



**Adult Learning Australia**  
*Lifelong and lifewide learning for all Australians*

## **Response to Discussion Paper**

### **Review of Training Packages and Accredited Courses**

Adult Learning Australia welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Government's Discussion Paper: Review of Training Packages and Accredited Courses.

As a peak body for small, not for profit, Registered Training Organisations, we offer a unique perspective on the issues raised in the paper and are able to provide constructive advice on moving forward. Our RTO members are based across Australia. They are neighbourhood houses, community colleges, community learning centres and charities. They are focused on disadvantaged learners, early school leavers and others who would otherwise struggle to engage in Vocational Education and Training.

### **Balance between technical and generic skills**

ALA believes that training packages are currently too focused on technical aspects of a narrow range of jobs at the expense of generic skills including literacy and especially numeracy. While Australia performed reasonably well relative to other advanced economies in the 2013 Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) Survey, there were some significant pockets of underachievement including the significant drop off in literacy and numeracy levels amongst adults 45 and above and the relatively weak results in numeracy across the age span. This means that many Australian adults will enter the VET system needing to improve in these key areas.

The discussion paper rightly points out the importance of STEM jobs in the emerging economy. In order to compete internationally for these industries, Australian VET

curriculum needs a much stronger emphasis on applied numeracy. The increased focus on explicit literacy and numeracy in the 2012 Standards for Training Packages is welcome and it is acknowledged that these reforms have yet to flow through the system, however, it is still our contention that a broader approach to training is needed.

We support the “broad banding” of qualifications into more general vocational streams with emphasis on applied literacy, numeracy and digital literacy. We concur with the Business Council of Australia that the focus needs to move from “training for a particular job” to “capabilities and skills required to compete in a technology enriched, globally traded labour market.” A strong focus on generic skills also recognizes the role of VET in supporting entrepreneurship, and micro-business.

From the perspective of individuals and families, we believe that broader skills set will allow people to cope more effectively with the realities of Australian working life, which involve considerable career shifting, plus transitions through casual, part time and full time work as Australians remain in the workplace longer and balance work with caring responsibilities.

The need for ever higher general skills has led to the development of generalist and more specific qualifications in the Higher Education system, the so-called “Melbourne Model”. It makes sense that adults who have not completed secondary education in an environment that calls for ever greater informational processing, communication and self-management skills would be in even more need of attention to these skills, albeit in the applied format of VET.

#### **Cert 4 in Training and Assessment**

The status and role of the Certificate 4 in Training and Assessment requires some comment. Allowing the Certificate 4 TAE to become the default qualification for teaching in VET is a minimalist approach, especially when compared to the VET systems in the

advanced economies of Europe<sup>1</sup>. The discussion paper asks the question; *do all the competencies, skills and qualifications currently included in the national system need the same level of prescription and oversight?* Given the role of the TAE in underpinning the VET system, it requires much stronger oversight. ALA would support much stronger quality controls for the delivery of this qualification including external assessment.

### **External Assessment of Qualifications**

ALA members support a stronger role for industry or industry bodies in validating assessments for some qualifications in some circumstances. These circumstances would be: where this type of licensing role already exists, where the qualification is in a high risk industry from an occupational health and safety perspective, or an industry where research indicates a substantial problem with low quality training. In addition, qualifications such as those in the TAE would be included because of their important role across the VET system. However, concerns raised in the discussion paper about increased costs and lack of ability to customise assessments are legitimate, and for these reasons, we would not want to see external assessment across the entire VET system, particularly for entry level training.

### **Accredited Courses**

The discussion paper suggests that Accredited Courses exist to fulfill an enterprise specific or jurisdictional need. However, accredited courses are also used for general adult education and preparatory purposes allowing early school leavers to complete their basic education within the VET system. The vocational focus of training packages, including the Foundation Skills training package, means that they are not able to meet the need for curriculum that covers more general literacy and lifeskills.

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<sup>1</sup> Wheelahan and Moodie, G, 2010, The quality of teaching in VET: final report and recommendations, Australian College of Educators

For example the Certificates in General Education for Adults, while registered by the Victorian Board of Adult Community and Further Education, are offered across Australia, often for young people who have left school but are not ready for work or for a specific VET qualification. The Certificate 1 in Active Volunteering is similarly used to facilitate pathways into volunteer work as a precursor to paid work, often for older unemployed adults. The Certificates in English as an Additional Language are an essential tool for ensuring that new arrival immigrants have the English language skills they need to enter the VET system. The alignment of these qualifications with the national training system is essential to ensure that generic skills are recognized when the learner pathways across into a more specific VET qualification.

The loss of these accredited courses would be devastating for the not for profit community education sector which currently carries much of the load of assisting socially and economically marginalized people to pathway into VET. We strongly disagree with the suggestion that accredited qualifications become discontinued.

The Discussion Paper suggests the discontinuation of accredited courses and training package qualifications that have few or no enrolments. This may well solve the issue of excessive accredited courses without impacting popular and critically important accredited qualifications such as the Certificates in General Education.

### **Preparatory Qualifications**

The Discussion paper rightly questions the value of job specific Certificates 1 and 2 within Training Packages where the industry entry level is higher than these. ALA recommends that qualifications within any given training package begin at the entry level to a particular industry and that preparation for industry level qualifications is dealt with differently. We would suggest that the accredited curriculum outlined above is currently fulfilling this preparatory role for those outside the school system. For VET in Schools participants, broad industry stream qualifications as suggested in the discussion paper would be useful. These could be similar to the popular Certificate in Occupations

Studies programs of the early 1990's, which allowed young people to build general skills in broad occupation areas.

### **Green Skills**

In order to prepare adults for jobs of the future in a globalized world, training packages need to include emerging green jobs and must also assume demand for low energy and more sustainable products and services. The initial work on embedding green skills into training packages was welcome but needs renewed focus.

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Adult Learning Australia

Henderson House

40 Moreland St,

Footscray, 3011

[www.ala.asn.au](http://www.ala.asn.au)