



NSW Adult Literacy & Numeracy Council

Views and concerns of the NSW adult literacy and numeracy workforce

A Summary of Responses to the NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council Member Survey 2016

In 2016 the Council conducted a survey of members to gain a picture of the NSW adult literacy and numeracy workforce and their current concerns for their students and the adult literacy and numeracy field. There were 78 respondents to the survey and their profiles mirror those in similar workforce surveys: predominately female, mostly employed part time, delivering face to face training in a classroom setting and an ageing workforce. The largest group of respondents were aged between 55 and 64 and over 40 percent had more than twenty years experience. There was also a group of older teachers with less experience indicating teachers who have retrained and others who have moved in and out of the workforce.

Respondents main concerns for their students included the lack of and length of appropriate programs to meet students' needs and large class sizes. Teachers expressed concern about casualisation of the workforce and lack of job security. Respondents were also asked about their concerns about the future of the adult literacy and numeracy field and responses included concerns about the lack of adult literacy and numeracy policy and strategic direction at both the national and state level and the lack of emphasis on individual students' needs.

A summary of responses is below:

1. Concerns for students

Respondents commented on learner programs:

- lack of appropriate programs to meet students' needs. Large, mixed ability classes – especially in small campuses e.g. 6 or so different curricula, 4 different ACSF levels in a class of 7
- lack of access to face-to-face training for disadvantage students
- length of programs insufficient to meet students' needs, especially for lower level students
- too much emphasis on screening at the expense of practice
- courses too short Vs some students only want a few U of C
- concerns re students – lack of motivation, hangout with other non-native speakers

Respondents commented on the practice of combining classes for ABE and ESOL students in some campuses and noted the shortage of students willing to work with native speaking LLN learners.

There were also comments about funding sources and curriculum:

- contractual arrangements for SEE, AMEP, S&S – eligibility rules, inappropriate curriculum, too much reporting and assessment, emphasis on quick completion
- **Smart and Skilled** funding model for Foundation Skills requires mostly delivery of full courses in short time frames and doesn't cater well for slower literacy learning needs.
- FSK curriculum doesn't allow enough time for people to learn the basic skills in language
- difficulties in funding when students need to repeat units

- too much assessment/pressure to pass students before competent and progress them (some related to SEE program)
- poor treatment of students by job service providers. Emphasis by job service providers on employment (often where no jobs), push for students to be enrolled in more/inappropriate courses. Particular mention of lower level students in SEE program and lack of motivation.
- issues related to continuous enrolment- rolling enrolments (SEE) can stall class progress, particularly in numeracy where basics need to be constantly retaught.

Whilst many of the comments about funded programs were critical of program policy and arrangements, such as: *LLN curriculum is geared towards workplace skills at the expense of student interest and literacy needs. Funding is tied to tick the box processes that are often irrelevant to individual student needs and do not develop transferrable skills.*

One respondent presented a contrary view: *I am concerned that many practitioners are caught up in wanting to use the old curriculum arrangement instead of the new Foundations Skills Training Package that has a more appropriate contextualisation to workplace needs.*

Other issues raised included:

- Lack of LLN support for vocational students – provided by vocational teachers, volunteers, too expensive to provide where needed
- Managing students with mental health issues.

2. Respondents indicated the following preferences for their professional development:

- Online learning
- Information about:
 - * current adult literacy and numeracy practice and compliance issues
 - * accessing funding
 - * teaching students with mental health issues
 - * teaching disengaged learners
 - * managing classes with both ESOL and ABE learners
 - * numeracy, especially higher order numeracy.

