

Current and future professional development needs  
of the language, literacy and numeracy workforce

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## Publisher's note

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# Key messages

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This study explores the current and future professional development needs of three sectors—vocational trainers, specialist teachers and volunteer tutors—of the Australian adult English language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) workforce. Over 200 workers gave generously of their time.

- ✧ Language, literacy and numeracy educators are not a homogenous group. Some differences relate to employment sector or work context, some relate to the language, literacy and numeracy educators as individuals with varying educational and employment histories, and still others relate to the role differentiation that has emerged with national training reform.
- ✧ The sector in which the language, literacy and numeracy worker is located is the single most significant variable in determining professional development attitudes and issues. The sector determines entry requirements, reporting requirements, availability of funds for professional development and the distribution of those funds, and these impact on the kind of professional development required by language, literacy and numeracy workers and on how best to deliver it.
- ✧ Further development of expertise as a teacher is of great importance to the most experienced language, literacy and numeracy specialist teachers. Vocational trainers are interested in professional development to raise their awareness of language, literacy and numeracy issues, but they see language, literacy and numeracy support teachers as best equipped to provide assistance to students. Volunteer tutors have some concerns about whether they can meet future skill needs because of a lack of access to professional development opportunities and value the opportunity to interact with other tutors and teachers through informal networks.
- ✧ A number of innovative, relevant and comprehensive professional development programs are being offered at national, state and local provider levels. Better dissemination of information about good practice professional development initiatives may benefit a wider audience of language, literacy and numeracy workers, particularly casual and regional workers.
- ✧ Compliance with the reporting demands of external funding and regulatory bodies has increased the administrative workload of many specialist teachers and vocational trainers, to the point where they believe it is adversely affecting both the quality of their teaching and the time and energy available to engage in professional development activities.
- ✧ Employers currently offer significant amounts of professional development aimed at achieving compliance. This creates something of a mismatch between what is offered and what is desired by language, literacy and numeracy workers. All workers want additional professional development in teaching and managing the changing profile of learners and information technology skills.
- ✧ Language, literacy and numeracy workers have quite strongly held views on adult learning, and their own preferred means of accessing professional development. Face-to-face interaction with colleagues, a practical ‘hands-on’ approach, and peer learning are highly valued modes across all sectors of the workforce.

# Executive summary

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The aim of this study was to determine the variety of current and future professional development needs of the adult English language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) workforce and to explore methods for addressing such needs. To achieve this aim, the study draws information from three states, a range of employing organisations and three distinct sectors of this workforce: specialist providers of accredited language, literacy and numeracy tuition; vocational trainers who are incorporating language, literacy and numeracy into their delivery of training packages and volunteer language, literacy and numeracy tutors in community settings.

Over 200 language, literacy and numeracy workers gave generously of their time, sharing their experiences and their insights to make this study possible. The study reveals a diverse but confident, committed and collegiate language, literacy and numeracy workforce. The individuals that make up this diverse workforce engage in serious reflection on their practice, are able to clearly articulate their professional development needs and remain interested in strengthening their teaching delivery skills.

A largely qualitative methodology underpins this study, guided by specific research questions for the collection of data. Please refer to the methodology and design chapter for details regarding the methodology.

The study has produced findings and drawn conclusions which can be used to assist in professional development planning for the language, literacy and numeracy workforce at local, state and national levels. The research team believe these findings to be useful and productive, but do not claim that these findings will reflect the experience of every Australian language, literacy and numeracy worker. While cautious about overstating the general nature of these findings, significant issues and possible solutions have emerged from this dialogue with language, literacy and numeracy workers.

The sector in which the language, literacy and numeracy worker is located was found to be the single most significant variable in determining professional development attitudes and issues.

Language, literacy and numeracy specialist teachers, no matter how experienced, express a continuing hunger for professional exchange on how to better go about their language, literacy and numeracy teaching practice. Most vocational trainers come to the Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Adult and Community Education (ACE) sectors with a body of industry knowledge, and can return to that industry to seek professional renewal. Language, literacy and numeracy specialists have no such industry area, and so must turn to each other to deepen their knowledge of teaching practice and to seek such professional renewal.

The majority of the vocational trainers who participated in this research are not being offered professional development related to language, literacy and numeracy. The many other demands on their time are so pressing that attending language, literacy and numeracy professional development is not a high priority despite an interest in learning how to better assist their learners. The preferred approach suggested by these vocational trainers is to improve the lines of

communication between vocational trainers and language, literacy and numeracy specialists, so that these specialists may assist vocational learners with respect to their language, literacy and numeracy learning needs.

Volunteer tutors are clear that they do what they do because it is intrinsically rewarding, and are realistic about the extent to which their organisations can fund professional development. Although, in general, less experienced than participants from the other two sectors, volunteer tutors appear satisfied that their initial training has equipped them with the skills they need, and seek to augment this initial training through informal support structures.

Of course, not all findings are sector-specific. All three sectors feel confident that they have the skills and knowledge they need to function effectively in their current roles, with volunteers being somewhat more concerned about meeting future challenges than the other two sectors.

Language, literacy and numeracy specialists and volunteer tutors see improving their teaching practice as the area of most pressing current professional development need. To improve both their current and future practice, all sectors want to learn more about managing the changing profile of learners. Consequently, they expressed a pervading concern about the access to appropriate resources and learning materials to meet the needs of specific learner groups.

The findings of this study strongly support the view that the need to comply with regulatory, auditing and funding bodies associated with the rapid and extensive changes in the education and training landscape has greatly increased the administrative workload of teachers, trainers and managers (Waterhouse, Townsend & Virgona 2001; Chappell & Johnston 2003). Language, literacy and numeracy specialists in particular spoke of 'drowning in paperwork' engendered by Australian Government-funded language, literacy and numeracy programs and of the adverse impact that this administrative load is having on their teaching practice.

Research participants saw information and communication technology skill development as an important future need, especially in relation to the use of multimedia resources and to facilitate more efficient completion of teaching and non-teaching tasks. Program managers also saw this area as a high priority. The great majority of language, literacy and numeracy provision still occurs face to face (McGuirk 2001), and gaining access to the new teaching and learning technologies and developing the computer literacies to use them are issues requiring serious attention (Snyder, Jones & Lo Bianco 2005; Rumsey 2002; Leu 2003; Golding, Davies & Volkoff 2001). Some resistance to the uncritical acceptance of technology-based approaches to teaching was evident.

Strong views were expressed on adult learning best occurring through active participation, and all three sectors overwhelmingly favour professional development that is delivered face to face. There was a resounding preference for short, 'hands-on', practical training delivered by expert facilitators, coupled with opportunities for informal interaction and sharing with peers.

Employment status is resulting in inequitable access to professional development opportunities. Only 31.8% of the paid participants in this research were permanent employees. This study confirms the finding by other researchers (Dickie et al. 2004; Harris et al. 2001; McGuirk 2001) that permanent employees have much greater access to employer-funded professional development than casual, part-time and sessional workers. The finding that approximately 70% of the paid language, literacy and numeracy workforce is facing barriers to gaining professional development due to their employment status is of serious concern.

Geographical location also plays a role in limiting access to face-to-face professional development, with the barrier of distance compounding the frequently identified barriers of time and money in accessing professional development.



A distinction can be made between professional development related to teaching roles and professional development related to business or compliance needs (Rumsey 2002). Dickie et al. (2004) distinguish between professional development with the goal of workforce development and professional development as a means to improve the professional practice of an individual. Participants were aware that there needs to be balance and realism regarding professional development needs which primarily benefit individuals. However, there were complaints that employers and managers were too preoccupied with compliance and technology-related workforce development. In addition, they were undervaluing the importance of teachers developing their teaching skills, which research participants in our study clearly saw as crucial both now and in the future.

Study participants appreciate their access to the professional development available in their own and other organisations, but remain focused on specific demands of their varied and changing teaching contexts.

Good practice professional development models have emerged from this research. Perhaps the most salient feature of good practice models identified was that the professional development delivered met the identified and articulated needs of the participants. The message from the field to its managers and employers seems to be to listen to what professional development specialist language, literacy and numeracy teachers, vocational trainers and volunteer tutors actually want and need at the local level.

In a climate of diminishing resources, professional development programs need, more than ever, to be built around good practice principles, including incorporating learner-centred teaching practice, needs-based assessment, the use of work-based learning and systematic and serious evaluation of the impact of professional development activities.

The findings indicate that professional development ought to be specifically tailored to the quite discrete needs of the three different sectors of this workforce, that the inequitable access by part-time and casual staff and geographically remote workers to employer-funded professional development must be addressed and that a balance needs to be achieved between business or compliance needs and the improved professional practice of individuals.

An extended literature review and detailed descriptions of the design and findings of the data collection instruments used in this research project are available in the supporting document to this report at <<http://www.ncver.edu.au>>.

# Methodology and design

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## Research questions

Four broad research questions were formulated to guide the collection of data by the research team:

- ✧ What skills and knowledge do language, literacy and numeracy workers require to best meet the needs of their current and future learners?
- ✧ Do language, literacy and numeracy workers in different contexts require the same skills and knowledge as each other?
- ✧ What are the options for bridging any skills gaps for all language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) workers?
- ✧ Is there any existing professional development that can serve as a model for similar organisations?

