package development* is a barrier to the effective delivery of Foundation Skills that has been created in the development and continuous improvement phase of the Training Package design cycle because the capacity of Training Package developers to embed Foundation Skills has not been consistently developed or demanded by Industry Skills Councils, DEEWR or the National Quality Council (NQC).

Equity review

The inclusion of LLN in Training Packages is considered during the quality assurance process in the report of the equity advisor. The holistic advisor, in considering the equity advice when quality assuring a Training Package from the perspective of the four quality principles, also plays a part.

The quality assurance process has been responsible for considerable improvement in Training Packages, and for supporting the appropriate integration of LLN. However, not all equity panellists have specific knowledge of LLN. Equity panellists are appointed for their expertise in equity issues, but individual panel members vary widely in their areas of expertise. This in itself may not be an issue if effective approaches to panellist professional development and moderation are used to ensure a consistent approach. Unfortunately, this has not been the case and, as a result, the attention given to LLN by equity panellists reflects the individual panel member's expertise, and so is widely varied.

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[6] This is the DEEWR ACSF mapping identified in the National Core Skills and Outreach Project, see Appendix C.

Compounding this situation is the fact that Foundation Skills are not simply an equity issue. For many equity groups Foundation Skills can be a barrier to participation and achievement in training, but Foundation Skills also need to be developed by all learners concurrently with the development of new skills and knowledge. By specifically focussing on Foundation Skills only in the equity part of the quality assurance process the message is reinforced that they relate only to equity.

The holistic quality assurance process for Training Packages looks at four quality principles – responsiveness, recognition, flexibility and functionality. Considerations around the effective integration of Foundation Skills could be made within all of these principles, but specifically within functionality. However, the extent to which Foundation Skills are considered depends on the knowledge and awareness of the individual holistic QA panellist. The moderation and professional development process for panellists, which is under development by the NQC, should include awareness of Foundation Skills during the holistic QA process.

Inconsistent approaches to Foundation Skills in Training Package development is a barrier to the effective delivery of Foundation Skills that has the potential to be exacerbated in the quality assurance phase of the Training Package design cycle if LLN is only specifically considered as an equity issue.

1.3 Lack of system capacity to build Foundation Skills across all AQF levels

Despite the barriers noted in sections 1 and 2, Training Packages do contain detail on the Foundation Skills required for competence – either as stand-alone units (less likely), or as elements, performance criteria or parts of range statements (more likely). However, these skills are not well delivered for two broad reasons:

1. RTOs find it difficult to implement effective approaches to the integrated delivery of Foundation Skills;

2. VET practitioners are often unable to unpack or interpret the Foundation Skills embedded in Training Packages (this second reason is addressed in section 4 below).

Units of competency describe workplace outcomes, including the Foundation Skills required for competent performance. They do not describe the full extent of underpinning skills and knowledge. Unless specificity is built into the prerequisite section, as EE-Oz has done, then a unit presupposes a certain level of competence from the learner, such as the ability to communicate in English, ability to write at least at a basic level, and the ability to understand the purpose of a variety of texts. Learners with LLN skills below what could be described as the 'expected entry level' cannot be expected to achieve competency in the unit under the standard delivery. A standard approach to delivery will not provide the learner with the opportunity to develop the underpinning skills they are lacking both because the nominal hours assigned will not be sufficient and the vocational trainer may not be experienced in delivery of specific LLN concepts.

The development of Foundation Skills as part of VET needs to occur in two ways:

▪ The development of Foundation Skills that are described in competency standards as being an integral part of work performance, e.g. the skills and knowledge to complete a particular type of report, to interact with customers, to calculate measurements required for production, etc.

▪ The development of the underpinning Foundation Skills that are needed in order to build new vocational skills, e.g. the ability to communicate in English, the ability to write basic information, the ability to read texts required in learning and work environments.

Some VET learners only need to develop the new Foundation Skills that are specifically identified in competency standards because they already have adequate underpinning skills. Other VET learners need support to build the underpinning Foundation Skills that enable them to develop the specific skills described in the competency standards. These two distinct scenarios provide different implementation challenges for RTOs. In the first instance, effective delivery may require a specialist Foundation Skills

practitioner to deliver some of the Training Package content. In the second instance, some learners may require the provision of additional support (such as extra delivery hours, an extended completion time, specialist assistance, or completion of extra modules or units of competency).

To determine which of these approaches is going to be necessary RTOs need a mechanism to identify whether learners need to develop underpinning LL or N skills in addition to the content of the competency standard. Once a need for the development of underpinning skills is identified, RTOs need advice on the most suitable approach for developing those skills (e.g. use of a Foundation Skills unit of competency or module from an accredited course, additional nominal hours that could be allocated, prerequisite or co-requisite approach). Training Packages could help practitioners with this task by providing advice on available Foundation Skills units or modules that could be delivered concurrently or as an entry-pathway to support the development of the relevant underpinning skills for particular vocational units or qualifications.

Current Training Package design doesn't include the mandatory provision of advice around prerequisite Foundation Skills or how these skills may be developed within the qualification. While good practice in many RTOs does see the pre-assessment of participants and the development of appropriate learning and support programs, the review of Training Package design could identify mechanisms that would make this process easier for all RTOs.

In situations where units of competency contain significant Foundation Skills content (e.g. high level oral communication skills within management or business qualifications, complex calculations within construction or engineering) RTOs often seem unable to use an LLN specialist for delivery. The vocational nature of Training Packages encourages ownership of them by the relevant vocational department within RTOs. These departments assume responsibility for delivery of all units within a particular qualification or Training Package. The degree to which embedded Foundation Skills are unpacked, interpreted and delivered then depends on the awareness and understanding of vocational specialists.

A mechanism in Training Package design for flagging whether a unit of competency contains significant Foundation Skills could help vocational specialists realise that they need to seek delivery advice from Foundation Skills specialists for certain units of competency. This may particularly apply to units with considerable numeracy content that would benefit from delivery by specialist numeracy practitioners.

> *Lack of system capacity to build Foundation Skills across all AQF levels* is a barrier to the effective delivery of Foundation Skills that is created in the implementation phase of the Training Package design cycle because STA and RTO systems have encouraged ownership of Training Packages by vocational specialists. Mechanisms need to be developed that make it easier for RTOs to include Foundation Skills specialists in the implementation of Training Packages. The WA introduction of Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills (CAVSS) is one policy mechanism that has been designed to address this issue.

1.4 Lack of consistency in how Foundation Skills in Training Packages are interpreted and delivered

As identified in section 3 above, VET practitioners are often unable to unpack or interpret the Foundation Skills embedded in Training Packages and to subsequently embed them into their training and assessment. An individual practitioner's awareness and understanding of Foundation Skills will influence what they do with content in this area. The wide range of awareness and understanding among practitioners leads to considerable inconsistency in the implementation of the Foundation Skills that have been included in Training Packages.

