



**Adult
Learning
Australia**

*Lifelong and
lifewide learning
for all Australians*

Submission

Re-imagining WELL in the 21st Century

June 2018





About

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) is the largest national peak body for adult and community education (ACE). ALA's mission is for equitable access to lifelong and lifewide learning for all Australians.

ALA has members in all states and territories of Australia that reflect the diversity of sector; including neighbourhood houses, community learning centres, community colleges and adult education institutions located in urban, regional and remote areas.

ALA exists to provide leadership, communication, professional development and advocacy for adult and community education practitioners to advance quality services for all adult learners.

The learner is the central focus of our attention. We believe that learning occurs through informal and non-formal means, as well as through the formal education and training systems.

In 2018, ALA celebrates its 58th anniversary.

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Recommendations

ALA makes the following recommendations regarding a new Workplace English Language and Literacy Program (WELL).

Recommendation 1	The Australian Government should develop a formal Lifelong Learning Policy that outlines economic and social goals; integrates efficiency and equity, and sets out roles and responsibilities for community, business and all levels of government.
Recommendation 2	The Lifelong Learning Policy should include a National Adult Literacy Strategy that prioritises language, literacy and numeracy (LLN), in various contexts, and prioritises a funded workplace LLN program.
Recommendation 3	The new workplace LLN program should be based on participatory design principles, with strong partnerships and collaboration between employees, employers and service providers.
Recommendation 4	The new workplace LLN program should be flexibly delivered via pre-accredited and accredited programs that use an appropriate LLN framework, such as the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF), to deliver verifiable outcomes.
Recommendation 5	The Australia Government should develop an approved provider list for the new WELL program that is focussed on high quality service provision and value for money. Providers should have strong experience with low literacy cohorts; demonstrated capacity to partner and a willingness to be involved in a participatory design process in order to meet the needs of different workplace contexts.
Recommendation 6	The new workplace LLN program should be delivered via skills gap training, intensive or extensive LLN programs or formal accredited programs, based on need and as determined in the co- or participatory design phase.
Recommendation 7	The new workplace LLN program must articulate clear criteria for accountability including administering and evaluating program outcomes.
Recommendation 8	The new WELL program should have a simplified application process through a business friendly website that includes a Helpline and support to facilitate effective business and provider partnerships.
Recommendation 9	The new workplace LLN program needs a positive and focussed communications strategy that articulates the investment value to business. Industry and provider peak bodies should be engaged to promote and share information about the program from employer-to-employer, provider-to-provider and more broadly.
Recommendation 10	The Australian Government must involve ALA, AIGroup and ACAL in the drafting of program guidelines for the new WELL program, including the investigation of successful overseas workplace models.



Executive summary

The closure of the WELL program by the Australia Government in 2014 has created a vacuum for working Australians who do not have the language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills to function competently in their workplace roles.

The WELL program was introduced in 1991. The program offered grant funding designed to integrate LLN training with vocational training delivered in the workplace. Its primary aim was to provide workers with the LLN skills they needed to meet their current and ongoing employment and training needs. The program also funded the development of strategically aligned LLN resources and projects, including training and assessment materials and professional development resources.

Through the WELL program, the Commonwealth Government acknowledged the significant link between strong LLN skills and workplace productivity. The program was highly valued because it enabled access, improved communication and promoted a training culture leading to a wider field of workplace training. WELL was seen to equip participants with vocational and LLN skills, increase their employability prospects and improve social and personal skills. It was consistently evaluated as making a positive contribution to the workplace, especially in challenging and changing economic times.

A 2012 evaluation of the program found that 78% of employers rated the WELL program as either effective or highly effective in meeting their business needs.

Benefits identified included:

- reduced workplace WHS incidents
- increased capacity to use technology
- increased capacity to complete additional workplace training.

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) has a vision for a new effective and sustainable workplace model that is based on a set of agreed objectives; one that reflects the feedback from stakeholders, including workers, industry, TAFE and Adult and Community Education (ACE), and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), on how to improve outcomes for stakeholders.

This paper also includes feedback from previous ALA consultations on WELL, and other research, and highlights considerations for any proposed new model. ALA is committed to being involved in the process for developing a new model.



Section 1

Rationale

ALA seeks a commitment from the Australian Government for a replacement program to the WELL program, and agrees with calls by the Australian Council of Adult Literacy (ACAL) and the Australian Industry Group (AIG) for the development of a strategy to prioritise LLN workplace provision and the allocation of appropriate funding.