## Introduction

A literature review was used to contextualise current language, literacy and numeracy delivery in Australia and to provide a framework for consideration of these research questions.

A significant amount of quantitative data was collected and analysed as part of the research process, but the research team believed that subjective data gained through interactive modes such as in-depth interviews and focus groups would yield rich and productive insights into the understandings of professional development held by study participants.

Research questions concerned the skills and knowledge teachers believe are required to enable them to best meet the needs of current and future learners; the skills and knowledge required by different sectors; the options for bridging any current or future skills gaps and existing good practice professional development models.

Information on professional development needs and offerings was sourced from a range of key providers of professional development to the language, literacy and numeracy workforce. Electronic surveys were completed by 170 language, literacy and numeracy workers. Semi-structured telephone interviews were held with 42 language, literacy and numeracy workers. Four cross-state sector-specific teleconferences involved a total of 17 participants. Program managers were also involved in all stages of the research to provide insights into correlations and mismatches between workers' and managers' views. Finally, a face-to-face cross-state and cross-sector focus group attended by 11 participants and the full research team was held in order to validate research findings.

# Data collection and analysis

## Determining the sample

Population statistics and consultations with key stakeholders on language, literacy and numeracy provision in various sectors, states and regions were used as the means of estimating the number of respondents required for the desired sample. Key contacts from all major providers of language, literacy and numeracy tuition were selected after consideration of their capacity to reach a particular number of respondents. A modified form of a 'snowballing method' (Minichiello 1995; Sarantakos 1998) was used to access respondents for the initial electronic survey, with key contacts being asked to disseminate the surveys to appropriate personnel. This method required the key contacts and the personnel to whom the surveys were distributed to self-select to participate in this study. The data therefore reflects the views of personnel who chose to participate. Most participants in the later phases of the research were drawn from respondents to the initial electronic survey who had indicated their willingness to be contacted for subsequent data collection.

Language, literacy and numeracy workers from New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia participated in all stages of data collection and validation. There was appropriate representation from capital cities and regional areas. In the electronic teacher survey approximately 60% of respondents were from capital cities, 20% from large regional centres and 20% from small regional centres.

Study participants also came from a variety of employing organisations. These were Technical and Further Education (TAFE), Adult and Community Education (ACE), the Australian Migrant English Service, community centres, not-for-profit organisations and private providers and representation from these different employing organisations was achieved throughout the research process.

## Issues and challenges in data collection

The data collected covers a significant sample, but is not statistically representative of the needs and views of all language, literacy and numeracy teachers and tutors. Such great diversity exists in the work roles and contexts of language, literacy and numeracy teachers and managers that to gain a representative sample across states and sectors would require a much larger sample of data than possible within the scope of this research project. Even with a larger sample, such an undertaking would remain fraught, as no mechanism currently exists to accurately quantify the language, literacy and numeracy teaching workforce in Australia (NCVER 2005; McGuirk 2001).

The original research proposal sought data from four states: New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia. Queensland was removed from subsequent stages of the study because of the low level of electronic survey returns, despite considerable effort to source further respondents from that state.

Adequate numbers of volunteers participated in the survey, but the geographical spread was not as wide as that of the other groups and the majority of volunteers were from New South Wales. This does not appear to have adversely affected the research, as the findings indicate that the originating state of language, literacy and numeracy workers is of less relevance than other variables.

Difficulties were also experienced in getting adequate numbers of survey returns from vocational trainers. Defining who these workers were and accessing an adequate sample from this sector posed challenges throughout the research process. The needs and understandings of language, literacy and numeracy specialist teachers now working in vocational contexts are quite different

from those of vocational trainers with no, or very limited, training in how to address language, literacy and numeracy issues in the course of delivering training packages. The professional development issues of Workplace English Language and Literacy trainers is the subject of a parallel National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) research project, *The professional development requirements for Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) trainers*, but these trainers, too, are largely specialist language, literacy and numeracy teachers operating in workplace contexts. This project's vocational respondents were a mix of these two groups, with more being specialist language, literacy and numeracy teachers operating in workplace contexts. The input received from the vocational trainers who did participate was detailed and very valuable, but numbers of participants who were from industry backgrounds and were addressing language, literacy and numeracy issues in the course of delivering training packages were low. This limits the generalisations that can be made from the findings for this sector.

## Data collection instruments

A series of data collection instruments were used in the following chronological order to gather quantitative and qualitative information. These were:

- ✧ information collected by email from key providers of professional development to the language, literacy and numeracy workforce
- ✧ electronic surveys completed by 170 language, literacy and numeracy workers
- ✧ semi-structured telephone interviews with 42 language, literacy and numeracy workers
- ✧ cross-state, sector-specific teleconferences with each of the three sectors of the language, literacy and numeracy workforce involving a total of 17 participants
- ✧ a face-to-face, cross-state and cross-sector focus group with 11 participants to validate the research findings and to identify any gaps in the research findings.

### *Information collected from key providers of professional development to the language, literacy and numeracy workforce*

Information on professional development, available through their organisations, was requested from a range of key providers of professional development to the language, literacy and numeracy workforce. The professional development providers who responded came from four states and serviced an extremely wide range of language, literacy and numeracy practitioners. These providers included the National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research, the Australian Council of Adult Literacy, the Australian Council of Teachers of English as a Second Language, the Victorian Adult Learning and Basic Education Council, the Queensland Council of Adult Literacy, the Queensland Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, the New South Wales Association of Teachers of English as a Second Language, the South Australian Teachers of English as a Second Language, Delivery Support Service Workplace Education TAFE SA, and Dare to Lead South Australia. The subjective responses gained from this exercise provide useful information for triangulation with the data collection instruments used in this study.

### *Electronic surveys*

Following discussion with key stakeholders in the research project, a target of 150 surveys was agreed upon. Two separate surveys were developed. One was for completion by program managers. Program managers were defined as head teachers, coordinators and any other job titles in which there was a line management responsibility for language, literacy and numeracy workers. The other survey was for completion by teachers, trainers and tutors. Surveys were trialled and Australian Government Statistical Clearinghouse approval was obtained before sending surveys

to stakeholder key contacts. Selected key contacts were asked to distribute the surveys to staff, or to supply contact details of a more appropriate officer to undertake the survey dissemination. Owing to the data collection method used the exact number of surveys distributed to individuals, and therefore the exact survey response rate, remains unknown. However, more than the target number of surveys was returned.

The teacher surveys elicited information on respondents' demographic profile, delivery issues, current and future professional development needs, barriers to accessing professional development and perceived strengths and weaknesses in teaching and non-teaching roles. The program manager survey questions covered demographic information, the current and future professional development needs of their staff, examples and modes of delivery of professional development activities undertaken by their staff members in the preceding year, and constraints to providing professional development.

Table 1 illustrates the breakdown of the surveys analysed.

**Table 1: Surveys analysed by state and sector**

State	Program managers	LLN specialist teachers	Vocational trainers	Volunteers	Total
NSW	13	40	4	33	90
Vic.	9	34	8	4	55
SA	5	9	5	2	21
Qld	1	3	0	0	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>170</b>

#### *Semi-structured telephone interviews*

Forty-two semi-structured telephone interviews of 20 minutes duration were conducted to obtain qualitative information expanding on the key issues emerging from the findings of the electronic surveys. Two separate sets of suggested questions were developed to prompt individual reflection on these issues. One set was for specialist teachers, vocational trainers and volunteer tutors and the other for program managers. Interviewees received the interview questions prior to the telephone interview. Researchers used a coding sheet for each interview.

The teacher interview covered professional development needs in current roles, perceived future changes in role and possible consequent skills gaps, constraints to meeting professional development needs, preferred means of gaining professional development, suggestions on how employers and policy-makers can best provide professional development in the future and examples of good practice professional development. The program managers' questions sought similar information on the staff they managed. Program managers were also asked whether their organisation collaborated with other providers to offer professional development to staff.

Thematic analysis was chosen for analysis of the qualitative data, as it is particularly effective in dialogic or interactive methodologies such as interviews and focus groups (Sarantakos 1998; Kellehear 1993).

The breakdown of telephone interviewees is indicated in table 2.

**Table 2: Semi-structured telephone interview participants by state and sector**

State	Program managers	LLN specialists	Volunteers	Vocational trainers	Total
NSW	3	13	5	0	21
Vic.	2	8	3	1	14
SA	1	4	1	1	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>42</b>

*Cross-state sector-specific teleconferences*

This phase of the research used interaction between groups of participants from the same sector but different geographical locations to explore the key sector-specific issues emerging from the previous phases of this research project. Teleconferences took place for each of the three sectors studied in this research. Because of the lower numbers of vocational trainers sourced in the preceding phases of the research, several new vocational trainers were invited to participate in an extra teleconference to strengthen the findings for this sector. Participants were sent copies of the questions before the teleconference. Several teleconference participants were unable to join the teleconference on the actual day and, instead, provided written responses to these questions.