Unless Foundation Skills content is described in a stand-alone unit, it tends to be delivered by a vocational specialist, rather than an LLN specialist. While, there seems to be increasing awareness of Foundation Skills among vocational specialists, the extent of knowledge and expertise in this area is widely varied and results

in inconsistent interpretation and implementation. A number of DEEWR funded projects are currently attempting to address this issue; further details are included under Question 3 below.

Using the concept of reasonable adjustment VET practitioners are sometimes able to 'get around' the LLN requirements of Training Packages rather than build skills (e.g. using only oral presentations for reporting requirements). Because this type of adjustment is possible it can encourage inexpert practitioners to believe they are appropriately addressing LLN skill issues and do not need advice from specialists.

There is a need for all VET practitioners to build their understanding of Foundation Skills so that they at least know when to get expert advice. The elective from the TAE Certificate IV, TAELLN401A, provides the skills and knowledge to identify LLN issues and seek appropriate support. However, relatively few VET practitioners have completed this elective[7] and so a concerted effort is in place through an IBSA project to increase practitioner capability in this area. However, projects alone will not solve the entire issue and so more specific advice within Training Packages could be used to highlight where consideration needs to be given to the embedded Foundation Skills content and where specific LLN delivery expertise may need to be sought.

> *Lack of consistency in how Foundation Skills in Training Packages are interpreted and delivered is a barrier to the effective delivery of Foundation Skills that is created in the implementation phase of the Training Package design cycle because there is a lack of specificity about whether a certain level of LLN skills is required as a prerequisite for participation in training. As a result, learner skill levels may be assumed and not explicitly built into the training program. Exacerbating this issue is the reality that VET practitioners generally do not have the awareness, capacity or confidence to unpack and deliver the Foundation Skills content within Training Packages or to seek specialist advice where necessary.*

1.5 Limited access to LLN expertise in delivery

Because LLN skill development has been seen as an issue of equity and confined to stand-alone accredited courses, the traditional LLN workforce has been, in the main, segregated from mainstream vocational delivery within most publicly funded RTOs. LLN specialists provide government funded programs, such as the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP) and WELL, and state-based accredited course options, such as the Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA) in Victoria and WA or the Access Employment and Education Training (AEET) Framework in NSW and Tasmania. There is some formalised use of LLN specialists in vocational programs, such as the WA Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills (CAVSS), which enable integrated LLN support for a limited number of hours.

The existing LLN workforce (like the general VET workforce) is ageing and the number of university based undergraduate and post-graduate qualifications specifically designed to produce and/or upskill adult literacy and numeracy practitioners has dwindled dramatically since the mid-1990s. Practitioners operating in the field today hold a range of credentials, but there is no standard national qualification for LLN practitioners available in Australia.

NCVER research[8] has found that the opportunity for formal professional development for credentialed and non-credentialed practitioners is rare and that there has not been a formal replacement for the Adult Literacy Teaching and Adult Numeracy Teaching courses that were developed by the National Staff Development Committee in 1995. With this in mind, IBSA is working with DEEWR to develop new

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[7] NCVER data on publicly funded VET delivery indicates that 5,396 individuals successfully completed the LLN elective between 2004 and 2009.
[8] *Current and future professional development needs of the language, literacy and numeracy workforce*, Mackay et al. (2006), NCVER

qualifications and pathways into LLN specialist roles within the VET system. (Further detail is provided under Question 3.) However, it will take time to build capacity in this area.

Co-delivery and team-teaching approaches are expensive and perhaps not sustainable as a stand-alone solution. Only a percentage of the existing LLN specialist workforce has the skills, and willingness, to co-deliver in VET mainstream courses. And only a percentage of vocational trainers have the capacity to deal independently with LLN issues in their training practice. Even with the best of intentions, many vocational and LLN specialists struggle to work out how they can effectively work in cooperation due to funding, cultural, geographic and time barriers.

Limited access to LLN expertise in delivery is a barrier to the effective delivery of Foundation Skills that has not been specifically created by the Training Package design cycle, but it has been driven by the increasing focus of the VET system on Training Package delivery sometimes at the expense of Access and General Education. Training Packages have not clearly identified where specialist LLN expertise may be needed in delivery and so they have not encouraged the expansion or diversification of the profession.

2. Opportunities within the VET Products for the 21st Century framework and report recommendations

Are there new/existing opportunities within the VET Products for the 21st Century framework and report recommendations that could be better leveraged or expanded to address these barriers?

Although many barriers to the effective delivery of Foundation Skills relate to implementation – and therefore to practitioner skill, funding mechanisms and AQTF quality assurance processes – the *VET Products for the 21st Century* framework and report recommendations provide a number of opportunities to begin to address the barriers identified above.

Significantly, twelve of the 22 recommendations have implications for Foundation Skills. A table in Appendix B shows which recommendations relate to each of the barriers identified in Question 1.

2.1 Recommendation 2

A fuller and more explicit definition of competency makes clear that LLN and Foundation Skills are integral to competency. This could be used to bring the attention of funding bodies and policy makers to the need to adequately fund training delivery that enables the development of both the vocational and foundation aspects of each unit of competency. This is especially critical when people enter a qualification with lower level LL or N skills. Given that ALLS data indicates that more than 40% of the Australian population have skills that will limit their participation in work or everyday life, and the fact that there are high levels of non-completion in some VET qualifications[9], it seems critical that Foundation Skills are built into fundamental definitions that underpin the VET system.

This recommendation has the potential to partially address Barriers 2 and 3 by encouraging Training Package developers and STAs to adopt an understanding of competency that includes greater attention to Foundation Skills.

2.2 Recommendation 5

A single organising framework for VET qualifications is an important outcome and helpful for building parity between Training Packages and accredited courses. However, allowing Foundation Skills to remain in accredited courses is not ideal. Many accredited courses are covered by state-based or RTO copyright and are therefore not publicly accessible or require additional licensing. There is considerable duplication of effort and resources across States and Territories to produce what amounts to the same thing. The multiplicity of LLN modules works against easy and consistent adoption of them within vocational training. There is little opportunity for credit transfer or recognition of accredited course outcomes by employers who are now accustomed to nationally consistent qualifications. Nationally consistent units that describe competency in LLN and Employability Skills (Foundation Skills) could be used to deliver both AQF level I and II Foundation Skills qualifications and to provide electives for vocational qualifications. Such a development would bring consistency and streamlined design to VET.

This recommendation has the potential to address Barrier 3 by providing accessible Foundation Skills units and qualifications that fit more seamlessly into VET systems and funding mechanisms by not restricting Foundation Skills delivery to one source of funding (i.e. Foundation Skills units of competency available in a Training Package could be funded through mainstream VET delivery).

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[9] Wignall, L. (2009) *Greater than the sum of its parts: The external review of the AEET Framework*, TAFE NSW

2.3 Recommendation 6

A review of packaging rules has the potential to allow and encourage access to existing accredited course modules as 'bolted on' options that come with nominal hours funding and allow for concurrent Foundation Skills development for learners who do not have them at the required level. However, if Foundation Skills units of competency were available within a Training Package (as suggested above) the new 1/6 rule may not be necessary for the importation of LLN units from accredited courses.

