

Up to speed

In a competitive business environment you need to be sure that your business is reaching its full potential. While there is no magic fix for unlocking business potential, did you know that building the language, literacy and numeracy skills of employees can have a significant impact on business operations?



Australian Government
Department of Education,
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Checklist

This booklet provides a starting point for tackling language, literacy and numeracy issues in the workplace and building your workforce capability.

Think about:

- the language, literacy and numeracy skills that are needed in your workplace
- the tools and support that your employees have for completing language, literacy and numeracy tasks
- the training needs of your workforce
- how you could change workplace practices to provide language, literacy and numeracy support for employees

Find out about your local training providers

Conduct a training needs analysis

Develop a training plan

Identify sources of funding

Implement a training program

Evaluate your success

Benefits

Improving communication processes and addressing language, literacy and numeracy issues in the workplace can:

- *reduce wastage and miscalculations*
- *avoid inconsistent or ineffective reporting*
- *improve customer complaints handling*
- *overcome a workplace culture that is resistant to change or to the development of new skills*
- *improve adherence to standard procedures or quality processes*

This can bring significant business benefits including:

- *productivity growth*
- *better communication, teamwork and cooperation*
- *increased employee morale and willingness to develop new skills*
- *improved customer relations*
- *the successful introduction of quality processes*
- *a safer workplace*
- *better compliance with workplace legislation*

Food for thought

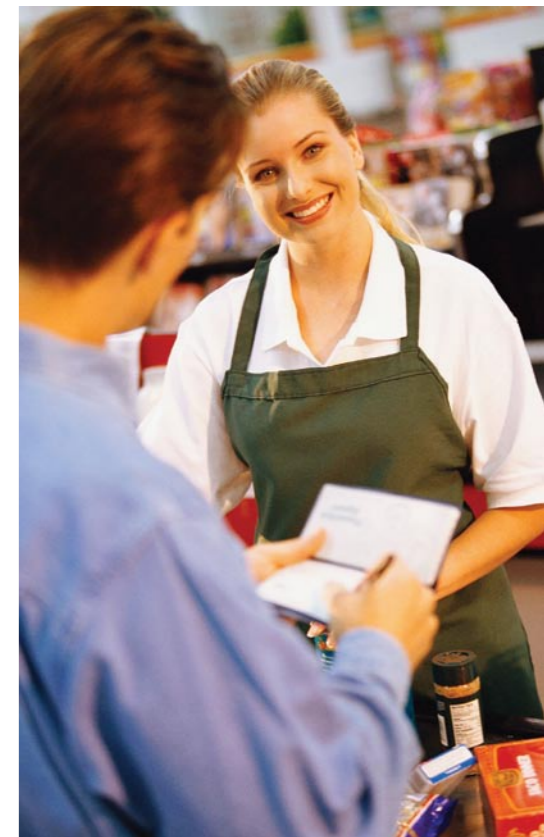
When Joseph Romeo, one of three brothers directing the family-run Romeo Retail Group (RRG), analysed his business' growth potential in 2002 he knew that he needed a solid training program for his largely casual staff. RRG needed training that would bring employees up to speed with changing workplace demands such as OHS legislation and compliance. Without dedicated, well-trained staff the company would be unlikely to expand beyond its three IGA Foodland franchises.

'We needed staff to grow with us,' says Joseph. But he knew that many of RRG's casual workers would struggle with the demands of training due to their limited education or non-English speaking backgrounds. He engaged the services of the Workplace Education unit of TAFE SA South to help him plan a program that would work, both for the business and its employees.

The training program they developed was tailored to retail operations. It integrated language, literacy and numeracy skill development and support into the training and resulted in workers with no previous qualifications successfully completing four units of competency at Certificates II and III levels. Training costs were subsidised by the Australian government's Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) programme.

Five years down the track RRG has seven IGA Foodland franchises – a business growth outcome that Joseph puts down to the success of the WELL training programme.

'It wouldn't have happened without the training. It's not just that we got the ball rolling as far as training is concerned or that we now comply with all safety laws and are probably even leaders in training and compliance. The employees who took part in the training have gone from seeing working for us as a casual, short-term option to being committed to RRG because we provide a career pathway,' says Joseph.