Results from the Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC 2011–12) survey found that around 1 in 7 Australians (14%) have very poor literacy skills and 1 in 3 (30%) Australians have literacy skills low enough to make them vulnerable to unemployment and social exclusion.¹

This means that approximately 44% of Australian adults have literacy levels below what is required to carry out everyday activities, find and keep a job and engage in the social and economic life of their community. And a further 53% have low numeracy levels that impact on their participation in these domains.

Advances in technology drive the need for continual learning. To remain in or re-enter the modern workforce, Australians need to be able to use new technologies. In addition, the Internet is an increasingly important tool for social inclusion, allowing people to remain in contact with family and friends, pursue interests and build communities of shared interest.

According to UNESCO:

'Education improves understanding of new technologies and facilitates their diffusion and implementation – factors which also promote economic growth.'

Evidence supports the cost–benefit analysis 'that investment in human capital, that is, in education and skills training, is three times as important to economic growth over the long run as investment in physical capital, such as machinery and equipment'.² Workplace education and training programs and increased literacy contribute to a rise in the GDP.

The Treasury submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics Inquiry into raising the level of productivity growth in the Australian economy, August 2009, identified that:

'Education and training can contribute to improvements in both productivity and participation in the workforce.'

For many adults who have missed out in the education system or have had little or no access to training, the development of strong foundation skills including language, literacy and numeracy will provide pathways to developing higher-order skills.

ALA supports the UNESCO assessment³ on the impact and challenges associated with WELL, which stated that:

'[T]he program plays an important role in supporting the development of foundation skills in the workplace', and that the 'training has a positive impact on LLN skills as well as on employee career prospects.'

¹ <http://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/>

² <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-004-x/2004006/7780-eng.htm>

³ <http://litbase.uil.unesco.org/>



To achieve this, there must be a shared understanding of the employer's specific training needs and workforce profile, as well as a strong partnership between the employer and the registered training provider.

A new national workplace LLN program must be developed to build upon the previous WELL program to better support workers and industry in working towards a more sustainable and prosperous future; one where both workers and industry have the capability, capacity and willingness to deliver what is required for a productive learning economy.

The capacity to learn new skills and adapt and be flexible to respond to the new work order and changing economy requires increasingly sophisticated language and knowledge of digital literacy in the workplace. This impacts most notably on older workers facing redundancy and job loss, especially workers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (ATSI) and from low socio-economic areas and people living in rural and remote locations with limited access to education facilities.

Older workers were one of the key groups identified in the PIAAC survey, which measures adults' proficiency in key information-processing skills – literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments – and gathers information and data on how adults use their skills at home, at work and in the wider community.



Section 2

Challenges and benefits

Overall, WELL was seen to have made a valuable contribution to learning in the workplace and to encourage more efficient, more effective, more competitive, and more capable workplaces.

Challenges and benefits of the WELL program	
Program benefits	Program challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Practical, customisable and authentic▪ Tangible and relevant workplace LLN outcomes; including improved digital and financial literacy▪ Improved capacity to complete other workplace training▪ Met learner and workplace needs▪ Industry valued it▪ Flexible on-site delivery model▪ Facilitated peer-to-peer learning in a familiar environment▪ Built long-term partnerships with business and relationships with learners (with up to 3 years funding)▪ Supported employees with learning barriers▪ Gave employers confidence to deliver other VET programs▪ Supported employers to embed LLN practice into other VET programs▪ Supported collaborative program design between providers and employers▪ Pro-active approach to building LLN skills in the workplace▪ Other social and economic benefits to employees, outside of the workplace, due to improved literacy levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Promoted a deficit view of LLN▪ Lack of suitably qualified and experienced trainers to meet the needs of both employer and employee and who understood the organisation and its training needs▪ Lack of appropriately qualified LLN specialists to meet workplace LLN needs▪ Workplaces were not informed about the program▪ Lack of awareness of the WELL program, its focus and suitability to the workforce▪ Financial disincentives were a barrier for organisations to take up the program.▪ Logistics of meeting ever-changing business needs▪ Insufficient time allocated to training▪ Lack of clarity around when training should occur e.g. during or outside of work hours▪ Difficulties negotiating the best time of the year for training to take place▪ Lack of funding for training analysis to ensure program is designed effectively▪ Misalignment between training requested and training required▪ Lack of flexibility in training provision where non-accredited or a mix of non-accredited and accredited more appropriate.