This recommendation has the potential to address Barrier 3 (if Foundation Skills units of competency are not available) by allowing and encouraging the importation of modules from accredited courses into vocational qualifications.

2.4 Recommendation 7

The efficient utilisation of units of competency has the potential to reduce the massive duplication of Foundation Skills units that have been developed within many Training Packages. The national availability of Foundation Skills units of competency, or the availability of modules from accredited courses, that can be imported into TP qualifications has the potential to replace a multitude of individual units of competency for communication, numeracy, teamwork and other core/employability skills that currently exist.

This recommendation has the potential to partially address Barriers 2 and 4 by encouraging Training Package developers to package qualifications with more transferable Foundation Skills units of competency and thus provide greater consistency in Foundation Skills units that will ease the task of unpacking for Training Package users.

2.5 Recommendation 8

A stronger focus on preparatory and enabling qualifications should ensure that a range of qualifications is available for building Foundation Skills. The diagram in Appendix A shows how Foundation Skills units of competency may be used to build nationally consistent Foundation Skills qualifications and a range of vocationally-flavoured Certificate I and II qualifications where these have not been developed as part of an industry Training Package. Although these qualifications would not be designed to produce an occupational outcome, they would provide more focussed preparation for participation in vocational pathways.

There is support for such a construct with ACCI recently stating in their *Response to the Australian Apprenticeship Taskforce* that:

> *RTOs and business and industry associations would need to work together to develop pre-vocational programs that incorporate Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) skills, Employability Skills and basic vocational skills with strong work experience components. The graduates of these programs would at least commence their apprenticeship with some industry experience that could be transferred immediately to the workplace.* [10]

This recommendation has the potential to partially address Barrier 3 by providing Foundation Skills qualifications that are more clearly linked to vocational pathways. Implementation of these qualifications would encourage STAs and RTOs to consider how the vocational and Foundation Skills content can be best supported.

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[10] P9, ACCI Discussion Paper, July 2009
*www.acci.asn.au/.../Microsoft%20Word%20-%20Australian%20**Apprenticeship**%20Taskforce%20-%20Final.pdf*

2.6 Recommendation 10

Allowing for VET qualifications to include knowledge and preparatory units may support the development and inclusion of higher level Foundation Skills units in higher level qualifications, e.g. cross-cultural communication, negotiation skills, statistical analysis.

This recommendation has the potential to partially address Barrier 3 by allowing the Foundation Skills required at all AQF levels to be more clearly identified and described within units of competency and packaged into vocational qualifications.

2.7 Recommendation 15

Ensuring that LLN are made more explicit in the development of occupational and foundation qualifications may appear to be a win for Foundation Skills, but, as already stated, Training Package design is not responsible for the lack of explicit LLN. The real factors affecting Training Package content are the demands of employers, the priorities of ISCs and the skills and awareness of Training Package developers.

This recommendation has the potential to address Barrier 1 if the recommendation is used as a lever to raise industry stakeholder and ISC awareness of the importance of accurately and explicitly capturing the Foundation Skills required in the workplace and ensuring that they are effectively included in Training Packages.

2.8 Recommendation 16

Simplifying and streamlining the content of Training Packages by separating performance standards from guidance may enable the development of suitable locations for the inclusion of more specific advice on how Foundation Skills should be treated. This recommendation proposed that the endorsed components include 'qualifications and occupational/foundation outcomes'. Ensuring the consistent use of this component may enable Training Package developers to clearly identify significant Foundation Skills outcomes for qualifications and/or units of competency. This information has the potential to guide RTOs in decisions around which practitioners or departments ought to be responsible for implementation.

This recommendation has the potential to partially address Barriers 3 and 4 by ensuring that the endorsed component of Training Packages provides clear information to users on Foundation Skills outcomes.

2.9 Recommendation 17

Expanding the non-endorsed components of Training Packages will allow the inclusion of more detailed implementation advice. This section of the Training Package could be used to alert users to units that have significant embedded LLN content. This information could be used to: specify when specialist LLN expertise is needed, or recommended, for delivery; and to provide advice on stand-alone Foundation Skills units or modules that could be used to support the development of the unit's underpinning skills.

This recommendation has the potential to partially address Barriers 3 and 4 by providing useful implementation advice for Training Package users and, at the same time, raising their awareness of Foundation Skills issues and solutions. Advice provided in the non-endorsed component of Training Packages will need to be quality assured to ensure that approaches to the development of advice are consistent across Training Packages.

2.10 Recommendation 20

At present there are barriers caused by accredited courses being controlled by State copyright. If the content was made publicly available on NTIS it may encourage uptake of LLN qualifications and modules by making them more accessible. However, this solution does beg the question as to why this content remains in state accredited courses where there is considerable duplication.

This recommendation has the potential to partially address Barrier 2 by increasing Training Package developers' awareness of available Foundation Skills qualifications and modules and encouraging them to package the modules into Training Package qualifications. However, it is not the most effective solution for making Foundation Skills units more widely used and accepted.

2.11 Recommendation 21

Acknowledging and building on existing professional networks could provide a mechanism for raising RTO awareness of how Foundation Skills in Training Packages could be delivered and supported. Networks also have the potential to raise industry awareness of Foundation Skills and subsequently informing the development and continuous improvement of Training Packages.

This recommendation has the potential to partially address Barriers 1, 2, 4 and 5 by building capability and awareness within key players in the Training Package design cycle – industry stakeholders, Training Package developers, vocational training practitioners and LLN specialists. However, considerable resources (time, funds, energy and expertise) need to be invested in networks if they are to achieve significant outcomes at a system level.

2.12 Recommendation 22

Conducting a joint review with NVEAC on how best to ensure that equity needs are addressed is a worthy contribution to VET continuous improvement, but it is critical that Foundation Skills are not positioned as only an equity issue. Foundation Skills need to be dealt with in equity but they are also important as an overall issue of quality. Locking Foundation Skills into an 'equity only' position does them a disservice and will further entrench the identified barriers to effective delivery.

This recommendation has the potential to, once again, label Foundation Skills as only an equity issue if these skills are perceived to be only the low-level skills that can be a barrier to participation. However, the prominence of Foundation Skills in many other parts of the VET Products for the 21st Century *framework is likely to prevent this from happening.*

It is evident that by taking up the recommendations of the *VET Products for the 21st Century* report the identified barriers to effective delivery of Foundation Skills can be partly addressed. The table in Appendix B shows which recommendations relate to each identified barrier. However, the implementation of these recommendations will not fully ameliorate the identified barriers. Some needed changes, around capability and awareness raising, are beyond the scope of Training Package design. These are:

- Industry and ISC awareness of Foundation Skills – this issue is unlikely to be fully addressed within the scope of Training Package design and should probably be addressed within broader approaches to raise awareness of Foundation Skills in general, beyond their role in the development of Training Packages

- Availability of LLN expertise – will require extensive skilling and upskilling of VET professionals and initiatives to encourage people into the LLN field

- Capacity of VET practitioners to unpack Training Packages – will require the development and widespread implementation of approaches to professional development and awareness-raising around the identification, support and delivery of Foundation Skills by vocational practitioners

- System obstacles to integrated delivery of Foundation Skills – most of these may be overcome through implementation of the recommendations, but a concerted and conscious effort through the Framework will be needed to bring about changes to VET system blockers (changes such as creating funding mechanisms for integrated delivery, overcoming the push for higher level skills at the expense of Foundation Skills, and reconsidering the appropriateness of nominal hours where Foundation Skills development is embedded in vocational training).