Table 3 illustrates the breakdown of teleconference participants.

**Table 3: Teleconference participants by state and sector**

State	LLN specialists	Volunteers	Vocational trainers
NSW	2	2	6
Vic.	2	3	1
SA	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>

Teleconferences were kept to a maximum of 45 minutes and were recorded by the telephone company with participant permission. Questions differed slightly between groups. The thematic areas covered in the language, literacy and numeracy specialist teacher and vocational trainer teleconferences were: the degree to which participants' entry qualifications had prepared them for their roles and work; strategies to address the finding that reporting demands are affecting the nature of professional development required by teachers and on the time available to participate in professional development and the interrelationship between access to professional development and a sense of being valued by the employing organisation. The surveys and telephone interviews indicated that volunteer tutors were not affected by the reporting issue to the same degree as their paid colleagues. In the volunteer tutor teleconferences this question was therefore replaced by a more relevant issue: promoting interaction between volunteer tutors.

*Face-to-face focus group*

A cross-sectoral, cross-state, face-to-face focus group was the final data collection instrument in this research project. This focus group was used to validate the research findings and to identify any additional information to include in the research report. To this end, a summary of project findings and a set of questions for each sector to discuss were distributed prior to the meeting.

The breakdown of focus group participation is presented in table 4.

**Table 4: Face-to-face focus group participants by state and sector**

<b>State</b>	<b>LLN specialists</b>	<b>Volunteers</b>	<b>Vocational trainers</b>	<b>Total</b>
NSW	2	1	2	<b>5</b>
Vic.	1	2	2	<b>5</b>
SA	1	0	0	<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>

The project manager and the research team provided information about the project and a brief account of the findings derived from the previous data collection instruments. The group then split into three small sub-groups according to their sector, with one researcher joining each group. The groups discussed the questions as they related to their sector and reported back to the large group. One participant from each sector then briefly presented a good practice professional development model that may be relevant to other providers within the same sector or to other sectors. Participants from each sectoral sub-group agreed that the issues identified in the project findings reflect the professional development issues in their sector, and elaborated on some of the themes which have emerged in the findings.

# Literature review

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## Introduction

Key issues from a literature review undertaken to contextualise this study and to identify key professional development issues in the language, literacy and numeracy field are presented below. An extended literature review is available in the supporting document to this report at <<http://www.ncver.edu.au>>.

The changes to the education and training landscape over the last two decades have been intense and show no signs of abating. In fact, as Schofield and McDonald point out, the pace of change in the coming decade is likely to accelerate. They suggest that:

... the challenge of aligning skill outcomes to the changing world of work, new industry and labour market dynamics, and different social circumstances is now far greater than when Australia first embarked on the path of training reform. (Schofield & McDonald 2004, p.8)

There is widespread agreement that the professional capacity of the vocational education and training (VET) and community sector workforces should be continuously improved to cope with the increased responsibilities of knowledge workers in the new millennium (McKenna & Fitzpatrick 2004; Wilson & Corbett 2001; Harris et al. 2001; Kerka 2003; Trenerry 2002).

The VET national strategy, *Shaping our future: Australia's national strategy for vocational education and training (VET) 2004–2010*, explicitly acknowledges the growing significance of knowledge and the ability to manage new literacy demands, and includes specific reference to language, literacy and numeracy in two of the 12 sub-strategies in the plan (ANTA 2004).

A number of high level drivers, including the development of the national strategy and its supporting action plans, the high level review of training packages and the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) project on innovation in teaching and learning have promoted reflection on the professional development needs of adult educators over the last five years (Wilson 2003; Dickie et al. 2004).

## Australia's language, literacy and numeracy workforce

A number of studies, including the recent NCVER publication *Profiling the national vocational education and training workforce* (NCVER 2005), remark on the lack of reliable, centrally collected, quantitative data on the VET and ACE workforce. Accurate statistics on the language, literacy and numeracy workforce do not exist, but demand for language, literacy and numeracy courses remains high and indicates a sizeable workforce (ANTA 2003; McGuirk 2001; NCVER 2005; Harris et al. 2001; McKenna & Fitzpatrick 2004).

The most comprehensive recent snapshot of literacy and numeracy specialists in Australia is that provided in the TAFE New South Wales Access Division project, *Adult literacy and numeracy practices 2001: a national snapshot* (McGuirk 2001). This research covers workers from TAFE, ACE



and not-for-profit sectors. The sample of language, literacy and numeracy workers (n=642) reported on by their managers portrays a workforce that is largely casual or sessional (70%), female dominated (85% female), ageing (50% of the total workforce between 40 and 50 and with only 2% of language, literacy and numeracy educators under 30).

Demographic data on vocational trainers is provided by the human resources and teachers' surveys conducted by Harris et al. (2001). Of the 11 084 teachers and trainers reported on, 51.5% were male and 48.5% were female and more males than females held permanent positions. Only 40% of VET teachers/trainers were permanent staff. Seventy-five per cent of teachers were between 35 and 54, and only 13% under 30 (Harris et al. 2001, p.99).

In Australia in 2000 between 1.1 and 1.3 million people took part in ACE learning (NCVER 2001, cited in Harris et al. 2001, p.5). It seems that given the strength of its contribution to the adult language, literacy and numeracy field, community provision remains somewhat 'under-conceptualised, under-researched and under-theorised and possibly insufficiently appreciated in the current policy context' (Hannon et al. 2003, p.5).

What is known is that many thousands of volunteer tutors work in the adult literacy field through government and not-for-profit providers, such as TAFE, the New South Wales Adult Migrant English Service, The Smith Family and Mission Australia (McKenna & Fitzpatrick 2004).

## Impact of changes in the broader vocational education and training landscape

All knowledge workers face new and significant challenges due to the reform of the education and training sectors that has occurred in recent years (Dickie et al. 2004; Wilson 2003; Schofield & McDonald 2004).

Chappell and Johnston's thematic analysis of data from VET practitioners revealed five major themes in the 'talk' of these practitioners. These themes were talk of change, commercialisation, increased administrative work, challenges to educational identity and industry identity (2003, p.4).

The move towards a business and service orientation has resulted in something of an identity crisis for many practitioners and, in a sense, of ideological dissonance for the significant number of language, literacy and numeracy educators motivated by social justice agendas (Chappell & Johnston 2003; McGuirk 2001; Searle 1999; Sanguinetti, Waterhouse & Maunder 2004; Golding, Davies & Volkoff 2001).

The need for compliance with regulatory, auditing and funding bodies has greatly increased the administrative workload of teachers, trainers and managers (Waterhouse, Townsend & Virgona 2001; McGuirk 2001; Chappell & Johnston 2003).

All three sectors of language, literacy and numeracy workers have been affected by these changes. Vocational trainers have grappled with the complexities of competency-based training and delivery through training packages (Harris et al. 2001; Dickie et al. 2004; Chappell & Johnston 2003). Language, literacy and numeracy specialists in both VET and ACE have been affected by funding constraints and the tendering and reporting demands of attracting external funding, the casualisation of the workforce, the requirement for teachers to be qualified to deliver accredited training, and increased competition deriving from the proliferation of providers. There are further difficulties for ACE providers in the increased emphasis on delivery of accredited VET programs, when many ACE teachers are volunteers (Golding, Davies & Volkoff 2001; Searle 2001).

## The skill base of the language, literacy and numeracy workforce

Language, literacy and numeracy workers have followed varied pathways to enter the field, and there is ongoing debate as to what constitute appropriate entry qualifications and professional competence for both language, literacy and numeracy workers and the broader VET and ACE fields. Some writers argue for increasing the professionalism of the field by adopting or upholding minimum entry standards, while others advocate a more situational and needs-based approach to what constitutes professional competence (Dickie et al. 2004; McKenna & Fitzpatrick 2004; Foley & Thompson 2003; Victorian TAFE Association 2001; Shore & Zannettino 2002; McGuirk 2001; Giumelli 2001).

Volunteer tutors have, as a minimum entry standard, completed initial volunteer tutor training programs (Smith Family 2005).

Vocational trainers are most likely to enter the profession with qualifications relating to their vocational area and may only gain educational qualifications subsequent to their entry to the profession (Harris et al. 2001).

In McGuirk's study (2001) a large number of the language, literacy and numeracy teachers had postgraduate qualifications and a significant number had the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training. This would be expected as language, literacy and numeracy teachers are required to have a teaching qualification and postgraduate qualifications relating to language, literacy and numeracy to be employed by public providers such as the Adult Migrant English Service and TAFE.

Language, literacy and numeracy workers require many of the same skills and attributes as the broader education and training workforce. Skill areas listed in skills profiles for VET and ACE teachers include instruction and assessment skills, personal skills, student support skills, technology skills and management skills (Rumsey 2002; Harris et al. 2001; Corben & Thomson 2001; Lepani 1995).

The volunteer and ACE sectors appear to foreground the importance of personal attributes such as patience, understanding, and awareness of power dimensions (Smith Family 2005; Sanguinetti, Waterhouse & Maunders 2004).

