



Australian Council for Adult Literacy

supporting literacy and numeracy education for adults

Thank you for the opportunity for the Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL) to provide a response to the Consultation paper *Scoping a foundation skills professional standards framework*. ACAL is a peak organisation for adult literacy and numeracy professionals. We support initiatives to ensure that literacy and numeracy provision is delivered professionally and for practitioners to be able to develop and exercise professional expertise and judgment in the work they do.

With the National Foundation Skills Strategy (NFSS) for Adults released twelve months ago, it is timely for there to be a debate about how we understand the relationship between the disciplinary fields of language, literacy and numeracy and the new policy context of foundation skills, and what changes there are to consider in terms of the work of practitioners and the knowledge and skills they need to perform their roles.

We are not convinced that there is a need to define foundation skills as a new field or discipline. We do however, agree that provision of programs that fall within the scope of the NFSS more often than not involves the cooperation of professionals from a number of different disciplines including the adult language, literacy and numeracy; vocational trainers; disability support personnel; counselors; and job services personnel. The challenge always is for these different professionals to work together in a way that the learners experience a coherent and integrated support system for undertaking their study and in some cases employment preparation or workplace training. We believe that using terms such as ‘foundation skills practitioners’ is in fact misleading because it suggests that there are practitioners who have all of the expertise that is held by a team of practitioners.

The nature of any work that is tied to government funding is that practitioners’ work can expect to be impacted by policy changes and shifts. Many adult literacy and numeracy practitioners have in their careers experienced not only numerous changes to curricula, but a paradigm shift from using curricula with strong pedagogical frameworks to using competency-based training packages. While many may have struggled philosophically with some of these major changes, they have learned to work within new paradigms with support from their community of practice, professional development workshops and experience. We have not had to define a new field or discipline each time these changes took place. The renaming of the program context from ‘adult language, literacy and numeracy’ to ‘foundation skills’ is no different.

We believe the current mix of adult literacy and numeracy and TESOL qualifications serve the LLN practitioners working in foundation skills programs well. If the addition of ‘employability skills’ is expected to introduce a major change to the work of the LLN practitioners to the extent that they need a different set of formal qualifications to do perform their job roles, then we would like to see a stronger argument made about this that is based on evidence from practice as well as from the relevant disciplinary scholarship.

Given also the precarious nature of employment in many foundation skills programs, LLN practitioners need to have qualifications that enable them to obtain work in other LLN contexts such as in the ELICOS sector and academic literacy and numeracy programs. A narrow identification or qualification that has currency only within foundation skills programs would not serve them well.

As stated above, we believe that the success of a foundation skills program depends critically on the effective collaboration of a team of professionals, based on mutual respect of the different knowledge and skills each brings to meeting learners’ needs. Labeling everyone as foundation skills practitioners discounts the professional identity each practitioner brings to this collaboration.

For these reasons, we believe that standards that individual practitioners need to meet should be determined by their respective professional field, not by a particular program context that exists at a

particular point in time. It may, however be worthwhile - given the challenges of the inter-professional practices that are so crucial for foundation skills programs, to have a set of guidelines (that over time may become standards) for providers of foundation skills programs on supporting effective inter-professional services.

Finally, we believe that successful and ethical development of professional standards are best undertaken from a participatory practice-based research base, that is, by examining the actual practices in the field, and involving practitioners to make sense of the observations. This creates greater transparency and ownership of any standards that emerge.

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