3. How does the VET Products for the 21st Century project fit within the 'big picture'

How does the VET Products for the 21st Century project fit within the current 'big picture' of investment in Foundation Skills, including the new National Strategy?

Many national initiatives are currently underway around Foundation Skills. A number of these have the potential to address the identified barriers that cannot be fully covered through the implementation of the *VET Products for the 21st Century* report recommendations. There is huge potential for 'joining up the dots' if the report recommendations are implemented in collaboration and consultation with related initiatives.

3.1 Ai Group national workforce literacy project

This DEEWR funded project is critical to the current conceptualisation and ownership of literacy and numeracy issues by industry. The project itself is premised on identifying what industry wants, raising awareness of LLN issues among employers and highlighting to others that employers are interested in literacy. From a research perspective it will also provide useful data on ways LLN skill development can be delivered and the impact on business when it is dealt with effectively.

The eleven pilot sites are being asked to report on ways in which they have delivered LLN training using both stand-alone LLN units and/or the ACSF as mechanisms for describing Foundation Skills gain.

Given the need for industry 'buy-in' – this project will provide a useful driver for positioning Foundation Skills in future policy decisions and for drawing industry/employer attention to Foundation Skills issues.

3.2 DEEWR Foundation Skills Package

The Australian Government announced a $119.2 million Foundation Skills Package[11] as part of the 2010 Budget. The Package included development of a national Foundations Skills Strategy, an increase in WELL, LLNP and community program funding and an Outreach and Leadership project.

Foundation Skills Strategy

The Government will develop a National Foundation Skills Strategy for adults in consultation with the States, Territories and other stakeholders by the end of 2011. The National Strategy will provide a framework for Foundation Skills provision across all jurisdictions for the next decade.

Very little further information is available as to how this strategy will be developed however there are many stakeholders eager to participate in any consultation processes to see a sustainable national solution to Foundation Skills delivery. The strategy will most likely be progressed through the Ministerial Council and DEEWR expect consultations to commence before the end of the year.

Given that TVET, DEEWR, Skills Australia, the national network of TAFE Access Education Leaders, the national WELL ISC Network and Ai Group are all indicating that Foundations Skills are an issue, the time is ripe for a 'joined up' solution that leverages the interest and will of key stakeholders.

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[11] See Appendix C

Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP)

The aim of the LLNP is to assist eligible job seekers to address their LLN gaps to make them more competitive in the job market and/or place them in a better position to complete further education and training. Additional funding is in response to demand for a greater number of hours of training that the program has been experiencing from participants.

It is of interest to note that LLNP provision uses state-based accredited courses for delivery but with reporting of gains against the ACSF indicators in reading, writing, speaking and listening, numeracy and learning. Even though the rhetoric of the program describes links to employability or further VET training – the mechanisms for formal pathways or recognition of effort are not in place because of the disconnect between the accredited course outcomes and Training Packages.

Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Program

The WELL program delivers vocational training integrated with LLN training in the workplace. The training is flexible, tailored to the needs of the individual and the workplace and based on an industry specific, nationally endorsed Training Package. Program funding is designed to support employers to cultivate a culture of training in their workplaces.

Over recent years, DEEWR has expanded their concept of the WELL program to include three key aspects: training of workers; resource development; and training of pre-employment IEP participants. Of these components, the training of existing workers is the most relevant to the work of the *VET Products for the 21st Century* project.

Although the LLN content delivered in a WELL program is generally derived from the content embedded into a Training Package, it is not always possible to measure the direct LLN or Employability Skill learning gain. The program may benefit from access to a wider choice of Foundation Skills units.

Community-based services

The community-based services build on the Foundation Skills Taster Course Pilot program which was funded in the 2009–10 federal budget. The program offers learning opportunities in community settings and targets adults who have been disengaged from formal learning and work. The program offers informal, short courses structured around topics of direct relevance to people's lives; embedded with literacy and numeracy and ultimately aimed at reconnecting individuals into more formal training and work.

This program seeks to implement what is described in the Ministerial Declaration on Adult Community Education (ACE) as – 'ACE with *vocational intent*' that is designed to 'increase vocational choices and employment opportunities, especially for people from socially excluded or educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.'

At present this program does not request that providers report the learning gain against any specific reporting mechanisms because much of the content is in such small increments that it might not be at a unit of competence level and certainly below AQF level 1.

Some work has been carried out in the Victorian Credit Matrix to describe pre AQF level 1 content. It has been labelled as 'Enabling'. There is further work to be done to link this lower level activity in ACE with mainstream VET mechanisms. If a connection could be found then Foundation Skills taster courses could offer effective pathways into the VET system for disengaged, low skilled people.

National Foundation Skills Outreach and Leadership Project

The Outreach and Leadership project aims to address existing structural issues within the national training system to improve Foundation Skills for adult Australians. The project is designed to lift the current workforce capacity constraints so that expanded adult LLN training can be delivered to meet demand. It also aims to improve the quality of embedded LLN in vocational training and raise the awareness of industry, training providers and individuals of the benefits of improving LLN skills.

Funding of $23.5 million over four years has been provided to tackle adult LLN capacity constraints in the national training system. This initiative will support the overarching National Foundation Skills Strategy that is to be developed with the states and territories and other stakeholders. It consists of a mix of strategic and program activity aimed at addressing national training system capacity constraints such as the adult LLN workforce and the stigma associated with poor LLN.

Specific elements include:

   i.   a national community education campaign to raise awareness of adult LLN skill needs and highlight solutions

  ii.   expansion of the adult LLN teacher scholarships program

 iii.   mapping of embedded LLN in vocational training against an existing LLN assessment tool

 iv.   development of a tool to assess Employability Skills

  v.   collaboration with industry to improve the core skills of trade apprentices, especially in those sectors where high levels of numeracy are required.

i. DEEWR Foundation Skills community education campaign

This is likely to be a public awareness campaign with a similar construct to the 'Beyond Blue' campaign – part public awareness raising, part resourcing and provision. Exactly how this campaign will be conceptualised and activated is unknown.

> *It would be useful to maintain a watching brief on this project (with a view to being part of any consultation process) so that messages could be used to raise employer awareness of the need for these skills in Training Packages.*

ii. LLN qualifications and workforce development

Exactly what constitutes the Foundation Skills workforce is highly contested but there can be no doubt that past notions of the LLN 'field' being entirely made up of specialist teachers with post graduate qualifications is over. It is now recognised that whilst a limited number of universities offer LLN specialisation, and a larger number offer TESOL specific courses, these are only part of the picture of who may need skilling or upskilling around LLN and be considered part of a broader definition of the LLN workforce.