The great majority of language, literacy and numeracy provision still occurs face to face (McGuirk 2001), and gaining access to the new teaching and learning technologies and developing the computer literacies to use them are issues requiring serious attention (Rumsey 2002; Leu 2003; Golding, Davies & Volkoff 2001). Snyder, Jones and Lo Bianco go further, arguing that literacy and information and communication technology can no longer be regarded as separate activities. Digital literacies, in their view, need to be completely integrated into adult literacy education. This would have significant professional development implications for adult literacy educators (Snyder, Jones & Lo Bianco 2005).

Language, literacy and numeracy workers in registered training organisations delivering the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Programme have also needed to become proficient in the use of detailed technical reporting tools like the National Reporting System (Perkins 2005).

## Professional development opportunities currently accessed by language, literacy and numeracy workers

Quantitative data and published qualitative data on the professional development currently being undertaken by language, literacy and numeracy educators remain scant, but the literature suggests that professional development has always been limited in the community sector and appears to be

declining in the VET sector (McKenna & Fitzpatrick 2004; Foley & Thomson 2003; Castleton & McDonald 2002; Wilson & Corbett 2001; Harris et al. 2001).

This is not to suggest that effective investments are not being made in professional development opportunities for language, literacy and numeracy educators throughout Australia. There have been a significant number of such projects with a particular language, literacy and numeracy focus and many more in which language, literacy and numeracy educators have joined with other educators from their workplaces and beyond to gain a range of skills. Examples of projects specific to language, literacy and numeracy educators are:

- ✧ an online project entitled 'Adult Literacy and Technology LearnScope', which was sponsored by Preston/Reservoir Adult and Community Education in 2004 to connect adult literacy teachers who wished to integrate technology into their teaching practice. The project description indicates that the aim was to use online communication to build a sense of community, enable people to share ideas, resources, opinions and other information.
- ✧ a Reframing the Future project conducted by the Adult Basic Education section of TAFE NSW South Western Sydney Institute which included training, support and mentoring for industry-based language, literacy and numeracy specialist teachers. The project aimed to ensure that a pool of competent workplace trainers existed within the Institute and to offer development opportunities to people willing to participate in workplace programs in the future.

A number of Reframing the Future projects have been specifically directed at upskilling vocational trainers to address the embedded language, literacy and numeracy demands of training packages. Two examples of such projects documented on the Reframing the Future website are:

- ✧ a project using action learning, facilitated mentoring and coaching and the establishment of a community of practice conducted at Southbank Institute of TAFE Queensland. In this project vocational trainers in two pilot areas developed their capacity to meet the requirements of the Australian Quality Training Framework standards pertaining to the integration of language, literacy and numeracy in training package delivery.
- ✧ a project by the RMIT University Post Compulsory Education and Training Research Centre which used work-based learning methods of facilitated action learning and mentoring with a group of vocational trainers to raise awareness of language, literacy and numeracy issues, create models for the integration of language, literacy and numeracy within VET courses and to produce a professional development resource that would be available online to all RMIT University staff.

Despite many good practice initiatives Harris et al. (2001) believe that professional development planning in recent years has not wholly been constructed around notions of VET teachers and trainers as key lifelong learners. Rather, decisions have been somewhat reactive and *ad hoc* and based on policy imperatives. The impact of external factors has meant that in too many cases professional development has been reduced to information downloading with a strong compliance focus (2001, pp.viii–ix).

There is evidence of increasing diversity in the way professional development needs are being addressed. In the last decade there has been a significant shift away from formal university sector language, literacy and numeracy undergraduate and postgraduate courses (McKenna & Fitzpatrick 2004; Foley & Thomson 2003; McGuirk 2001), and there has been a great increase in work-based and informal learning across all education and training sectors (Dickie et al. 2004; Sanguinetti, Waterhouse & Maunders 2004; Harris et al. 2001; Bates & Wiltshire 2001; McGuirk 2001). It is possible that, as Waterhouse, Townsend and Virgona write, 'we have greatly underestimated the significance and the power of informal experiential learning' (2001, p.5). Learning from peers through means such as team teaching, for example, is an important informal learning strategy. In the Western Australian Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills, designed

to provide an accredited framework for delivery of literacy and numeracy support to VET students, for example, there have been opportunities for both the vocational teachers and the literacy specialist teachers to develop their professional practice by collaborating closely with each other (Bates & Wiltshire 2001).

The quantity of professional development cannot be used as an indicator of effective professional development. The relevance and outcomes of professional development for individuals and organisations are crucial, particularly in an environment of diminishing resources (Kutner & Tibbetts 1997; Wilson 2003).

Rumsey (2002) distinguishes between professional development related to teaching roles and professional development related to business or compliance needs. Dickie et al. (2004) make a useful distinction between professional development as workforce development and professional development as a means to improve the professional practice of an individual. Employers may be more focused on workforce development and business or compliance needs, while practitioners may be more focused on improving their own professional practice. There needs to be balance and realism regarding the ability of employers to meet those professional development needs which primarily benefit individuals (Dickie et al. 2004; Victorian TAFE Association 2001; Harris et al. 2001; Kutner & Tibbetts 1997).

## Perceived key professional development needs of the language, literacy and numeracy teaching workforce

Dickie et al. argue that national investments which have been made in workforce development in Australia have been extremely effective and recommend that a national role is maintained. Demand for national funding has continued to outstrip available resources with, for example, 44.5% of applications to Reframing the Future in 2002 not being funded (2004, p.25).

In the TAFE SA teacher training project the 424 respondents were asked to comment on the relevance of the structured education and training opportunities they had attended over the past three years, excluding training leading to a formal qualification. The highest relevance was ascribed to activities updating knowledge of discipline area (80%) followed by industry liaison (73%) and updating teaching/training skills (68%), with an equal ranking given to upskilling in training packages (68%) (Bierbaum & Karthigesu 2003, p.7).

The key stakeholders in the research project conducted by Harris et al. (2001) identified compliance with external agendas as the most pressing current professional development need. However, when they were asked about future professional development needs they answered that the development of individual expertise as a teacher was a key priority. There is an inconsistency here. The resource pressures of the present, which are positioning compliance in the foreground of provider agendas, are unlikely to diminish, and the professional development offered in the present will lay the groundwork for meeting the challenges of the future.

## Barriers to accessing professional development

Access to professional development is strongly influenced by employment status, with more barriers being faced by the large numbers of casual, sessional and part-time staff (Dickie et al. 2004; Harris et al. 2001). This is of particular concern given that the majority of language, literacy and numeracy workers are not permanent employees.

Commonly identified barriers to meeting professional development needs are time, funding, and access due to distance (McGuirk 2001; Wilson, Townsend & Virgona 2001; Harris et al. 2001; Wilson & Corbett 2001).

## Existing good practice models to inform future planning and delivery of professional development

No single or prescriptive best practice model can be developed to meet the needs of this diverse workforce. However, the literature reveals principles of good practice that may function as components of good professional development models (Dickie et al. 2004; Kerka 2003; Harris et al. 2001; Henry, Mitchell & Young 2001; Kutner & Tibbetts 1997). These are work-based learning, learner-centred teaching practice, needs-based assessment, systematic and serious evaluation of the impact of professional development, achieving a balance between workforce development and enhanced professional practice and the collection and dissemination of good practice models.

# Findings

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## Introduction

The researchers do not claim that these findings reflect the experience of all language, literacy and numeracy workers, and remain mindful of making strong claims about the vocational trainer sector owing to the smaller sample captured in the study. However, the findings can be used to assist in professional development planning for the language, literacy and numeracy workforce. The validity of these findings is strengthened by the very good overall internal consistency between the findings from the successive data collection instruments and the clear themes that emerged from the data analysis. The findings reveal still passionate educators struggling to manage the relentless pace of change in the broader education and training landscape and the manifestations of this change in their everyday teaching practice.

The research findings suggest that there are commonalities and differences among the professional development issues faced by the three discrete sectors in the study, but that employment sector remains the most significant single variable in determining professional development understandings and needs. Participants from the three separate sectors identified many current and future skills needs in common. However, there were significant differences among the three sectors in relation to entry pathways to the field, attitudes to language, literacy and numeracy professional development and the way in which such professional development should be delivered. Table 5 summarises the influence of the employment sector as experienced by the participants in this research project. More detailed information follows in the discussion of findings below.

Even within the three sectors there are significantly different experiences. Language, literacy and numeracy specialist teachers in community organisations, for example, operate under very different conditions from their colleagues employed by major VET providers. Teachers in major capital cities have very different access to professional development opportunities to that of their counterparts in small regional or isolated areas, and employment status has professional development implications for all paid language, literacy and numeracy workers.

Encouragingly, all three sectors feel confident that they have the skills and knowledge they need to function effectively in their current roles, with volunteer tutors being somewhat more concerned about meeting future challenges than the other two sectors. Despite this high level of confidence in their competence, the overwhelming majority of language, literacy and numeracy workers in this study remain interested in participating in future professional development activities which meet their identified needs.