Section 3

Review process

Literature review

ALA conducted desktop research to explore the features of the former WELL program and results from various evaluation processes. A brief summary of this process follows.

Tackling Foundation Skills in the Workforce Report Australian Industry Group (2016)

This report identified the impact of low literacy and numeracy on business and showed that building workplace LLN through targeted programs has a positive return on investment for employers.

The report identified that promoting foundation skills to employers has been made difficult by the cessation of the WELL program without a comparable replacement. (On 19 December 2016, the Australian Government announced the decision to close the Industry Skills Fund (ISF) and no longer accepts training grant applications.)

Of the 300 employers surveyed, 93% identified that low levels of functional literacy and numeracy negatively impacted their business in terms of lost productivity and profitability.

Employers continue to report major issues due to low levels of literacy and numeracy skills; including poor completion of workplace documents (42%), material errors and wastage (32%) and teamwork and communication problems (28%). They also report issues arising from miscommunication, poor internal and external communication, and other issues of a personal basis.

The report recommends support for a national foundation skills strategy to seriously address workplace LLN, to develop strong employer champion networks and to broadly promote the strong return on investment of a workplace LLN program for employers.

http://cdn.aigroup.com.au/Reports/2016/AIG9675_EMAIL.pdf

Work-Related Training and Adult Learning survey Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017)

This Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) survey released 2017 indicates that fewer people are participating in work-related training.

Overall, participation in work and related training has decreased from 27% in 2013 to 22% in 2016, which is a significant drop over a three-year period.

Approximately 3.8 million people across the country participated in work-related training in the 12 months prior to the survey collected between July 2016 to June 2017. Participation by men decreased from 27% to 22%, while participation by women decreased from 27% to 21%.

People without a school qualification were more than twice as likely to participate in work related training than those with school qualification in 2016/17 (28% compared with 12%). However, participation has decreased for both these groups since 2013, from 35% for those without a school qualification and 16% for those with a school qualification.

One in 10 Australians aged 15 to 74 years would like to participate in more work related training. For almost half of these people, too much work or too little time were the main reasons that they could not participate more. About one in four people, who wanted more training, deemed the cost too prohibitive.

However, participation by people in the labour force has decreased from the rates recorded in 2005 (59.1%) and then in 2013 (53.1%) to 46.1% in 2016-17. In comparison, participation by



people not in the labour force increased from 2005 (25.2%) to 2013 (29.9%) but then decreased in 2016–17 (28.1%).

Future Proof, Protecting Australians through Education and Skills Business Council of Australia (2017)

Future Proof uses a lifelong learning lens to identify that workers will need to ‘dip in and out of training’ throughout their lives to upskill, reskill and to remain current.

The report aims to protect the workforce and build the skills and resilience necessary to adapt to technological change using a proposed ‘Lifelong Skills Account’. The capped Lifelong Skills Account could be used to pay for courses at approved VET or higher education providers over the person’s lifetime. It would consist of a subsidy and an income-contingent loan to replace existing loans and subsidies.

The report also outlines the importance of equipping people with the functional competencies they need to effectively communicate, interact and work, which includes minimum levels of literacy, numeracy and technology.

National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Standing Council on Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment (SCOTESE) endorsed the [National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults](#) in 2013.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults is a ten-year framework, which brings a national focus to improving education and employment outcomes for working age Australians with low levels of foundation skills (language, literacy, numeracy and employability skills).

Through the strategy all Australian governments have committed to a target that, by 2022, two thirds of working age Australians will have literacy and numeracy skills at Level 3 or above (refers to the levels in the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey undertaken in 2006 by the Australian Bureau of Statistics): <https://www.education.gov.au/national-foundation-skills-strategy-adults>

National Skills Australians Fund

The establishment of the [Skilling Australians Fund](#) is a major commitment by the Australian Government to ongoing funding for vocational education and training and it will have a lasting positive impact on skilling Australian workers into the future.

The Fund is prioritised towards apprentices, trainees, and pre- and higher apprentices in the following key areas:

- Occupations in demand
- Occupations with a reliance on skilled migration
- Industries and sectors of future growth
- Trade apprenticeships
- Rural and regional areas
- Respect of people from targeted cohorts.