DEEWR funded IBSA to develop two new VET qualifications to provide:
- credentials and professional development opportunities for practitioners from the VET and community services fields who may require upskilling in adult LLN as a requirement of their job

- pathways for existing LLN practitioners who may want to move into leadership positions that require additional expertise in assessment systems, research methodology or multiliteracies resource development.

The new Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma are designed to provide entry and exit points for a wide variety of personnel looking to develop, consolidate or to extend their skills in

order to specialise in this important teaching and training area. The packaging allows for flexible use of core and electives to build specific delivery context specialisation such as in the workplace or in the community and the potential for skill sets to be identified[12].

In addition, units included in the Training and Education Training Package at different qualification levels provide a pathway for skills development. The development and inclusion of the unit TAALLN501A *Support the development of adult language, literacy and numeracy skills* as an elective in the Diploma of Training and Assessment (TAE50110) provides an opportunity for trainers and assessors to deepen their LLN teaching practice.

In combination with a number of state-based accredited VET courses this range of credentials is designed to build capacity in vocational trainers and VET teachers and offer PD opportunities to the existing LLN field. Across the next four years DEEWR is offering scholarship funding to support 'new entrants' to LLN specialisation.

> *Clearer identification of Foundation Skills that require delivery through Training Packages (as embedded content or stand-alone units or modules) would provide RTOs with a better indication of the level of LLN skills and knowledge their practitioners need for delivery, and could act as a catalyst for uptake of the range of upskilling options available.*

iii. ISC mapping of ASCF

A recent DEEWR project has assigned $1.6 million over four years to support ISCs with the mapping of Training Packages to the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF). This measure aims to assist trainers and assessors by making the LLN embedded in Training Packages more explicit.

However the methodology for this activity has not been finalised although preliminary discussions have taken place between DEEWR and ISCs. At this stage it seems most likely that ISCs will be funded individually for this work. DEEWR expects that work in this area will take account of the EE-Oz mapping pilot so there is likely to be a long lead time before any agreements are in place

> *It would be timely for TVET to communicate with DEEWR about the outcomes of the EE-Oz pilot and how the identification of ACSF levels might fit into new streamlined designs for Training Packages and units of competency to ensure that the two initiatives do not work at cross purposes.*

iv. DEEWR Employability Skills assessment tool development

Very little information is available about this initiative. The ACSF is used to describe five levels of LLN competence but a similar tool has not been developed for employability skills. This objective has arisen from the Adult Literacy Section of DEEWR, but it anticipated that there will be collaboration with the Training Package Development section of DEEWR on the design of this initiative.

> *A watching brief on this project is required so that any tool that is developed has acceptance and uptake in mainstream VET contexts and is in line with the application of employability skills in the newly designed Training Packages.*

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[12] User Guide for TAE70110 and TAE80110 (www.ibsa.org.au/.../Now-available-Language-Literacy-and-Numeracy-LLN-User-Guide.aspx -)

v. Collaboration with industry to improve the core skills of trade apprentices

Very little information is available about this initiative. It is an area that is highly contested with some stakeholders claiming that the training effort should be the domain of schools:

> *Apprenticeship completion rates could be improved by lifting the input level of literacy/ numeracy skills of school-leavers. While adding literacy/numeracy training to existing apprenticeship training is successful in the short term, it is a bandage and not a cure. Improving entry level literacy/numeracy would greatly improve the educational outcomes of trade training, and together with true competency based training (decreasing training time), would allow for better completion rates.[13]*

Whether the issue is remediated before or during training there is no doubt that industry itself is now recognising the impact of low-level core skills:

> *Language, literacy and numeracy shortfalls in new and existing workers are a major barrier to improvement in industry performance and may be linked to high non-completion rates for traineeships and apprenticeships among other factors.[14]*

> *The ability for the VET system to be able to state categorically what Foundation Skills are required as a pre-requisite to training, or what level of Foundation Skills need to be developed concurrently with technical skills, would support the achievement of this broad objective.*

3.3 NCVER search conference

NCVER is convening an adult LLN search conference in early August. Participants for the search conference have not been finalised, but initial planning has identified the following:

- DEEWR Foundation Skills Branch (responsible for WELL and LLNP)
- Department of Immigration and Citizenship (responsible for the Adult Migrant English Program)
- Social Inclusion Unit, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
- Skills Australia
- Productivity Commission
- Australian Industry Group
- Australian Council for Adult Literacy
- Adult Learning Australia
- Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
- DEEWR Schools Branch
- IBSA
- ISC WELL Network

The aim of the search conference is to:

- quantify the level of recent and current adult literacy and numeracy development activity

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[13] Barry McKnight, Charles Darwin University, Submission to the National Resources Sector Employment Taskforce, April 2010 (*www.deewr.gov.au/Skills/Programs/National/nrset/.../CDUNRSET.pdf*)
[14] Page 5, CPISC, Environmental Scan 2010-11

- inform the scope of future research, e.g. should the focus be on the general population or on specific groups?
- identify potential groups who may benefit in terms of inclusion, participation and productivity from improvements in their literacy and numeracy skills
- identify data gaps in knowledge of the literacy and numeracy skills of potential target groups
- suggest focussed research activities that might close data and information gaps.

Although it is unclear to what extent NCVER will make the outcomes of the search conference public, monitoring the outcomes may provide indications of future research and policy directions. Outcomes are likely to be of direct relevance to the Equity Blueprint work of NVEAC.

3.4 Strengthening the AQF consultation paper

The July 2010 AQF consultation paper includes a draft AQF Generic Skills policy. Under this policy generic skills are defined as those skills that are not specific to work in a particular occupation or industry but are important for work, education and life in general. These skills include LLN, ICT, people skills, thinking skills and personal skills. The draft policy proposes that:

- qualification developers and accrediting authorities will ensure that generic skills are explicit in qualifications
- the application of a generic skill will be commensurate with the level of a qualification type and the field of study
- schools, VET and higher education providers will ensure that graduates achieve the generic skills associated with their sector and particular qualifications
- the means for achieving generic skills will be incorporated into teaching and learning strategies, including the evaluation of outcomes in assessment strategies.

Work on the streamlining of Training Packages will need to take account of any revisions to the AQF. The draft Generic Skills Policy indicates that qualification developers will need to pay attention to the identification and incorporation of generic skills, including LLN. Training Package design that allows the explicit inclusion of generic skills will be necessary.

4. What are the possible solutions?

The current level of interest in Foundation Skills by policy makers and VET system stakeholders provides an opportunity to reconceptualise LLN, and its fundamental relationship with employability skills, as an integral part of mainstream VET. Often in the past, LLN have been regarded primarily as an equity issue – relevant only to the needs of certain equity groups. But, as a key component of Foundation Skills, LLN can be seen as relevant more broadly throughout VET. Foundation Skills are beginning to be recognised as both important for inclusive access and essential to product quality.

The *VET Products for the 21st Century* project has the potential to support this shift by re-thinking the place of Foundation Skills in the National Training Framework. There are a number of possible solutions that could be implemented, initiated or investigated through the work of this project.