KEY MESSAGE:

Nationally recognised training can be a key driver to commercial growth and give workers increased skills and confidence as well as a career pathway.

MORE INFORMATION:

02 8243 1200

www.serviceskills.com.au



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Getting started

Every workplace has unique language, literacy and numeracy requirements.

The skills needed to work effectively in your business will not be identical to those required in any other and so all employees need help to build the skills necessary to fit in.

To tackle language, literacy and numeracy issues in your business you need to think about the specific skills needed in the workplace, your communication practices and the characteristics of your workforce. All businesses can take some simple steps to identify areas for improvement and develop solutions.

Planning for success

Management at PMP Print's Queensland site realised that improving teamwork and communication was vital for the introduction of the company's manufacturing excellence plan. Under the plan work teams had to take greater responsibility for meeting key performance indicators and achieving production targets. But taking on that responsibility would be difficult for some of the site's valued workers, many of whom had stayed with PMP for more than twenty years after completing printing apprenticeships.

And so PMP Print (Queensland) began to develop strategies to build communication skills in a way that would suit their workforce and their business needs. The Australian government's Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) programme was used to introduce an on-site trainer to the workplace. Initially the WELL programme raised awareness of communication issues and increased workforce receptiveness to skill development.

Now in its second year, the WELL programme is being refined to address specific skill needs – particularly for working in teams. The process of identifying skill needs and planning the program has included input from managers, supervisors, floor workers and the WELL trainer.

'Now we want the number one printer on each press to take on more of a leadership role,' says HR Manager, Peter Robinson, 'and so we are focussing on the way they communicate with team members, supervisors and management.'

The training program includes a flexible mixture of informal coaching, on-the-job training and classroom based workshops that can be varied to suit the individual needs of work teams and their leaders. Opportunities for training are maximised by having the WELL trainer on-site regularly. One-on-one coaching is available and group training can be offered when presses are offline.

During the planning process PMP has also given thought to how the program's success will be measured. Improvements are expected in productivity and in the way team leaders relate to management. In addition Peter Robinson expects that the site will benefit from better problem solving and innovation. 'Improving communication at all levels of the organisation will mean that workers have the confidence and ability to voice their ideas and solutions,' he says.

KEY MESSAGE:

Analysing the particular needs of your business and the characteristics of your workforce is important for creating a skill development program that delivers the desired result.

MORE INFORMATION:

03 9815 7000
www.ibsa.org.au



Things you can do

Think about the language, literacy and numeracy skills that are needed in your workplace. *Your business probably uses in-house jargon, customised reporting procedures, established spiels for communicating with customers, templates for preparing quotes or calculating materials. What language, literacy or numeracy skills do employees need to use to complete their tasks? You might think about:*

- Do employees need to work in teams?
- Do written reports have to be completed?
- Do measurements, costings, timelines, material requirements have to be calculated?
- Do employees need to interact with customers?

Think about the tools and support that your employees have for completing language, literacy and numeracy tasks. *Ask employees for feedback on workplace communication practices and documentation – consider instructions, safety notices, operating procedures, meeting papers, reporting templates:*

- Are documents written in plain English?
- Are some documents consistently ignored or misinterpreted in the workplace?
- Do employees have suggestions for improving workplace documents?
- Do employees seem to have difficulty following some instructions or messages?
- Do employees have mechanisms for providing feedback to supervisors/management?
- Are the reporting processes logical and easy to follow?
- Do employees work together well with their co-workers?

Confidence trick

Andrew was a dedicated correctional officer with five years experience when his employer introduced a computer based reporting system to the work environment. Basic training in computer applications was provided and all staff were expected to provide evidence of their competence in report writing. The new reporting system was portrayed as an important means for improving records management in the corrections system in response to public criticism from the judiciary and media.

Several months after the introduction of the new system Andrew's work attitude had changed markedly. He had been disciplined and recommended for conflict management training by his manager. He was surly and withdrawn, his uniform was scruffy and he was taking an unusual amount of sick leave. The Workforce Development Advisor concluded that Andrew was not happy with the move to computerised reporting and arranged for additional computer training.