**Table 5: Commonalities and differences in professional development issues across sectors**

	<b>LLN specialist teachers</b>	<b>Vocational trainers</b>	<b>Volunteer tutors</b>
<i>Entry pathways</i>	Teaching qualifications and postgraduate qualifications in English Language, Literacy and Numeracy	Industry qualifications and teaching qualifications	Minimum of initial volunteer training program
<i>Attitudes to professional development</i>	Keen to attend professional development which will develop teaching practice  Limited interest in professional development focusing on administrative and workplace systems issues	Interested in awareness-raising, but many competing priorities and language, literacy and numeracy professional development not top priority	Want to improve teaching skills to better assist students, but are volunteer tutors not paid professionals
<i>Responsibility for professional development</i>	Shared	Shared	Shared, but realistic about extent to which volunteer organisations can fund professional development
<i>Barriers to professional development</i>	Time due to other work duties, especially reporting  Funding constraints  Relationship between employment status and access to professional development	Time due to competing work priorities  Funding constraints  Relationship between employment status and access to professional development	Time due to paid work and other life commitments  Funding constraints
<i>Preferred professional development modes</i>	Short hands-on practical sessions  Limited interest in gaining further formal qualifications	Short hands-on practical sessions  Improved lines of communication with language, literacy and numeracy specialist teachers	Informal support structures, such as opportunities for networking and information sharing with other volunteers and language, literacy and numeracy teachers
<i>Current and future skill gaps</i>	Improving teaching practice  Dealing with needs of specific learner groups and changing learner profile  Accessing and developing appropriate learning materials  Information and communication technology skill development  Consistent and reliable assessment practice  Skills to comply with increasing reporting requirements	Improving teaching practice  Dealing with needs of specific learner groups and changing learner profile  Accessing and developing appropriate learning materials  Information and communication technology skill development  Consistent and reliable assessment practice  Implementing training packages	Improving teaching practice  Dealing with needs of individual learners and specific learner groups  Accessing and developing appropriate learning materials  Information and communication technology skill development

## Becoming a language, literacy and numeracy worker

### Pathways to becoming a language, literacy and numeracy worker

Language, literacy and numeracy workers follow varied pathways to enter the field. Volunteer tutors have almost all attended an initial volunteer tutor training program as a minimum entry standard. The other qualifications held by volunteers vary widely. Most language, literacy and numeracy specialist teachers have teaching degrees and/or discipline-specific postgraduate qualifications in Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages or Adult Basic Education and such qualifications are required to obtain employment with providers delivering accredited training. Most vocational trainers who participated in this study had industry and/or teaching

qualifications, and several also held language-, literacy- and numeracy-specific qualifications. This, however, does not appear to be typical of vocational trainers in general and appears to say more about the kinds of vocational trainers who were motivated to participate in this research project than the field in general. Dickie et al. (2004) in their major report on strengthening the capacity of Australian VET professionals found that one in three vocational practitioners in TAFE, but only one in ten outside TAFE, held qualifications specific to education and training. Vocational trainer participants in the study stated that very few of their vocational colleagues had done any formal training in the area of language, literacy and numeracy.

## Teacher skill development

The significant shift away from formal university sector language, literacy and numeracy undergraduate and postgraduate courses in the last decade was the subject of discussion by study participants. Only three out of 142 respondents regarded formal qualifications through the university sector as the best means of gaining professional development.

Many of the language, literacy and numeracy specialist teachers taking part in this study had extensive experience and already held discipline-specific university level qualifications. This, and the fact that participants in the study expressed the view that career prospects for new entrants to the language, literacy and numeracy specialist field are currently not strong, may have had an impact on demand for university courses.

Experienced language, literacy and numeracy specialist teachers and program managers in the study expressed strong views on the decline in quality and standards of both undergraduate and postgraduate university programs preparing adult language, literacy and numeracy workers for entry into the field. Participants were united in their view that an appropriate entry qualification for language, literacy and numeracy workers must contain a substantial number of properly supervised practicums. There was also agreement that practicums in university courses had been reduced in quantity and quality. The view was that the focus in university sector courses was highly theoretical to the exclusion of the practical skills required to teach a class. Program managers spoke of university-trained specialist language, literacy and numeracy teachers entering the field without ever having seen a specific curriculum, having prepared a lesson plan or having heard of the commonly used language, literacy and numeracy rating scales and tools.

Some explained this decline in quality as largely due to the decreased funding of the university sector. However, some very experienced respondents did not see this lack of practical application in university programs as such a recent phenomenon:

I don't remember learning anything useful at all. It [the teacher training program] was very impractical and pretty theoretical really, and the supervised practicals that we had were supervised by people who were called 'cooperating teachers', which was a bit of a misnomer really, who often didn't know what they were doing either. So, when I actually started teaching part-time in TAFE I had absolutely no idea what to do. (70)

This did not translate into an uncritical acceptance of the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training as an appropriate alternative to university sector courses. There was, in fact, a sense of almost indignation at the view that the Certificate IV could properly do justice to the complex theory and practice underpinning adult language, literacy and numeracy teaching. It was suggested that policy-makers and employers should:

... place more emphasis on formal training so that teachers are not 'dumbed down'. There seems to be an acceptance that anyone can teach adult literacy and all you need is a Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training. (101)



# Attitudes to professional development

## A sense of being valued

Language, literacy and numeracy specialist teachers and vocational trainers see an interrelationship between access to professional development and a sense of being valued by the employing organisation.

Volunteer tutors were less concerned about this interrelationship saying that their sense of value comes from the rewards of interaction with their learners and peers. Volunteer tutors were clear that they do what they do because it is intrinsically rewarding. Although generally less experienced than participants from the other two sectors, most volunteer tutors were satisfied that their initial training had equipped them with the skills they needed, realistic about the amount of professional development their organisations can provide to them and keen to augment this initial training and develop their competence through informal support structures.

## An ageing language, literacy and numeracy specialist workforce

More than half of the language, literacy and numeracy specialist teachers in this study have been in the field for over ten years, and a significant number of the TAFE and Adult Migrant English Service workforces, in particular, are nearing retirement age. While there was still strong interest in attending professional development seen as relevant to their specific teaching contexts, a number of research participants did draw a connection between their time of career and the types of professional development activity they now saw as relevant. They expressed concern about the gap in knowledge and expertise that would occur with this coming generational change and recommended a cyclic approach to professional development to address the differing needs of experienced teachers and those of new teachers.

## High expectations being placed on vocational trainers

A challenge of the integration of literacy within vocational skills training in the Australian training model is that specialist adult literacy teaching skills and vocational training skills are required by the whole VET workforce (McKenna & Fitzpatrick 2004). However, the majority of the vocational trainers who participated in this research are not being offered professional development related to language, literacy and numeracy. The many other demands on their time are so pressing that such professional development is not a high priority, despite an interest in learning how to better assist their learners.

The clear message from the vocational trainers participating in this study was that vocational trainers, in general, cannot become experts in the language, literacy and numeracy area. They recommended awareness-raising professional development on language, literacy and numeracy issues, preferably at the time of entry to the workforce.

The vocational trainers argued that language, literacy and numeracy support is best integrated in the delivery of vocational training through a team-teaching approach between vocational trainers and the language, literacy and numeracy specialists who had themselves undergone awareness-raising in the particular industry areas in which they were to provide support.

In the telephone interviews and focus groups there was recurring discussion of the valuable informal professional development opportunities provided to both the vocational trainers and language, literacy and numeracy specialist teachers involved in team teaching. Through discussions with the specialist teacher the vocational teacher gained valuable insights into how to identify and address language, literacy and numeracy issues in their teaching materials and

delivery. By working in the vocational context alongside the content expert the specialist teacher deepened her or his understanding of the actual and specific language, literacy and numeracy demands of the vocational competencies being delivered or assessed.

Vocational trainers, then, saw improving the lines of communication with language, literacy and numeracy specialists and providing adequate funding for specialist support to be the best means of ensuring quality language, literacy and numeracy support to their students.

## Responsibility for professional development

The question of who is responsible for the professional development of practitioners is the subject of considerable discussion in the literature reviewed (Dickie et al. 2004; Wilson 2003; Kutner & Tibbetts 1997; Harris et al. 2001; Victorian TAFE Association 2001).

Most program managers representing major providers felt that their organisation offered adequate professional development opportunities for their staff. Almost 40% of language, literacy and numeracy specialist teachers, 50% of vocational trainers and 44% of volunteer tutors who participated in the electronic surveys felt that their professional development needs were not being adequately addressed. However, the discussion in the interview and focus group stages of the research suggest that this apparent mismatch between managers' and practitioners' perceptions may not be as serious as the survey results alone suggest. In the study a tension was revealed between the high priority placed on professional development to improve teaching practice by practitioners and the need for program managers to also offer substantial amounts of professional development aimed at improving business performance or strengthening compliance with external agency demands. The mismatch may then relate to perceptions of the appropriate balance between improving professional practice and achieving workforce development.