To address the barriers to effective delivery of Foundation Skills identified in Section 1 of this paper, possible solutions are to:

- Enable nationally consistent Foundation Skills units and qualifications
- Promote Foundation Skills pathway qualifications
- Eliminate duplication of Foundation Skills units
- Provide specific direction on pre-requisite Foundation Skills
- Develop Foundation Skills implementation advice
- Establish clearer connections between employability skills and LLN as components of Foundation Skills
- Increase Foundation Skills knowledge and capability of VET product developers
- Build VET system awareness of Foundation Skills

The table in Appendix C indicates how these solutions relate to the barriers and recommendations identified in previous sections.

4.1 Enable nationally consistent Foundation Skills units and qualifications

To ensure that opportunities to develop Foundation Skills are a seamless and esteemed component of the VET system, nationally recognised and consistent Foundation Skills units and qualifications need to be available and used in combination with mainstream VET programs. There is interest from the TAFE Access and General Education Leaders Network (representatives from TAFE in each State and Territory who use their own state-accredited courses to deliver Foundation Skills) to create a nationally recognised set of units that could be used as stand-alone qualifications or more flexibly as imported units. While this interest from the Network indicates State and Territory willingness to collaborate on a national approach, an appropriate 'home' for the proposed set of units is needed.

There are two alternative ways in which this idea may be developed. Further work and consultation will be needed to determine the most appropriate and viable solution.

Foundation Skills Training Package

The development of a Foundation Skills Training Package would allow consolidation of the plethora of State accredited LLN courses. LLN and employability skills modules from these accredited courses could be redesigned into units of competency at a range of levels of complexity. Associated packaging advice could be formulated to allow for customised AQF I and AQF II Foundation Skills qualifications (see Appendix A).

Units from the Foundation Skills Training Package could be imported into vocational Training Packages at a range of AQF levels.

Recommendation 8 of the VET Products for the 21st Century report allows scope for the development of preparatory and enabling qualifications and for their incorporation into the national framework in a more systematic way. Although in the past the purely vocational focus of Training Packages has prevented the development of more generic qualifications, and therefore Training Packages, it may now be possible to conceive a Training Package that provides enabling qualifications as pathways into employment and further VET.

Many issues would need to be addressed during the development of a Foundation Skills Training Package, including:

- Requirements for delivery and assessment – the standard AQTF requirement for assessors to hold the Certificate IV in TAE and the qualification they are assessing would not be appropriate for delivery and assessment of Foundation Skills qualifications. To ensure the quality of training and assessment for stand-alone Foundation Skills qualifications and for Foundation Skills units that may be imported into other Training Packages, trainers and assessors would need appropriate LLN practitioner qualifications.

- Packaging rules – at present many ISCs have introduced restrictions on the AQF level of units that can be imported into qualifications. When Foundation Skills units are being imported into vocational qualifications, the 'one up, one down' rule may prevent the packaging of Foundation Skills units that would meet individual learner needs. Importation rules may need to be reconsidered to ensure that they provide maximum flexibility around Foundation Skills, while still ensuring that the integrity of the vocational qualification is not compromised.

National Foundation Skills Framework

An alternative solution to a Foundation Skills Training Package is the concept of a National Foundation Skills Framework. Through such a framework States and Territories could identify and agree a consistent set of Foundation Skills content, based on the content of various State accredited courses. The resulting Framework would reduce duplication through more clearly identifying and branding available content. The Framework's identification and promotion of content that is fit for particular needs could result in better uptake of accredited course content in Training Packages, supported by the one-sixth importation ruling.

A National Foundation Skills Framework would introduce a new element into the National Training Framework and so does appear to work against recommendation 5 from the VET Products for the 21st Century report. However, the Framework may provide a solution that could be effectively managed through the national regulator.

4.2 Promote Foundation Skills pathway qualifications

Regardless of whether they are available through a Foundation Skills Training Package or through the importation of units from accredited courses, there is a need for Foundation Skills qualifications (at AQF I and II) that provide vocationally-flavoured pathways. The *VET Products for the 21st Century* report recognised that enabling and preparatory pathways that build Foundation Skills are required for young people (including those still at school), adults without any post-compulsory qualifications and those who have had a long break from learning or formal training.

Although the COAG targets focus on qualifications at Certificate III level and above, there is a need for the effective provision of learning pathways into these higher-level qualifications. Many people are not capable of completing a vocational qualification at this level and require a preparatory learning experience.

A set of preparatory qualifications, housed either in a Foundation Skills Training Package or in existing vocational Training Packages but drawing from nationally agreed Foundation Skills units/modules, would be a valuable addition to the current range of national products. These qualifications could be clearly designed as learning pathways, not for specific occupational outcomes, providing a link between Certificate I and II qualifications and entry into vocational qualifications. Such qualifications would also have synergy with the proposed Foundation Skills school cadetships as a mechanism for ensuring young people have access to opportunities to develop the underpinning skills required for undertaking further vocational training.

4.3 Eliminate duplication of Foundation Skills units

The national availability of Foundation Skills units has the potential to minimise duplication and encourage the efficient use of competencies across industry, in line with recommendation 7 from the *VET Products for the 21st Century* report.

Currently there are many low-level units within Training Packages that address communication skills needs, and other Foundation Skills, within particular industry and workplace settings. More widespread use of generic Foundation Skills units would provide efficiencies in training product and resource development, as well as support transferability for learners.

Guidance for ISCs and Training Package developers could be provided through:

- Information and advice on how nationally agreed Foundation Skills units can be used within Training Packages

- Amendments to the Training Package Development Handbook requiring the minimisation of duplication in Foundation Skills units

- Encouraging quality panel members to consider whether Foundation Skills units are unnecessarily duplicated in Training Packages

4.4 Provide specific direction on pre-requisite Foundation Skills

The users of Training Packages need to clearly identify the Foundation Skills required by Training Package units and qualifications. These requirements can be made unambiguous by specifying Foundation Skills levels as pre-requisites for individual units, or for qualifications. Two approaches may be considered:

- Mapping to ACSF levels – the approach currently taken by EE-Oz, allows specific levels of LLN competence to be identified as essential to achievement of the unit of competency. RTOs may use the pre-requisite ACSF levels to restrict entry to a course, develop bridging courses or pathways, or determine the level of LLN support and skill building that will need to be provided to individual learners.

- Identification of pre-requisite units – Training Package developers could specify particular national Foundation Skills units as pre-requisites. RTOs may use the pre-requisite information to recognise the existing skills of course entrants (RPL them in the Foundation Skills pre-requisites as a course entry procedure), develop bridging courses or pathways, or co-deliver the Foundation Skills unit with the vocational qualification.

This action has the potential to drive major change in the way that Foundation Skills are considered in the implementation of Training Packages. It would need to be accompanied by considerable awareness raising and capacity building for both Training Package developers and for RTOs and practitioners.