3. Concerns for teachers

The bulk of respondents commented on their current teaching and employment conditions for example:

- concerns about casualisation of the workforce and lack of job security
- lack of continuity, no PD related to teaching – only training related to compliance
- need for access to payment for administration duties/lesson preparation and marking as there is a large increase in admin duties
- restructure of TAFE. Proposed changes in employment conditions – reclassification as trainer/assessor which are at a lower pay rate
- the lack of certainty about the continuation of programs, so the preparation effort is wasted and there is no chance to develop expertise by repeating programs
- lack of resources and not being paid to develop resources is a concern
- due to the heavy administrative workload, many SEE teachers are under stress and are doing unpaid overtime in order to catch up on paperwork
- Corrections and others are dropping the basic qualifications for teachers. Teachers' salaries are being reduced by 50%

- no computer access though I started working with XXX since last Nov 2015. No wifi access though I brought in a MacBook Pro to enhance literacy teaching. This became very frustrating without basic teaching tools Will advise to give students' assessment, yet no access to a computer or any laptop to search or record students' info.
- *my contract says "Permanent Part-time", but it's only for the fixed-term of our current SEE contract. Hence I work 35hours/week for 12 months (max), including a 6 month probationary period, despite having been employed as a casual by the same company for 20 months prior to the start of this contract. Hourly rates are staggeringly low. I suspect many of my unemployed students get more benefits than I get paid.*
- implications of Smart and Skilled – education as a product on the market (lack of full-time and permanent employment opportunities may cause many good teachers to leave the industry
- no single award that fits the industry – workers in different organisations, although performing exactly the same duties, are on different awards.

Respondents also commented on what they termed the devaluation of their role and recognition of their worth as adult literacy professionals:

- devaluation of the LL&N specialists role (except for the AMEP) contract) e.g. Recent push to enable and improve LL&N skills of VET practitioners. Impact on long term employment
- undervaluing of LLN specialists.

There were also negative comments about some teachers currently working in the field:

- lack of innovative learning environments due to ageing head teachers (over 65) which would be okay if they were able to adapt to new learning systems and new needs of learners
- lack of qualified L&N teachers in regional and rural areas
- concerns re teachers who are doing the same old teaching which is not monitored or quality.

4. Concerns for the adult LLN field

Comments ranged from big pictures concerns about current LLN policy to issues affecting individual practitioners. This section of the survey elicited the most detailed responses from practitioners.

Respondents focused on current policy that impacted negatively on their learners:

- No Adult Literacy Strategy in NSW/Australia!!! NZ and Canada's (BC) models of umbrella organisations with local/regional coordinators and volunteers supporting paid teachers is worth considering (as Tasmania and WA appear to be doing)
- ABE provision is no longer based on adult learning principles. Instead we are tied to a system that is designed to satisfy administrative and reporting requirements. Curriculum is now designed to enable tick a box reporting. The Foundation Skills Training Package is an example of how literacy skills cannot be broken down into tick a box tasks and at the same time give a meaningful representation of a student's literacy skills. Furthermore such a curriculum does not develop transferrable skills needed to operate at many levels in the workplace and society.
- Despite its undeniable connections to long term unemployment, crime and poverty, despite its ongoing cost to society, adult LLN issues are not of interest to the decision-makers who are increasingly focused on short-term gains, profit and popularity. In some remote and regional areas, sorely-needed adult LLN services are being withdrawn, reducing hope and opportunity for those who need it most and leaving many incapable of meeting the increasing demands of functioning in a highly-literate society. Without stronger political influence, or more emphasis on advocacy, marketing and campaigning, the field of adult LLN is in danger of being side-lined even further.

- LLN is being ignored by State and Federal Governments. The PIACC survey 2011-12 found approximately 6.7 million Australians (43.7%) aged between 15 and 74 have ACSF scores at or below level 1 and 2 for Literacy. Approximately 9 million Australians (53.5%) between 15 and 74 have ACSF scores at or below level 1 and 2 for Numeracy. (5 levels on the SCALE: Level 1 and Level 2 being the lowest.) I was not at all surprised by the Census fiasco when 6-7 million Australians between 15 and 74 do not have the Language, Literacy and Numeracy no Digital Literacy to function above ACSF 2. LLN needs to be firmly back on the agenda for governments. It should be given the time and quality provision and generous resourcing it requires to make a difference to people's lives, to employment and to Australian society.
- Unlike a system of adult education based on adult learning principles the current model is not evidenced based. Where is the theory that supports the idea that adult literacy learning should be based on workplace skills?
- LLN needs to be an accepted strand in adult education, as necessary as any vocational area
- There is an unwillingness of policy and decision makers to acknowledge: the needs of individuals with low literacy skills, the scale of low literacy within the community, the negative impact on LL&N students of increased costs for courses, negative impact of inadequate time to master LL&N skills the deliberate attempt to undermine the integrity and professionalism of LL&N teachers
- I would like to see national AMEP LLN / VET research body and teacher accreditation
- Poor public perception of the need for LLN.

