

Improving LLN skills for the VET workforce

Final Report

Background

In its March 2010 report, *Australia's Future Workforce*, Skills Australia proposed that the Level 4 unit concerning LLN (TAELLN401A *Address adult language, literacy and numeracy skills*) should be incorporated in the TAE40110 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment as a core rather than elective unit.

At that time, IBSA had already concluded an extensive consultation process (during 2009) to revise the previous Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA40104) and had determined on that basis to incorporate the unit as an elective. In addition, IBSA judged that simply to incorporate the unit without any other related action would not achieve the desired outcome: to improve the LLN skills of the VET workforce. There would be resistance to such incorporation, especially as it was not proposed during the consultations and there was a lack of capacity in RTOs to guarantee effective training outcomes.

Consequently IBSA sought funds from DEEWR to undertake a scoping study to determine an effective and efficient means of upgrading the skills of the workforce in this area.

The project was not intended to be a definitive commentary on the total possible number of approaches to skills development in this area¹. Rather, it focussed on the tools IBSA has under its remit – namely, national Training Packages and the units, possible Skill Sets and qualifications within them. Nevertheless, the project also identified that units and qualifications are not the only solution to the issue and need to be considered alongside a number of additional policy drivers that would support greater LLN skills development within the VET workforce.

Project methodology

To capture the broadest range of views on language, literacy and numeracy within the VET training and assessment field the project had a staged methodology designed to pick up on the views of LLN specialists, experienced VET practitioners (with higher education or Diploma qualifications) and those trainers with a Certificate IV in TAA qualification.

Part 1. Discussion Paper

A Discussion Paper was distributed in July 2010 to relevant national stakeholders, including holders of the Diploma of TAA, and made available for review and feedback on the IBSA website.

¹ IBSA acknowledges that while the units and qualifications in the TAA04 and TAE10 Training Packages form part of the picture, they have to be taken into consideration against the total number of offerings available within and across sectors including Higher Education postgraduate qualifications and State based VET qualifications.

The Discussion Paper received 30 responses². The majority of responses were from RTOs or organisations with a specific interest in the delivery of LLN qualifications or in the provision of LLN learner support services. A smaller number of responses were received from those VET practitioners who did not have a direct professional interest or existing qualifications in LLN but who nevertheless had strong opinions about the implications of mandating the Certificate IV LLN unit.

Not surprisingly, the views on offer from each cohort differed in many respects. Yet what they agreed upon was the need for practical solutions to assist trainers who have work expertise and industry knowledge but no LLN training to be able to effectively identify and address learner LLN issues.

While some expressed concern at the extent to which trainers could be expected to address learner LLN issues within their training, there was a general agreement that some degree of awareness is required by all trainers and assessors.

Part 2. Face-to face-consultation

On the basis of the responses, a number of proposed ‘ways forward’ were tested at a series of face-to-face consultations held between October and December in Darwin, Adelaide, Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne³. Two additional presentations about the project were made at the VET-Connect Symposium in Brisbane on 24 November and at the national WELL Practitioner’s Conference in Melbourne on 26 November.

These consultations highlighted that a ‘one size fits all’ solution – namely, mandating the Certificate IV TAELLN401A unit in the Certificate IV – would not be satisfactory and that a number of interventions would need to be made to build capability in supply and maximise understandings about LLN in training and assessment practice within both the Certificate IV and Diploma qualifications.

Part 3. Invitational Seminar

On the basis of responses to the face-to-face consultations, a set of proposals for changes to the Certificate IV and the Diploma of TAE was tabled at an invitational seminar held in Melbourne on 13 December 2010⁴.

Invitees to the seminar represented DEEWR, a selected cross section of respondents to the Discussion paper (both LLN specialists and TAE trainer and assessors) and those involved in broader VET workforce development projects⁵.

The seminar invited attendees to discuss the proposals. As a result, several adjustments were made to the proposals and these now form the basis for the Recommendations section of this report.

Project Findings

40110 Certificate IV in TAE

² Details in Appendix A

³ Attendee details in Appendix B

⁴ Attendee details in Appendix C

⁵ IBSA is currently working with the Australian Industry Group on a DEEWR funded national action research project to identify skill sets for workplace supervisors and HR managers. IBSA also has links to a Community Services and Health ISC project that is developing LLN competencies for LLN volunteers and frontline community services and health workers.