4.5 Develop Foundation Skills implementation advice

For Foundation Skills to be effectively delivered through Training Packages, Training Package users need more detailed advice on how they should be implemented. There is scope to include specific advice on Foundation Skills in the non-endorsed component of restructured and streamlined Training Packages. In particular this advice could flag where a unit contains significant language, literacy or numeracy content that may require delivery or support from an LLN specialist – examples of such units may include: drilling, electrical or finance units with high level numeracy content; management or community services units that require advanced communication skills.

If the Foundation Skills content of particular units has been highlighted through non-endorsed advice material, AQTF auditors may have scope to question RTOs about how they took this advice into account in their implementation, thus reinforcing for RTOs the importance of considering these skills in mainstream delivery and assessment.

4.6 Establish clearer connections between Employability Skills and LLN as components of Foundation Skills

The term Foundation Skills is relatively new in the Australian VET policy environment. In current usage it has come to mean the combination of language, literacy and numeracy skills (as described by the Australian Core Skills Framework) and employability skills (as described by the endorsed approach to using Employability Skills in Training Packages).[15]

Although a connection between core and employability skills has been recognised, there is no formal way of joining the two systems. The ACSF describes the core skills across five levels while the employability skills derive their complexity from the level of the qualification in which they are embedded. Further work needs to be done to examine the way in which employability skills can be formally integrated with the concept of Foundation Skills. While there is potential for this to be achieved through DEEWR's proposed development of assessment tools for employability skills, concurrent activity through the *VET Products for the 21st Century* project could consider how the level and complexity of employability skills and core skills can best be described in Training Packages.

Such activity may include consideration of:

- how the existing employability skills content of Training Packages is currently implemented: uptake, effectiveness, consistency
- how employability skills best fit in the new streamlined Training Package construct
- the degree to which employability skills and LLN content overlaps in current Training Packages and whether they could be more elegantly integrated.

4.7 Increase Foundation Skills knowledge and capability of VET product developers

To ensure that Foundation Skills are effectively included in Training Packages, capacity needs to be built across all components of the product design cycle. In particular, Training Package developers, ISC personnel and NQC quality panel members need to be clear about the Foundation Skill requirements of the qualifications in their remit.

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[15] Employability Skills: from framework to practice, DEST, 2006.

A cascading array of information and professional development options will need to be made available to build the awareness, knowledge and capacity of those responsible for the development of Training Packages. Training Package developers will need the capacity to:

- identify Foundation Skills, including pre-requisites, in the endorsed component of Training Packages

- provide clear advice about implementation expectations for Foundation Skills in the non-endorsed component of Training Packages

- incorporate Foundation Skills units into qualifications (either from a Foundation Skill Training Package or from accredited courses).

The quality panel members are well placed to play a role in the upskilling of Training Package developers. Increasing panel members' capacity and understanding around Foundation Skills through professional development and moderation approaches would be a sensible first step in building developer capability.

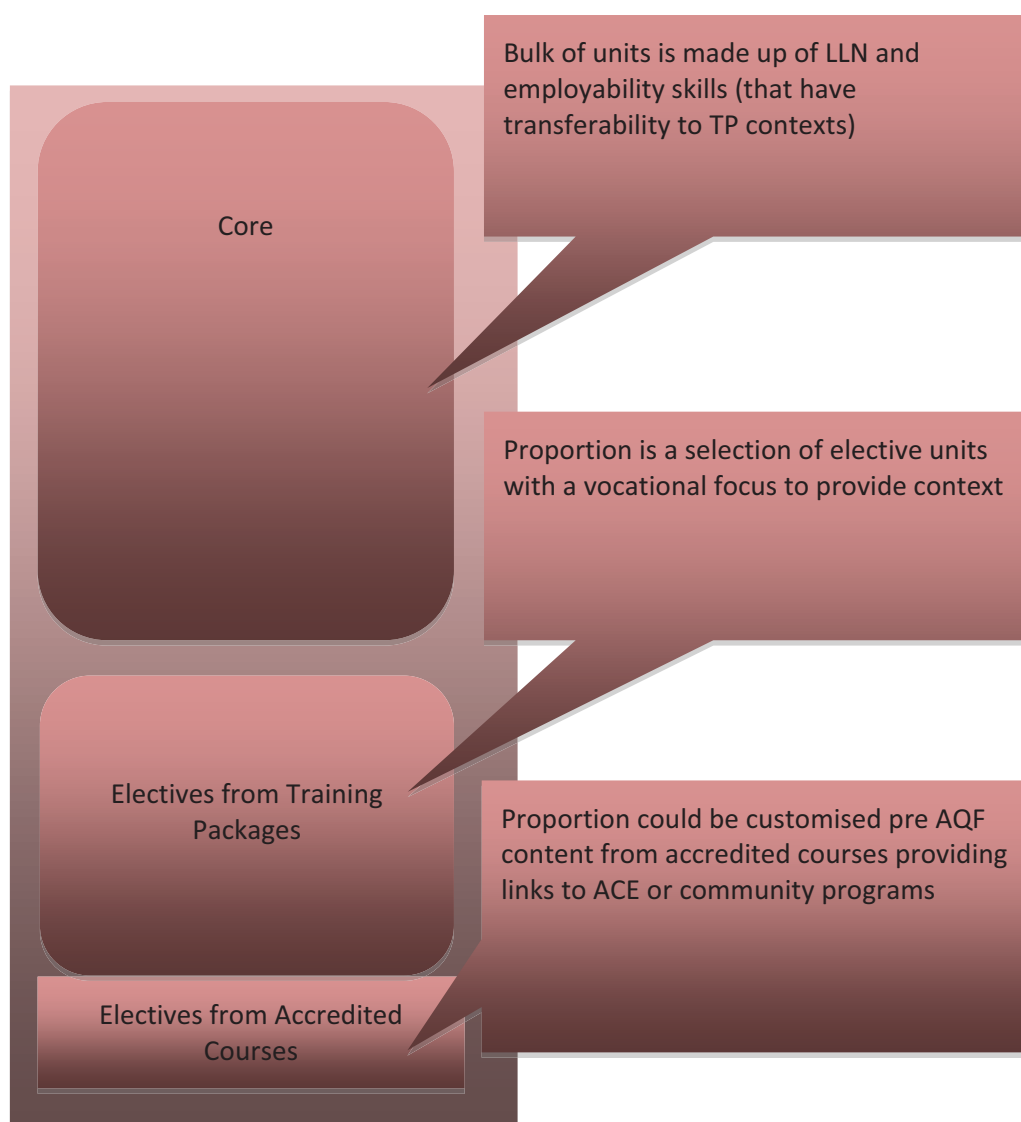## 4.8 Build VET system awareness of Foundation Skills

The identification of Foundation Skills within the endorsed component of Training Packages and the provision of clear advice about implementation expectations in the non-endorsed component will signal to RTOs and funding providers that Foundation Skills must be taken into account in the delivery and assessment of VET.

To reinforce the message that Foundation Skills are an integral part of all VET activity, relevant information about Foundation Skills will need to be incorporated into all communication activities supporting the *VET Products for the 21st Century* project. Communications about the definition of competency, or the streamlining of Training Packages, should also be used to raise awareness of how Foundation Skills fit into the National Training Framework.