Comments about required teacher qualifications:

- We are in danger of depriving our students of academically trained teachers in the VET system. Cert IV in LLN is a joke.
- I am concerned with dumbing down of teacher qualifications to a VET level qualification. Teacher shortages should not be addressed by lessening the standards
- Merging into foundation skills literacy is 'everyone's concern' and everyone can teach it, no qualifications required to teach FSK.

Comments related to the impact of policy on delivery:

- ABE learners are often included in ESOL classes and that drives me CRAZY as we do different things, have different skills and teaching methods. This also shows a lack of awareness for learner needs. ESOL and LLN learners are DIFFERENT. It is also frustrating that ESOL deliver LLN programs and assess at inconsistent outcomes
- limited funding means limited number of courses can be offered
- the lack of focus on Numeracy by most LLN teachers except for money and basics. We are getting many people with Spiky profiles that are lacking the higher numeracy skills to allow them to undertake topics such as higher level EXCEL or reading and presenting graphical information for Management programs
- the subsidy gap for FSK Certificate courses is a barrier for some students
- there is a need for more funding to provide literacy support to students studying other courses
- our RTO limits our class sizes to 15. However, some of our teachers have worked for other providers with classes up to 45 students
- student's ability to pay fees and enrol in a class is more important than their identified need to develop skills necessary for future study/employment
- the trend towards online learning mostly doesn't work for foundation learners
- it is hard to find current, Australian-designed resources.

Concerns about the impact of policy of specific VET programs and providers:

- Present Smart & Skilled funding doesn't allow students to repeat courses. This is unfair to students with intellectual and learning disabilities who may not have the capacity to successfully complete higher courses and who learn best by repetition
- Funding for 1:1 or small group Aboriginal tutorial support has been cut, leaving these students with less opportunity for support.
- LLN/Foundation Skills Faculty doesn't exist in the new world order of TAFE. The Faculty is not listed in the 2017 Handbook or on the website as other Faculties are
- Native speakers with LLN needs are not catered for with present curriculum in the TAFE system
- I have genuine concern about future inmate LLN provision when it is handed over to private for-profit providers
- The 'big picture' for TAFE hasn't been shared with the majority of staff so uncertainty has led to increased stress and dissatisfaction with the organisation and senior management team – an 'us v's the' mentality has developed so there is little or no confidence in the decisions being made

5. What PD Opportunities would you like?

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| Teaching and learning strategies | 23.94% |
| Teaching and developing programs for specific student cohorts | 32.39% |
| Update on current adult language, literacy and numeracy theory and practice | 42.25% |
| Update on current adult language, literacy and numeracy policy, strategy and education | 40.85% |
| Quality/ compliance issues | 33.80% |
| Working with VET products (e.g. ACSF, FS training package) | 23.94% |
| Assessment/assessment validation | 29.58% |
| Online delivery strategies | 45.07% |
| Accessing funding opportunities | 39.44% |
| Other PD needs/comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategies for dealing with PTSD sufferers • Engaging disengaged/native speakers in literacy numeracy resources; developing employability skills in LLN programs • Technical training in new software both for lesson preparation and for use in the classroom • Mental health training that is not just at workshop level. Mental health is the biggest challenge across the Australian community and its workforce and it is growing. We need to create a skilled group of not just mental health first aiders but an independent more upskilled position that works with clients onsite. • Always open to learning more and reflecting on ways to deliver more • No needs as I am likely to be made redundant before the end of 2016 • I would like to be re-employed to teach LLN. | |