A further factor may be the employment status of the respondents who saw the professional development offered by their organisation as inadequate. A high number of part-time and casual teachers and trainers participated in this study, and one of the findings of this study has been that part-time and casual staff experience more barriers to accessing professional development.

Two-thirds of the participants nominated their organisation or employer as primarily responsible for addressing their professional development needs. The other third felt that the individual needed to take an active role. However, overall there was agreement that both employers and the individual should take some part in the responsibility for professional development, with comments like 'the employer is responsible for some parts that are a compulsory requirement of the job and extras become the responsibility of the individual, especially when they are personal goals' (67) and 'the employer should support, the manager should encourage, the self should take the initiative' (16). The volunteer tutors generally expressed the view that professional development offered by employers was a good incentive for volunteers to continue to offer their time and expertise.

## Participation in professional development beyond employing organisations

The information received by the research team from key national and state providers of professional development to the language, literacy and numeracy workforce on the main professional development area to be addressed in their organisation's next scheduled professional development activity offers an indication of the diverse range of professional development activities available. Topics included:

- ✧ theory of adult numeracy; teaching pronunciation
- ✧ a national forum on 'Culture, content and language teaching'
- ✧ an introduction to the National Reporting System

- ✧ an overview of the language, literacy and numeracy Unit of Competency in the new Certificate IV in Training and Assessment
- ✧ information and communications technology and its application to language, literacy and numeracy teaching and learning
- ✧ current research into multiliteracies, including technological literacy
- ✧ well-being in culturally and linguistically diverse classes
- ✧ a state conference covering a range of practical and theoretical issues
- ✧ language development needs of Indigenous learners learning English as a second language
- ✧ the social, educational and language learning needs of refugees.

While the data gathered in all phases of the project suggest that employing organisations are the prime source of professional development for the language, literacy and numeracy workforce, the majority of research participants had, at some time in their careers, accessed professional development outside their employing organisations. The two main external sources of professional development are, first, regional or state-wide organisations such as the Adult Literacy Resource and Information Service, the Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council, the NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council, state-based Associations of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, and the TAFE NSW Access and General Education Curriculum Centre and, second, universities close to where the participants live. One- or two-day conferences offering a selection of sessions, or workshops addressing a particular teaching issue are the types of professional development most frequently cited. Where professional development is provided by a university, participants refer to short courses—for example, summer schools running for several days. To a lesser extent, professional development is also sought from national initiatives such as conferences run by the Australian Council for Adult Literacy and the National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research, and participation in Reframing the Future LearnScope projects.

## Barriers to accessing professional development

### Funding and time

Funding and time were reported by language, literacy and numeracy workers and program managers as the main constraints in access to professional development. The theme of lack of time was usually, but not always, linked directly to availability of funding. As one teacher put it, ‘heavy reporting demands take up more and more of the time that once was available for things like professional development’ (60). In some instances the time factor was a personal reluctance to spend extra time away from family and other commitments, and, for others, it was the amount of time spent travelling to where professional development is offered. For volunteers with other work commitments, the time at which the professional development activities were scheduled determined their availability to participate.

### Employment status

Only 31.8% of the teacher and trainer participants in this research were permanent employees. This study confirms the finding by other researchers, such as Dickie et al. (2004) and Harris et al. (2001), that permanent employees have much greater access to employer-funded professional development than casual, part-time and sessional workers. The major themes relating to this finding were issues surrounding teacher release and funding for teacher replacement. Responses such as ‘There are no replacement hours available for teachers to attend PD [professional development] if they are in class at the time’ (85), ‘Not much is offered in the faculty because of

severe cutbacks' (83), 'Getting release from classes is difficult because the budget is tight' (76) and 'I don't get paid because I'm a casual' (19) were typical of the kinds of constraints expressed. In line with findings in other studies, casual and part-time teachers in this study were more affected by funding cutbacks than their permanent and full-time colleagues, experiencing lack of access to professional development in paid time (Harris et al. 2001; Dickie et al. 2004).

## Distance

Geographical location plays a significant role in limiting access to face-to-face professional development, with the barrier of distance compounding the barriers of time and money. Most research participants from non-metropolitan locations commented on the barrier of distance. Despite such barriers to face-to-face professional development, interest in online professional development was relatively low.

## Preferred modes of professional development

Strong views were expressed on adult learning best occurring through active participation, and all three sectors overwhelmingly favoured professional development that is delivered face to face. Only six respondents out of the 142 teachers, trainers and tutors chose online delivery as their preferred mode of professional development delivery. Five of these six who chose online delivery were volunteer tutors.

There was an overwhelming preference for short and 'hands-on' practical training delivered by expert facilitators coupled with opportunities for informal interaction and information sharing with peers.

Many of the interviewees commented that active participation is only possible in small 'hands-on' groups. They valued face-to-face learning, interactivity, practical and visual components to the sessions, the 'opportunity to bounce ideas off others' (5), and the chance to 'get input from other teachers in the group' (86). However, it was clear from the responses that teachers preferred 'professionals' to lead these workshops, making comments such as 'a good presenter really sparks you up' (52) and 'I like quality content coming straight from the horse's mouth' (18).

Volunteer tutors wanted to have more opportunities to meet and learn from their peers and others in the language, literacy and numeracy field. Such meetings were seen as constituting a cost-efficient form of professional development that provided an informal opportunity for sharing experiences and strategies for resolving difficulties.

## Current and future skills gaps

### Information from key professional development providers

Language, literacy and numeracy professional development providers predict the main professional development needs and issues for their target audience in the next five years will be:

- ✧ upskilling of language, literacy and numeracy teaching practitioners in meeting the needs of disparate groups of learners, with emphasis on learners from equity target groups
- ✧ keeping teachers abreast of national and state language, literacy and numeracy policy and curriculum in a constantly changing education and training context
- ✧ developing skills in flexible delivery to enable offering a variety of delivery modes and to assist in the development of multiliteracies in language, literacy and numeracy learners

- ✧ covering aspects of teaching practice
- ✧ updating knowledge of theories of language and learning
- ✧ training for leadership and management roles
- ✧ taking a cyclic approach to professional development to cater for changes in personnel that will continue to occur due to the retirement of an ageing workforce and the high numbers of part-time and casual employees.

## Information from teachers, trainers and tutors

All three sectors are more interested in education-based professional development than compliance-based professional development, and see improving their teaching practice as the overarching area of current and future professional development need. They also see their current and future professional development needs as overlapping to a great degree. Current and future professional development needs are discussed together below under the key thematic areas identified by participants. However, as the collection of data progressed it became clear that 'teaching practice' means different things in the three sectors under consideration and so what constitutes professional development in regards to language, literacy and numeracy teaching and the best ways to meet current and future needs is not the same for each sector.

### *Dealing with the needs of specific groups of learners*

Dealing with specific groups of learners and the changing learner profile emerged as an urgent current and future professional development need for all sectors. Teachers felt the need for strategies to assist learners with disadvantages far beyond a lack of language, literacy and numeracy. Particular student groups mentioned included youth at risk, students with undisclosed psychiatric and neurological disability, African and other students with a background of limited literacy in their first language coupled with experience of torture and trauma.

One participant said that the problems of some of these new and severely disadvantaged groups of students are only being managed by organisations 'riding on the back of experienced teachers who are managing to cope with a very difficult situation'(1). It was suggested that organisations offer staff training on critical incident procedures. There is no evidence that risk management training is widely available to language, literacy and numeracy workers. Such training appears to be only routinely available to teachers working in juvenile justice or correctional contexts.

Many interviewees felt the need for specific professional development for working with youth at risk. As one of the interviewees put it:

The educational needs of young people at risk are very closely bound up with other needs, such as emotional, physical, mental health and financial, and I want professional development that can explain how all their other issues impact on engagement with education and what strategies others are using to deal with these in an integrated way. (23)

### *Resources and resource development*

All three sectors saw learning material or curriculum development as their most important current and future non-teaching-related professional development need. Appropriate teaching and learning resources and skills in resource development was a recurring theme throughout the research. The issue was often expressed in the context of teaching emerging groups with specific needs, and the inter-relationship of these two themes was the most significant response in regard to future professional development needs.

This finding is somewhat difficult to unpack as there are some embedded issues requiring consideration. Many excellent language, literacy and numeracy teaching and learning resources

have been produced at national, state and local levels, and efforts have been made to make practitioners aware of these resources as they are produced, but it would appear that more work is still needed to disseminate such information. Concern about access to resources may be, in part, an expression of lack of time to source and adapt such resources as much as a need for professional development in how to go about such customisation.

### *Information and communications technology*

Information and communications technology skill development was perceived as a key future need by all sectors. The skills that were identified as necessary included expertise in: using mainstream software packages, facilitating computer assisted language and literacy learning, online teaching, using the computer to create resource materials quickly, assisting older teachers to keep up with young computer literate students, knowing how to contextualise computer skills into the classroom, and computer skills in relation to administration documents.