When Andrew avoided the training altogether the WDA conducted further background checks and realised that Andrew had only very basic reading and writing skills. In the past he had gone to great lengths to conceal his poor literacy and now the demands of the new reporting system had seriously unbalanced his confidence and self-esteem.

An attempt to help Andrew with access to a workplace literacy class at the local TAFE College also backfired. He was embarrassed, angry and depressed and believed that his career was ruined.

Finally the WDA took the focus off Andrew's literacy 'problem' by concentrating simply on what he needed to do to be assessed as competent in preparing reports. Andrew could see that he could already do many parts of the competency. He could also see that his skills gaps were small, manageable tasks.

Gradually Andrew built his reporting skills with support and encouragement from a mentor, a trusted fellow officer. He completed his assessment for the required unit of competency, regained his confidence in his ability to do his job and became a valued mentor for new recruits.

KEY MESSAGE:

Language, literacy and numeracy skills can be central to people's identity and sense of self worth – sensitivity is needed when dealing with language, literacy and numeracy issues in the workplace.

MORE INFORMATION:

08 8410 3455
www.gsaisc.net.au





Things you can do

Think about the training needs of your workforce.

Consider the characteristics of your workforce and their training and development preferences. You might like to use a third person (consultant, training provider, counsellor, union representative) to ask employees for their views on training and development needs. Employee responses to these questions will not necessarily give you a training solution, but they will highlight some of the obstacles to implementing a training program.

Employees who need language, literacy or numeracy support may be reluctant to participate in formal training. They are also unlikely to want to be singled out for special treatment. Training programs that allow all employees to build their communication or language, literacy and numeracy skills are often better accepted than targeted solutions.

- What prior education and training experiences have employees had?
- Are there vocational skills or qualifications (occupational health and safety, quality process management, use of new tools/systems) that employees could develop in tandem with language, literacy and numeracy skills?
- Are there skills that employees would like to develop?
- Do employees have preferred learning methods – from co-workers, self-study, in classroom, on-the-job, in small groups?

Paving the way

Rick left school after Year 9 and spent fifteen years as an unskilled labourer in various jobs before joining Boral Asphalt. He enjoyed his job, was very experienced and was a good team worker.

However, when supplier registration requirements meant that all Asphalt employees involved in bituminous work had to undertake training and gain national qualifications, Rick was very confused. It would be his first experience of formal learning since he left school. 'I hated school and always failed maths,' he says 'I know what to do in my job and didn't think I needed a formal qualification.'

But the company was being driven by the customer's requirements and was adamant that all employees needed the qualification so a program was implemented to support employees through the process. The training program, Paving the Way, was developed by the Australian Asphalt Pavement Association (AAPA) with funding from the Australian Government's Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Programme.

Through the training program Rick and his co-workers were introduced to the workplace communication and maths skills associated with their day-to-day work as asphalt pavement operators. Seeing how the new skills related directly to his job helped Rick to gain confidence in his ability to learn. After completing Paving the Way Rick continued with the nationally accredited course and eventually gained the Certificate II in Bituminous Surfacing along with fifteen of his peers.

Rick's first ever formal qualification had also helped Boral Asphalt to gain their suppliers registration with key stakeholders for bituminous work. Because of the success of that first group of employees who enrolled and completed the Bituminous Surfacing Certificate III, Boral has committed to enrolling another 27 employees in the course.

A spokesperson from Boral Asphalt reported 'the program has demonstrated to our employees that the work they have previously done, and continue to do, is a very skilled and valuable job. This is a trade qualification that provides current employees and school leavers options outside of the traditional trades.'

KEY MESSAGE:
To be successful workplace training programs need to take account of workers' previous educational experiences, learning styles and support needs.

MORE INFORMATION:
02 9299 3014
www.riisc.com.au



Think about how you could change workplace practices to provide language, literacy and numeracy support for employees.

Your business will function more effectively if workplace practices are designed to take account of your employees' language, literacy and numeracy skills.

- Can you simplify reporting processes or provide simpler reporting templates?
- Can you structure work teams to encourage skills transfer through mentoring arrangements?
- Can you make supervisors more aware of good communication practices?
- Can you provide all employees with simple language, literacy and numeracy tools relevant to their job, e.g. work jargon dictionary, worked examples of common calculations, recordings of best practice customer service interactions.
- Can you include the development of language, literacy and numeracy skills in existing workplace training or induction programs?
- Can you provide formal or informal training to build particular language, literacy or numeracy skills in a workplace context?