In line with recommendation 21 from the *VET Products for the 21st Century* report, change can be implemented by building existing professional networks and supporting collaborative arrangements. In the case of Foundation Skills, there would be considerable value in strengthening and enabling connections between Foundation Skills practitioners (such as the TAFE Access and General Education Leaders Network) and key players in the Training Package product design cycle (Training Package developers, ISCs and Training Package end-users). The acknowledgement of Foundation Skills as an issue that is shared by everyone in the VET system is a crucial first step for implementing workable solutions.

Appendix A – Foundation Skills qualification (AQF I-II)

Core

Bulk of units is made up of LLN and employability skills (that have transferability to TP contexts)

Proportion is a selection of elective units with a vocational focus to provide context

Electives from Training Packages

Proportion could be customised pre AQF content from accredited courses providing links to ACE or community programs

Electives from Accredited Courses

Appendix B – Mapping of barriers to *VET Products* report

The table below is a graphical representation of content included in Section 2 of this paper. It shows the relationship of *VET Products for the 21st Century* recommendations to each of the barriers to effective delivery of Foundation Skills identified in Section 1.

Recommendation opportunity	Barrier				
	Limited industry awareness of Foundation Skills	Inconsistent approaches to Foundation Skills in TP development	Lack of system capacity to build Foundation Skills at all AQF levels	Lack of consistency in how Foundation Skills in Training Packages is interpreted and delivered	Limited access to LLN expertise in delivery
2 Definition of competency		■	■		
5 Single organising framework			■		
6 Review of packaging rules			■		
7 Efficient utilisation of units		■		■	
8 Stronger focus on preparatory and enabling qualifications			■		
10 Inclusion of knowledge and preparatory units			■		
15 Ensuring LLN made more explicit	■				
16 Simplifying and streamlining			■	■	
17 Restructuring and streamlining			■	■	
20 Access to Crown copyright		■			
21 Professional networks	■	■		■	■
22 Joint review with NVEAC					

Note: in most cases the recommendation could only be considered to partially address the identified barrier. For a fuller explanation refer to Section 2.

Appendix C – Mapping of solutions to *VET Products* report

The table below is a graphical representation of the relationship between the possible solutions outlined in Section 4 of this paper and the barriers to effective delivery of Foundation Skills identified in Section 1.

Numbers included in the shaded squares refer to *VET Products for the 21st Century* recommendations. The positioning of these numbers indicates where the implementation of a recommendation may support the achievement of a possible solution. However, as noted in the table in Appendix B, in most cases a recommendation can only be considered to partially address the identified barrier, or possible solution.

	Barrier				
Possible solution	Limited industry awareness of Foundation Skills	Inconsistent approaches to Foundation Skills in TP development	Lack of system capacity to build Foundation Skills at all AQF levels	Lack of consistency in how Foundation Skills in Training Packages is interpreted and delivered	Limited access to LLN expertise in delivery
Enable nationally consistent Foundation Skills units and qualifications		20	5, 8, 10		
Promote Foundation Skills pathway qualifications			5, 6, 8		
Eliminate duplication of Foundation Skills units		7			
Provide specific direction on pre-requisite Foundation Skills			6, 16	16	
Develop Foundation Skills implementation advice			17	17	
Establish clearer connections between employability skills and LLN as components of Foundation Skills	15				
Increase Foundation Skills knowledge and capability of VET product developers	15, 21	2, 21			
Build VET system awareness of Foundation Skills			2	21	21

Appendix D – Skills for Sustainable Growth Foundation Skills Package[16]

Skills for Sustainable Growth — Foundation Skills Package — LLN for job seekers — expansion

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations					
Year	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Expense ($m)	-	14.2	17.4	17.6	17.8

The Government will provide $67.0 million over four years to transform the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP) to secure ongoing funding for approximately 13,570 additional training places for job seekers of working age (15 to 64 years old).

The LLNP aims to assist job seekers of working age to achieve sustainable employment. This additional funding builds on existing funding to provide a total of over 70,000 job seekers with an average of 280 hours of language, literacy and numeracy training. Investment in these skills assists job seekers to secure higher levels of social inclusion and workforce participation.

This will help ensure that job seekers can build their foundation skills and are able to fully engage in the workforce.

Skills for Sustainable Growth — Foundation Skills Package — National Core Skills and Outreach Project

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations					
Year	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Expense ($m)	-	4.9	7.1	5.6	5.9

The Government will provide $23.5 million over four years to improve core employability skills, particularly language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills, among working age Australians. The initiatives that will be funded include:

- A Commonwealth contribution of $15.4 million over four years for an awareness campaign aimed at promoting LLN initiatives and reducing the stigma for people with LLN skill development needs. The Commonwealth will seek further contributions to this campaign from the States and Territories;

- $2.3 million over four years to extend the existing LLN Practitioner Scholarship Program. This program was established in the 2009-10 Budget to provide 40 scholarships a year in both 2009-10 and 2010-11 to students undertaking a course of study for the purpose of becoming a qualified LLN instructor. The extension provides for an additional 50 scholarships a year from 2010-11 to 2013-14 with an average value of $5,000 per scholarship;

- $1.6 million over four years to give greater prominence to foundation skills in Industry Skill Council (ISC) Training Packages. This initiative will fund ISCs to re-map ISC Training Packages in order to make LLN requirements more explicit and transparent. In addition, greater support will be provided to assist trainers to address LLN skill development needs they observe in students; and

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[16] Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Budget Expense measures
www.budget.gov.au/2010-11/content/bp2/html/bp2_expense-08.htm

- $1.5 million over four years to develop a tool for assessing employability skills and attributes other than LLN.

The Government will also develop a National Strategy for Foundation Skills in consultation with the States and Territories by the end of 2011. The National Strategy will provide a framework for foundation skills provision across all jurisdictions for the next decade.

Skills for Sustainable Growth — Foundation Skills package — workplace and community language, literacy and numeracy — expansion

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations					
Year	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Expense ($m)	-	4.7	6.6	8.0	9.4

The Government will provide $28.7 million over four years to provide up to 9,500 additional workplace and 8,000 additional community-based language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) training places.

The Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program provides employees with vocationally oriented intensive training and aims to assist workers to improve LLN skills to perform their work safely and effectively, progress to further vocational training and advance in the workforce. The program will be expanded with up to 1,500 additional training places in 2010-11; 2,000 places in 2011-12; 2,500 places in 2012-13; and 3,500 places in 2013-14. Industry Skills Council brokers will encourage participation by enterprises in target industries that have a high incidence of workers with low LLN skill levels.

Funding for community-based projects will deliver up to 8,000 additional training places to be provided through short courses in innovative community settings such as neighbourhood houses, men's sheds, mothers' groups, Indigenous support organisations and community colleges. These courses are aimed at attracting adults into further foundation skills LLN training. Up to 60 projects will be funded in 2010-11, 100 projects in 2011-12 and 120 projects each year in 2012-13 and 2013-14.

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