Proposed adjustments to Certificate IV TAE tabled at the invitational seminar were:

- Strengthen the references to LLN in core units of TAE 40110 (design, delivery and assessment)
- Strengthen the ‘Critical Aspects of Evidence’ so that the issue must be dealt with in both delivery and assessment of TAE Certificate IV
- Develop a section within the TAE User Guide (under development) to make explicit the requirements and expectations for addressing LLN
- Develop an ‘awareness raising unit’ that outlines the impact of LLN on the learning process and on the development of vocational and higher level communication and numeracy skills
- Develop a ‘Using the ACSF for skills gap analysis’ unit (as an elective)
- Include within elective options the units developed out of the ‘workplace supervisor’ Skill Set.

There was agreement that not all VET trainers and assessors need to become LLN experts but that all VET practitioners need to have some level of understanding and skill in LLN (including knowing about the ACSF), which should be relevant to the context in which they are working. There was strong support for strengthening the content within existing Certificate IV core units and to supporting effective implementation through the development of specific advice within the User Guide.

Seminar attendees felt that the existing Certificate IV *TAELLN401A* unit contains sufficient ‘awareness raising’ and an introduction to the ACSF and that the development of additional units was not required. There was agreement that the *TAELLN401A* unit should not be made core in the Certificate IV but should be an elective for those who need to work in more detail with LLN issues. There was agreement that the support materials developed for it be promoted widely to ensure that delivery of the unit is consistent with its intent.

There was also a strong feeling that the system lacks capacity to deliver *TAELLN401A* as a core unit at present because

‘We need an approach that enables more people who are able to deliver the LLN content of IBSA Packages before we mandate the elective’

It was noted that to ensure greater uptake of the Certificate IV *TAELLN401A* elective, the business models within some large RTOs might need to be adjusted to allow the unit to be delivered by a trainer with appropriate LLN background.

It was also noted that, in the absence of in-house capability, assistance would be required for smaller enterprise RTOs (perhaps through ISC PD initiatives) for the unit to be made available.

Diploma of TAE

Proposed adjustments to the proposed Diploma of TAE tabled at the Invitational Seminar were:

- Include the Certificate IV *TAELLN401A* as a core unit in the Diploma*, or design a new ‘purpose built’ core unit for the Diploma
- Keep the current Diploma unit *TAALNN501A Support the development of Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Skills* as an elective
- Include a Certificate IV ‘Using the ACSF for skills gap analysis’ unit as an elective
- Include, within the elective bank options, the units developed out of the ‘Workplace Supervisor’ Skill Set
- Mandate the Diploma as the level of qualification required to deliver the Certificate IV in TAE.

The new Diploma of TAE is being developed with the skills of the experienced practitioner in mind. Seminar attendees agreed that the Diploma level is a more appropriate level for deeper examination of pedagogy and a significant deepening of the training and assessment skills base.

There was unanimous support for the inclusion of TAELLN401A as a core unit in the Diploma to ensure that all practitioners at Diploma level would consider LLN within the realm of their core capabilities.

After discussion about the intent and current content of the elective unit *TAALNN501A Support the development of Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Skills* it was suggested, since this unit has not yet been implemented, that it be revised to have less of a theoretical focus and more of an applied focus to LLN issues in VET and the advanced use of the ACSF as a skills gap analysis tool.

There was also in-principle support for the inclusion of additional electives from the workplace supervisor Skill Set.

There was discussion around the possibility of mandating the Diploma as the level of qualification required to deliver the TAE Certificate IV. The decision to do this is not entirely within IBSA's remit and would require broader jurisdictional, DEEWR and NQC support. Nevertheless, there was support for the concept.

Additional policy drivers

In addition to the structural changes required in both the Certificate IV and Diploma qualifications a number of other issues were discussed that impinge on the overall impact that any Training Package content may have.

1. Awareness-raising/promotion

There is evidence that where the Certificate IV TAELLN401A is made available to trainers and assessors that there is interest and perceived value in it. Additional promotion of the unit and the available support materials would raise awareness and facilitate uptake.