Find out about your local training providers.

Training providers will vary in their approaches to working with business. You need to find one that will be responsive to your particular needs. This will involve asking questions about how they will work with you.

- Do training providers have expertise or experience in your industry area?
- Are training providers willing to customise training for your employees' language, literacy and numeracy needs and your business needs?
- Can training be provided at locations and times to suit your business and employees?
- Is specialist language, literacy and numeracy support available?

The Capsicum King

Sen Thach knows that English language skills are important for doing business in Australia. He also knows the value of a good local training provider.

After fleeing war torn Cambodia and Vietnam, Sen arrived in Australia with a basic grasp of English picked up from US soldiers. Since then he has steadily built his English and business skills and now, with his wife By, runs a capsicum farm on the South Australian coast.

Using the services of the Virginia Horticultural Centre (VHC), a local, community based training organisation, Sen has completed courses in chemical handling and quality assurance. The VHC facilitates community development by packaging training for the local horticultural industry and the particular skills needs of the local population.

'We really do believe in community capacity building' says Peter de Lacy, Operations Manager, Production and Training at VHC. 'We want to give growers the best opportunity to achieve for themselves, while working at their pace and in a familiar and flexible environment.'

VHC is introducing a range of courses that enable farmers to go beyond compliance-driven training to learn higher order skills and knowledge that will inform their work practices, like soil testing and keeping parasites at bay.

Recently Sen was involved with VHC in a niche marketing group which gave participants an overview of the way Australians operate their businesses. He learnt not only marketing knowledge and the language of business and commerce, but gained the confidence to undertake additional self-study and go on to create 'The Capsicum King' as a brand name for his produce.

KEY MESSAGE:
Businesses need access to local training providers for programs that specifically target local needs for skills and business development.

MORE INFORMATION:
02 6163 7200
www.agrifoodskills.net.au



Getting help

Things you can do in partnership with a training provider

Conduct a training needs analysis – a training needs analysis will build on information you have already gathered about your employees and workplace requirements to determine the types of skills, including language, literacy and numeracy skills, that are needed in your business.

Develop a training plan – a training plan will look at the skill needs, including language, literacy and numeracy, identified in the training needs analysis in relation to your business plan to consider the type of training solution that would work for your business.

Building capability

Joaquim Ribeiro had worked in the construction industry since he migrated to Australia from Portugal in 1989. While he was working as a labourer fetching scaffolding for a team of qualified scaffolders he was referred to a Registered Training Organisation (RTO).

In Victoria, only workers who hold a certificate of competency issued by the State Authority can carry out the erection, inspection and dismantling of scaffolding – under the law, workers without the certificate must be supervised. But the certificate's formal written, knowledge and practical assessments are conducted in English – which was proving to be a significant hurdle for Joaquim.

He had attempted a basic scaffolding course at night school to prepare for the certificate but had dropped out. Like many workers in the industry, Joaquim was trapped. Without the certificate his employment was insecure. And, without adequate training and experience, his understanding of OH&S could have placed him and his fellow workers at risk. To help Joaquim build his skills and achieve the competency required in the workplace, Joaquim's supervisor referred him to an RTO where an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher worked with him to conduct a learning needs assessment and develop a training plan.

After undertaking an emergency first aid course and a basic OH&S course with an ESL teacher Joaquim was ready to tackle the scaffolding requirements. With a trainee permit and log book he completed extensive supervised training on the job. According to Joaquim his work now had 'more purpose', and after 12 months he was confident enough to enroll in a scaffolding course. Working with an industry trainer and an ESL teacher he completed the course and topped the class in the Basic Scaffolding assessment. He later went on to successfully complete an Intermediate Scaffolding course.

KEY MESSAGE:

A planned and supported approach to training can address the particular development needs of individual workers and can significantly increase their workforce capability.

MORE INFORMATION:

02 6253 0002

www.cpsisc.com.au



Identify sources of funding

You will need a training budget, but there are also sources of government funding for workplace training. For example, the WELL Programme assists businesses with funding for workplace training that integrates the development of language, literacy and numeracy skills.