Despite this list of skill gaps, motivation to attend specific information and communications technology professional development programs was not particularly high. The great majority of language, literacy and numeracy provision still occur face to face, and there was some resistance to the uncritical acceptance of technology-based approaches to teaching and learning. There was also some anxiety about this need to gain skills in the new teaching and learning technologies, particularly from older members of the workforce, and some comments indicate significant skills gaps in the information and communications technology delivery area:

This is a big area of concern because of emerging technologies with not many teachers in the age group who grew up knowing about computers and the new technology. Most at the college don't know much more about them than how to turn them on. (85)

Other practitioners highlighted the infrastructure requirements for information and communications technology delivery to be a realistic option:

The main need is in resources and funding for these resources. There is never enough money to buy the appropriate technology to support the needs of students who know a lot about computers. Staff have skills but not the technology to teach the skills. (38)

### *Business compliance*

The escalating amount of time spent on administrative tasks, such as reporting on outcomes to funding bodies, was seen as time taken away from attending professional development, from developing classroom teaching resources and from meeting students' learning needs. Interviewees said that organisations were requiring systematic reporting on outcomes because of audits and accountability in the large number of externally funded programs. The feeling was that teachers need new skills to meet the need for compliance with such regulatory, auditing and funding bodies and that this increased need for compliance has greatly increased the administrative workload of teachers. Participants felt they were 'drowning in paperwork'. Both VET and ACE practitioners were weighed down by this burden of administration.

### *Assessing and reporting student outcomes*

Achieving consistent and reliable assessment practices was an important teaching-related future professional development need for language, literacy and numeracy specialists and vocational trainers.

A key aspect of the serious concern about the growing administrative burden placed on teachers was the issue of reporting on students' language, literacy and numeracy outcomes, especially in the areas of assessment, validation and moderation. Language, literacy and numeracy specialist teachers are particularly overwhelmed by the reporting demands of externally funded language,

literacy and numeracy programs and felt the need for professional development on the expertise required to assess and report validly, reliably and efficiently.

For teachers in community centres, the problems of compliance are further compounded by infrastructure and resourcing issues:

We [community centre staff] are still expected to do all the work. We are still expected to do all the assessments. However, we only get paid for the hours we teach so we don't get any extra money for all the assessment we are doing ... and with the amount that the work is increasing, it is becoming more and more difficult and more and more cumbersome to get it all done, and especially when a lot of community houses really don't have the space to have a room where teachers can actually put their work and sort it and go back to it. Very little space to do it, very little time to do it and no actual pay to do it. (23)

### *Teaching numeracy*

Lack of confidence in meeting the numeracy learning outcomes of programs was expressed in the survey responses and again in the telephone interviews. Numeracy classroom strategies were identified as a professional development need, particularly for teachers who are isolated. These teachers were keen to share ideas with other teachers. Teaching numeracy was also identified as an area of professional development need by English language teachers who are now required to explicitly include numeracy in their teaching programs. There were also problems for teachers with maths degrees employed to specifically teach numeracy, but who felt that their training did not equip them with the methodology to assist students with very low numeracy skills.

### *Implementing training packages*

Training package implementation was a key professional development need for those language, literacy and numeracy teachers who teach across vocational areas, in tutorial support and workplace English language and literacy programs. Linked to training package implementation was the need for incorporating employability skills into the curriculum. There were no identified resources showing how to achieve this, in spite of the discussion surrounding the Employability Skills Framework. Some interviewees misunderstood the term 'employability skills' and took it to mean teaching job-seeking skills to students, indicating a knowledge gap in this area.

## Information from program managers

Several major themes emerged from the interactions with program managers. The two main areas of professional development reported as being currently offered to staff are professional development in assessment, validation and moderation, closely followed by professional development to address the needs of specific learner groups. Other areas where substantial professional development was reported as being offered are classroom methodology (including teaching numeracy) and up-skilling teachers in teaching-related information and communications technology skills.

Program managers also perceived the present and future major professional development needs of their staff to be remarkably similar to their current needs, indicating that they too saw little change in the roles of their staff in the near future. Program managers identified as major current and future needs assessment, assessment validation and moderation, addressing the needs of specific learner groups and developing information and communications technology skills. This correlates reasonably well with both the professional development reported as being offered and with the views expressed by teachers, trainers and tutors.

However, from the teacher and trainer perspective, employing organisations are focusing too much on compliance-related professional development and not enough on the teaching practice that they desire.

# Examples of good practice professional development

## Good practice models as a professional development strategy

The collection and dissemination of good practice models is important, as it is a strategy in itself that may be used to inform the professional development planning at local and higher levels (Dickie et al. 2004). Most participants could readily identify a professional development activity they had attended that worked well for them and that they would recommend as good practice. Most examples correlated with responses about their preferred means of gaining professional development with descriptions such as:

A good session on the International Second Language Proficiency Ratings system because it was hands-on. The initiator of the rating system was the presenter. There was lots of question and answer time. It was great because the person with the expert knowledge was on the spot and everyone could also get a lot of information from other people working in the field with the same issues. (86)

Adult Numeracy Teaching that was of 80 hours duration. The content was not intrinsically fun but the presenter made it fun. There was a good group dynamic that was allowed to develop over a substantial time with a good presenter. (5)

Features of good practice in professional development that teachers, trainers and tutors nominated in their descriptions of good practice initiatives were reiterated by program managers. Such features included good facilitation, content that relates to teaching practice and the opportunity for networking with other practitioners. One program manager gave the example of a one-day regional workshop that started with a plenary session, then split into parallel sessions for smaller groups and finished with a regrouping of participants. As the interviewee said 'it satisfies the needs of the continuum of teachers, practical teaching ideas from peers, opportunities to network and share good practice'. (25)

Three quite different examples nominated as good practice by participants are described briefly below. These three have been chosen, as they exemplify not only the features of good practice identified by study participants, but also principles of good practice professional development identified in other research into the professional development needs of adult educators. These include a coordinated and planned program, work-based learning, systematically determined needs, mentoring, learner-centred teaching practice and shared responsibility for learning between the organisation and staff (Kutner & Tibbetts 1997; Kerka 2003; Dickie et al. 2004; Harris et al. 2001; Henry, Mitchell & Young 2001).

### *Back to basics using a 'bottom-up' approach*

This professional development model originated in an assessment and validation project linked to the employing organisation's need to meet the standards for registered training organisations at external audit. With the gradual dismantling of support for teachers over the years through the repeated restructures of the employing organisation, it was found that many English language teachers were teaching to their own repertoire, with scant reference to any curriculum documents or any accepted frame of reference relating to language development. A dedicated staff member with extensive discipline expertise was assigned the role of providing a systematic program of mentoring for all English language teaching staff, with a particular focus on new or inexperienced part-time staff. In a number of sessions over a few months the mentor worked with groups of between five and ten teachers to develop their understanding of:

- ✧ the structure of their employing organisation and the teachers' place in that structure
- ✧ the curriculum that teachers were expected to use



- ✧ how to use related resources such as the teacher's guide and the assessment guide for that curriculum, so that their classroom practice was pitched appropriately to the learners.

The mentor and teachers also worked together to develop units of work that clearly reflected the language learning outcomes of the curriculum they were using.

The program has been very successful, with the mentor earning the trust of teachers through her non-judgemental approach and eagerness to share her expertise. To date, she has worked with 75% of the English language teaching staff in her organisation (n=152) and the program has been positively evaluated by all stakeholders.

#### *Action learning to integrate language, literacy and numeracy into vocational programs*

This model has been developed in response to the need for registered training organisations to address language, literacy and numeracy in the delivery of training package qualifications. It aimed to translate theory into practice, using work-based action learning as the vehicle. The project involved 18 participants from a mix of 'hard' and 'soft' vocational teaching areas within the same employing organisation. These teaching areas included nursing, plumbing, meat processing, horticulture, aged care, visual arts, children's services, bricklaying, fire fighting, retail and carpentry.

One of the benefits of this diversity was the development of genuine collegiality among staff members who, irrespective of the presumed status of their vocational area, discovered a common level in their shared learning experience. Under the guidance of a language, literacy and numeracy specialist mentor, the participants worked through the five stages of the project. These were:

- ✧ identifying language, literacy and numeracy requirements of a unit or a course
- ✧ developing and applying initial language, literacy and numeracy assessment tools for new entrants
- ✧ developing teaching strategies for responding to language, literacy and numeracy requirements of the unit or course
- ✧ developing models and processes for student referral to specialist language, literacy and numeracy support
- ✧ integrating language, literacy and numeracy assessment into assessment of the vocational competence.

At the beginning of the project there were varying individual expectations of the relevance and usefulness of such a project. But the action-learning methodology and practical hands-on approach coupled with skilled facilitation resulted in improvements in individual teaching practice and also in improved lines of communication between vocational and language, literacy and numeracy specialists across the organisation.