2. Access to funded professional development opportunities

A strong message from Discussion Paper responses, face-to-face consultations and Seminar discussion was the need and importance of professional development activity to support a range of practitioners to increase their capacity to address LLN issues in their own training and assessment. This PD could include, but is not limited to, a range of mentoring, action learning or train-the-trainer approaches.

There is a number of ISC PD projects that have been successful in raising awareness and skill among industry sector-specific trainers and assessors. There was strong support for the continuation of this approach. Within larger RTOs there is a need for funding to support interdepartmental PD initiatives that use TAELLN401A as a central focus.

3. Mandated requirements for up-skilling (e.g. through AQTF)

Incentives for RTOs to include the elective in standard Certificate IV packaging and to ensure that a larger percentage of the workforce has requisite LLN skills cannot be controlled only through the availability of units. Additional quality assurance mechanisms (such as specific requirements of the AQTF) act as far stronger 'drivers'. There is potential for stronger mandated requirements regarding the skills and experience required to deliver TAE 40110.

If the AQTF had explicit advice linked to the provision of Foundation Skills, there would be a systemic driver for links between workforce capability and RTO quality systems. Over time (2 to 3 years) this would increase the number of VET practitioners who could deliver LLN unit content in

the Certificate IV in TAE and also establish vocational pathways to the Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma qualifications⁶.

IBSA to consider the following proposals

Related to 40110 Certificate in TAE:

- Strengthen the references to LLN in core units of TAE 40110 (design delivery and assessment)
- Strengthen 'critical aspects of evidence' so that the issue must be dealt with in both delivery and assessment of TAE Certificate IV
- Develop a section within the TAE User Guide (under development) to make explicit the requirements and expectations for addressing LLN
- Include, within elective options, the units developed out of the 'workplace supervisor' Skill Set and/or Community Services Skill Set
- Promote TAELLN401A and support materials
- Promote case studies of effective delivery of this unit
- Support PD linked to the ACSF
- *Announce that TAELLN401A will be incorporated as a core unit in the Certificate IV qualification by the beginning of 2014. The intention of this approach would be to *enable RTOs that had the qualification on their scope of registration to get ready to deliver the unit by (for example) providing training for their staff.*

Related to Diploma of TAE:

- Recommend to NPRG that the Certificate IV *TAELLN401A* be incorporated as a core unit in the Diploma
- Review and adjust the current Diploma unit *TAALNN501A Support the development of Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Skills* and retain as a elective
- Include within elective options the units developed out of the 'workplace supervisor' Skill Set.
- Mandate the Diploma as the level of qualification required to deliver the TAE Certificate IV.

⁶ IBSA has two graduate qualifications in LLN in the Training and Education Training Package (TAE10), namely:

- Vocational Graduate Certificate in Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice
- Vocational Graduate Diploma of Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Leadership

These qualifications are designed to provide a specialist core of knowledge and skills in the VET workforce and to provide support to other, less skilled VET practitioners.

These new qualifications provide some impetus for upskilling to 'specialist' level. However, IBSA and other stakeholders have acknowledged that there need to be more opportunities for the VET workforce as a whole to upgrade their LLN skills.

What is critical is that a raft of possible options be available that offer 'fit for purpose' options to a range of people who want to increase their understanding of this area and develop skills and knowledge at a level that is consistent with their job role.

A number of pathways are required for practitioners who want to move from novice to expert within the LLN field.

Broader policy considerations

- DEEWR to consider what focus and emphasis they want to place, as part of foundation skills strategy, on a range of units and qualifications
- AQTF implications
- Professional development funding
- Promotion.

Appendix A - breakdown of respondents to Discussion Paper by type and location

Table 1: Respondents by Type

Type	Number of responses
National Provider Interest Group	1
National Industry Skills Council	2
State Provider Interest Group	1
State Literacy association	2
State C MM	1
Government departments	3
Consultants	2
Enterprise/Industry RTOs	2
Enterprise/not RTO	1
Private providers	1
TAFE colleges	11
Dual sector institutes	3

Table 2: Respondents by National/State/Territory

National/State/ Territory	Number of responses
National	3
NSW	5
QLD	5
SA	4
TAS	1
VIC	9
WA	3