Implement a training program

The training program for your business should be specifically tailored for your needs and those of your employees, it will take account of findings from the training needs analysis and training plan.

Evaluate your success

You should regularly compare your actual outcomes to the business goals or objectives that were included in your training plan. Your evaluation findings can help you to make ongoing improvements to your training program.

Learning to grow

Startronics Pty Ltd has faced a number of significant hurdles to ensure its continued growth and success. The contract manufacturer of electronic devices needed to implement mandatory training for all staff in a range of areas including quality assurance, occupational health and safety, and new technological manufacturing systems and processes.

The company's expansion and increasing complexity were also creating new higher level positions that required skills in logistics management, purchasing, warehousing, quality assurance and production management. Startronics saw an opportunity to build career pathways to these positions to harness the industry knowledge and experience of existing staff.

Jenny has been with Startronics for 10 years, starting out on the assembly line as an unskilled process worker. Now she prepares customer quotations having completed a Certificate III in Engineering Production Services and Certificate IV in Business (Frontline Management) as part of Startronics Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) programme.

The WELL programme has enabled Startronics to successfully implement comprehensive training programs, including intensive language training and job-specific training, for all staff. According to a Startronics senior manager, 'a very pleasing aspect of the programme has been that a number of staff have been able to progress into higher level, more specialised work areas, beyond that originally envisioned.'

Many of the staff in the finance, logistics management, quality assurance, customer relations and production departments started with the company on the shopfloor. Startronics is now reaping the benefit of greater employee loyalty, reduced staff turnover and a more flexible workforce as employees develop broader skill sets.

KEY MESSAGE:

Building the language, literacy and numeracy skills of employees can enable their career progression – increasing staff loyalty, reducing turnover and retaining valuable industry knowledge and experience.

MORE INFORMATION:

02 9955 5500

www.mskills.com.au





WELL Programme

The Australian Government's Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) programme provides funding to help employers run training that is tailor-made for their workplace.

Businesses that have used WELL training have reported:

- improved health and safety
- an increase in productivity and efficiency
- the successful introduction of quality processes and systems
- more effective communication

State and Territory WELL Co-ordinators

ACT & NSW 02 9298 7281
 Northern Territory 08 8936 5162
 Queensland 07 3223 1032
 South Australia 08 8306 8816
 Tasmania 03 6222 9663
 Victoria 03 9920 4689
 Western Australia 08 9464 4110
 National WELL Hotline: 02 6240 7333
www.dest.gov.au/ty/well/

LiteracyNet – information about adult literacy and links to a range of additional programme, professional development, resource and research sites
www.literacynet.dest.gov.au

The Reading Writing Hotline – national adult literacy and numeracy referral service
 Phone 1300 6555 06
www.literacyline.edu.au

FAQs on language, literacy and numeracy are answered at
www.takingthelead.com.au

The power of language

Working with electricity can be a matter of life or death. Excellent maths, literacy and language skills are required for electrical workers to stay safe. This is especially true in the electricity supply industry where powerline workers are responsible for the installation, service, maintenance, diagnosis and repair of overhead powerlines, underground cables and substations. ETSA Utilities, South Australia's electricity distributor, has been proactive in ensuring that powerline workers have the language, literacy and numeracy skills they need.

ETSA is one of South Australia's largest organisations, directly employing more than 1,300 people across the State. With business increasing and many experienced lineworkers retiring, demand is high for skilled workers. In recent years ETSA has had to conduct an international recruitment campaign for powerline workers.

'About a year ago we started with a trial intake of lineworkers from the Philippines,' says Steve McDonnell, ETSA's Training Services Co-ordinator. 'The biggest hurdle we've had to overcome is with communications. It's important that they can communicate with the Control Room, and explain what they're seeing, or what issue they've encountered.'

To ensure the new workers could communicate effectively with the Control Room using handheld radios, ETSA enrolled them in a TAFE workplace language course. The course introduced recruits to the Australian colloquialisms and language they would encounter in the workplace, helping them to overcome the language and cultural barriers of a foreign environment. 'We've found the level of skill and professionalism of the recruits is exemplary, and with the additional training at TAFE, they are fitting in well with our existing workforce,' says Steve McDonnell.