#### *A nationally coordinated approach to professional development*

The Adult Migrant English Program professional development website, *Professional Connections*, provides a good example of a coordinated national approach to professional development. As part of their contractual obligations, providers who successfully tender for Adult Migrant English Program provision must undertake to provide relevant professional development for their personnel. The *Professional Connections* website provides evidence of a comprehensive range of professional development opportunities available to program staff. The site includes a calendar of a variety of professional development events, workshops, conferences, national forums and discussion lists. The site also contains useful resources, such as a bank of assessment tasks, links to professional reading, an e-bulletin facility and much more. The courses promoted on the site are offered in different states and are on diverse topics such as 'Culture, content and language teaching' and 'Meeting youth settlement needs in the AMEP' (Adult Migrant English Program Research Centre 2005).

# Conclusions

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The importance of appropriate training and professional development for the education and training workforce is difficult to overestimate. This study has highlighted the issues affecting language, literacy and numeracy workers as lifelong learners. From the findings, the research team has drawn conclusions and ends this report with a summary of these conclusions. In addition, a brief discussion is provided of the possible implications of these conclusions for policy-makers and those planning and delivering professional development to the language, literacy and numeracy workforce.

## Key conclusions from research findings

The main conclusions to be drawn from this research are that:

- ✧ the three sectors of the language, literacy and numeracy workforce have discrete professional needs and priorities
- ✧ part-time, casual and sessional language, literacy and numeracy workers do not have equitable access to employer-funded professional development activities, and redressing this inequity is critical to upskilling the language, literacy and numeracy workforce
- ✧ the escalating administrative and reporting demands faced by educators are having an adverse impact on the uptake of professional development
- ✧ innovative and effective professional development opportunities are being offered to language, literacy and numeracy workers, but supply is outstripped by demand
- ✧ employing organisations should aim to achieve a balance between professional development designed to fulfil the organisation's business or compliance needs and the educationally focused professional development so valued by educators.

## Implications

### More data on the language, literacy and numeracy workforce is needed

Skills gaps at the workforce level are difficult to identify and address without more reliable and comprehensive national data on the workforce. Strategies need to be developed for more accurate profiling of the language, literacy and numeracy workforce.

### Many good practice professional development opportunities and models exist and need to be more widely disseminated

Participants in the study provided many examples of worthwhile and motivating professional development activities in which they had been involved. These ranged from national initiatives to informal local community centre get togethers. The sharing of good practice professional

development strategies can stimulate other organisations to replicate successful programs. Ways need to be found to better share good practice in professional development within and between organisations.

## Sharing good teaching practice is a simple and effective way of addressing gaps in skills and knowledge

The sharing of good practice in teaching and learning practice is an effective way to address skill gaps. Many of the participants expressed great interest in finding out about techniques and resources that other practitioners were using to address specific pedagogical issues such as teaching numeracy. Many of the participants in the study commented on how much they had enjoyed the opportunity to interact with each other and how infrequent such opportunities were for some of them. Mechanisms which allow this kind of dialogue across organisations, states and sectors would be well received. Critical to the success of such a strategy would be ensuring that the dialogue could occur between workers in similar contexts or levels within organisations.

## It is time to make the most out of informal learning

The most well regarded professional development activities uncovered in this study were those that addressed a specific teaching-related need. These were often informal and work-based learning experiences. Informal learning has a crucial role to play in an environment in which diminishing resources are available to fund formal professional development programs. Embedding opportunities for informal learning into the everyday practice of language, literacy and numeracy workers requires planning and the commitment of resources but may prove to be strategic and cost-effective in meeting locally identified needs. Mentoring and action learning emerged as two key techniques for implementing informal learning within organisations.

## More dialogue is needed with the adult education teacher trainers in the university sector

University sector adult language, literacy and numeracy training programs may not be adequately addressing the practical skills required to teach language, literacy and numeracy. Mechanisms for greater dialogue between the future employing organisations and teacher trainers could facilitate a better match between the course content and employer needs.

## The professional development needs of the different workforce sectors require different strategies

The range of levels of knowledge about the theory and practice of language, literacy and numeracy teaching and learning held across the sectors posed challenges in finding a common language with which participants could discuss their practice. The study participants themselves made it very clear to the research team that the differences between sectors were significant.

Professional development planning for language, literacy and numeracy specialist teachers needs to recognise and build on this sector's expertise and theoretical background in their specific disciplines of adult English language teaching and adult literacy and numeracy teaching. Participants from this sector remain sensitive to the notion that the stand-alone and tutorial support language, literacy and numeracy tuition they provide may be perceived as of less relevance to the national training agenda than the delivery of vocationally specific qualifications.

Vocational trainers are very aware of the pressures placed on them by too simplistic interpretations of the delivery of integrated language, literacy and numeracy training. A separate study to determine whether vocational trainers delivering training packages are, in fact,

incorporating language, literacy and numeracy into their delivery and, if so, how they may be productive. Vocational trainers may be working with language, literacy and numeracy specialist teachers to assist their students; however, it appears unlikely that most vocational trainers would themselves be in a position to confidently incorporate language, literacy and numeracy into their delivery of training packages, having had little exposure to the principles of language, literacy and numeracy teaching and learning.

An integrated model of language, literacy and numeracy delivery should not require vocational trainers to become experts in language, literacy and numeracy issues. Vocational trainers do, however, need to be made aware of the language, literacy and numeracy demands of their teaching and learning materials and assessment practice. Given the national requirement to address language, literacy and numeracy in training packages, it is important that further measures are implemented to address the knowledge gaps faced by vocational trainers.

One practical way to achieve such awareness of language, literacy and numeracy issues would be for employing organisations, as vocational trainer participants in this study suggested, to strongly encourage, or even require, trainers to complete the elective TAALLN401A 'Address language, literacy and numeracy issues within learning and assessment practice' in the TAA40104 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. Another strategy would be to explore ways of improving and revitalising communication between vocational trainers and language, literacy and numeracy specialists within and between organisations.

Volunteer tutors have great commitment to their students but have chosen to be volunteer tutors in the language, literacy and numeracy workforce—not paid employees. External factors such as work and family commitments make scheduling professional development sessions for volunteer tutors difficult, but the volunteers in our study highly valued interaction with other language, literacy and numeracy workers through informal networks and support structures.

## Business compliance and reporting requirements are becoming unmanageable

A pervading sense of quiet desperation about the administrative demands of teaching and training has emerged as a theme in this study and in much recent research on the language, literacy and numeracy workforce and the broader VET and ACE fields (Waterhouse, Townsend & Virgona 2001; McGuirk 2001; Chappell & Johnston 2003; Harris et al. 2001; Dickie et al. 2004).

The participants in this study repeatedly and unambiguously reported that their professional practice as educators was being adversely affected by these administrative demands. Language, literacy and numeracy specialist teachers faced particular demands in relation to reporting on student outcomes in externally funded language, literacy and numeracy programs, but administrative demands also beleaguered vocational trainers and affected volunteers involved in the delivery of accredited training.

This situation has implications for addressing the professional development needs of the language, literacy and numeracy workforce in two ways. First, significant numbers of practitioners are choosing not to attend professional development because any time available is needed to comply with these administrative demands. Second, as Harris et al. (2001, pp.viii–ix) point out, in too many cases due to the impact of external factors, professional development has been reduced to information downloading with a strong compliance focus. No doubt, much of this compliance-related professional development has the aim of alleviating the burden placed on educational staff by such duties, but the clear message from this study is that although this kind of professional development may be necessary, it is not the kind of professional development educators desire.

## Approximately two-thirds of language, literacy and numeracy workers are not receiving equitable access to professional development

Two groups of language, literacy and numeracy workers emerged in the research as not receiving equitable access to professional development. These were part-time, casual and sessional workers, and geographically remote workers. The inequities of both groups need action, but the situation for part-time and casual workers is unsustainable. A two-tiered system exists in which permanent teachers attend professional development within work time, but casual staff have so much difficulty getting release to attend that all too often they either participate in their own time or do not participate at all.

Educators in these employment categories, along with volunteer tutors, constitute the great majority of this workforce and this situation is not likely to change. These workers need to have paid access to professional development. The biggest obstacle is financial. However, having someone replace the teacher or trainer so that they can attend face-to-face professional development is not always possible for logistical or other reasons, even where funding can be sourced. Informal approaches to professional development that do not require scheduled sessions may be useful. A cyclic approach to professional development planning to accommodate the turnover in casual staff and generational change was also seen as beneficial by study participants.

## In closing

The discourses of personalised learning and lifelong learning apply to educators when they seek to develop their professional expertise, just as they apply to their students. Language, literacy and numeracy workers must be regarded as among ‘the foremost lifelong learners with key responsibilities to train other lifelong learners in pursuit of vocational goals’ (Harris et al. 2001, p.20).

From the perspective of the project’s participating teachers, trainers and tutors, their practical needs at the local level should inform professional development planning at higher levels. As one of the research participants put it, when it comes to professional development organisations need to be prepared to ‘build the fire from the bottom rather than the top’ (60).

The three different sectors of the language, literacy and numeracy workforce considered in this study are three discrete groups with varying professional development needs. However, there was a common theme expressed across sectors and employing organisations. This was that ‘teaching is about doing things with people’ (70), and so language, literacy and numeracy educators need to be supported in learning not only what they have to do but also how to best go about doing it. The results of this research offer some insights and suggestions on how such support can be provided.

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