KEY MESSAGE:

Effective communication is vital for safety in many industries. A shared understanding of workplace language – including jargon and colloquialism – is necessary for workers to communicate effectively.

MORE INFORMATION:
 02 6241 2155
www.ee-oz.com.au



Dinner is served

The shift towards community based care for people with disabilities has dramatically increased the skills required of support workers. In the hospital and institution environment Registered Nurses were present for most of the health related activities of daily living. Now, in community based care, support workers have to take responsibility for new tasks, such as the administration of nutrition and medication via a gastrostomy tube.

People with intellectual disabilities, stroke, acquired brain injury and cerebral palsy often have difficulty in co-ordinating muscles for swallowing. This condition increases the risk of breathing food and fluid into the lungs, which is potentially life threatening. The use of a gastrostomy tube ensures that nutrition and fluid are delivered into the stomach, greatly reducing health risks.

Learning to perform this procedure safely and competently is a challenge for many support workers, especially for those with limited language, literacy and numeracy skills. To help support workers develop their skills in gastrostomy feeding, Disability Enterprises is developing a training resource that simplifies the process.

The resource, which has been funded under the Australian Government's Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Programme, includes an interactive, self-directed CD ROM, workbooks and a DVD that models the procedure of Gastrostomy feeding. In the design of the resource consideration has been given to the needs of learners with limited language, literacy and numeracy skills.

Debra Brown, Disability Enterprises, Assistant Manager Accommodation and Family Support says, 'this new resource will be invaluable and will promote safe practice and positive outcomes for people requiring complex health care. In addition the resource will be linked with competencies from the Community Services Training Package and so will provide support workers with a learning pathway that is directly relevant to their workplace.'

KEY MESSAGE:

Learning workplace tasks and using documentation can require greater language, literacy and numeracy skills than the task itself. Employers need to ensure that training materials provide appropriate support for learners.

MORE INFORMATION:
 02 9263 3589
www.cshisc.com.au



Moving forward

The Transport and Logistics Industry is experiencing skill shortages not seen in Australia since the 1960's. Shortages are caused by a combination of factors including the ageing of the workforce and barriers to the recruitment of young people. To build the skills of potential workforce entrants and create pathways into the industry, the Transport & Logistics Industry Skills Council has developed a new course that combines general education with industry knowledge and skills.

The new course means that people undertaking language, literacy and numeracy studies through adult education can also develop workplace knowledge and skills that will make them attractive workforce recruits. Many of the employability skills that are required to work successfully in the transport industry, such as accurately completing documents, time management and working in teams, contain aspects of language, literacy and numeracy that new entrants might find challenging. By learning these skills in an industry context participants enter the workforce with job ready skills and an appreciation for training in the workplace.

Content for the course has come from the Certificate I in Transport and Distribution and covers topics such as: occupational health and safety, workplace communication and calculations, customer service, working with others, security procedures and forklift operations. Information on drug and alcohol testing, industrial relations and worksite visits are also part of the course.

Feedback from employers during the trial phase was enthusiastic about the course's potential for skilling future recruits. 'Trainees will be able to enter a traineeship/apprenticeship in a more work-ready state.'

KEY MESSAGE:

Developing language, literacy and numeracy skills in an industry context enhances learners' skills and creates employment and further training opportunities.

MORE INFORMATION:
 03 9320 4242
www.tlisc.com.au





Australian Government
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Agri-Food Industry Skills Council
02 6163 7200
www.agrifoodskills.net.au



Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council
02 9263 3589
www.cshisc.com.au



Construction and Property Services Industry Skills Council
02 6253 0002
www.cpsisc.com.au



ElectroComms and Energy Utilities Industry Skills Council Ltd (EE-Oz Training Standards)
02 6241 2155
www.ee-oz.com.au



Government and Community Safety Industry Skills Council
08 8410 3455
www.gsaisc.net.au



Innovation and Business Industry Skills Council (Innovation and Business Skills Australia)
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Resources and Infrastructure Industry Skills Council
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Service Industries Skills Council (Service Skills Australia)
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www.serviceskills.com.au



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