An estimated \$1.5 billion will be available for the ongoing Fund from 2017–18 to 2020–21. With matched funding from states and territories, this will support up to 300,000 apprenticeships, traineeships, pre-apprenticeships and higher apprenticeships.

Australian Core Skills Framework

The Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) is a tool, which assists both specialist and non-specialist English language, literacy and numeracy practitioners describe an individual’s performance in the five core skills of learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy.



The Federal Budget Department of Education and Training (DET) performance criteria 2.8 Building Skills and Capability indicates that the expected achievement in this area for 2018/19 and 2019/20 is that at least 80% of participants in targeted programs increase one or more levels on the Australian Core Skills Framework.

Consultation process

While there have been a number of prior investigations into WELL which show that industry believes a significant number of employees do not have the required workplace literacy and numeracy skills, and that successful outcomes of the program have been consistently reported, there has been little, if any, opportunity for adult and community education (ACE) providers (with previous experience of WELL) to contribute their view.

'Re-imagining WELL for Work in the 21st Century' ALA workshop – The Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL) Conference, Darwin, September (2017)

60 participants

Key themes from the workshop are outlined in Section 4 but relate to:

- program planning, design and implementation
- roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders
- flexibility to cater to diverse needs of employers and employees in different workplaces
- promotion and awareness of opportunities and outcomes
- sustainability of the program and program benefits
- monitoring and evaluation
- accountability and transparency.

ALA member engagement

Feedback from ALA's membership, surveys and forums identified that the LLN gap is a significant barrier to achieving mainstream training, employment and community outcomes.

There is expressed support for a new WELL model that embraces a participatory design model; is responsive to diversity and the requirements of employers and workers across all states and territories.

Commonwealth programs

The Australian Government's DET Building Skills and Capacity program identifies a key objective of working to create an effective and efficient skills and training system that is industry led and delivers the skills Australian employers need. The DET 2018-19 budget statement explains that building skills and capabilities is central to Australia's economic growth, competitiveness, and business productivity and that the national training system aims to provide employees or potential employees with the skills and capabilities required for a job or pathway into a job.

There is \$3.875 million set aside in the 18/19 Federal budget to establish a new Skills Checkpoint for Older Workers program to enable new roles within their current industry or pathways to a new career, including referral to relevant education and training options but it is yet to be developed.

The most current Commonwealth workplace programs under the Building Skills and Capacity program and their attributes are compared to the previous WELL program, as shown below.



Table 1: Commonwealth program comparison

Workplace English Language and Literacy Program (defunded)	Skills for Education and Employment SEE	Adult Migrant English Program AMEP
<p>Overview</p> <p>Established in 1991, closed 2014</p> <p>Workplace English Language and Literacy Program (WELL) encourages employers to invest in LLN training, integrated with vocational training, to meet the employment and training needs of workers.</p> <p>WELL defined literacy as:</p> <p>'the ability to read and use written information as well as to write appropriately, in a range of contexts. Literacy also includes numeracy, such as the recognition and use of numbers and basic mathematical signs and symbols within text. Literacy involves the integration of speaking, listening, and critical thinking with reading and writing'.</p> <p>WELL funding</p> <p>Funding for WELL training programs in the states was allocated on a population basis.</p> <p>Funding was available for training that was integrated with vocational training via partnerships between the industry and providers.</p> <p>Aim</p> <p>The target group for WELL was employees with the greatest need for workplace English language and literacy assistance in the context of occupational and workplace training requirements. For employees whose English language, literacy and numeracy proficiency is below the level where they can communicate in English with sufficient accuracy to meet minimum workplace industry competency standards. Generally referring to employees at levels 1 and 2.</p>	<p>Overview</p> <p>Established in 2013.</p> <p>Skills for Education and Employment Program (SEE) provides LLN training to jobseekers, who are referred by DHS and employment service providers including the Remote Jobs and Communities Program.</p> <p>Caters for job seeker groups with literacy and/or numeracy training needs including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, youth, people with disabilities, mature aged people, and job seekers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.</p> <p>Up to 800 hours of free LLN training.</p> <p>About LLNP</p> <p>SEE is an extension of LLNP (2002–13). LLNP included integrated Literacy & Numeracy Training and Advanced English for Migrants program. A 2013 review identified LLNP needed to be more flexible and that the name had social stigma so SEE was established in 2013.</p> <p>Aim</p> <p>The target group for SEE is job seekers. Finding employment after undertaking the training is the measure of success, but attainment is also important e.g. improving ACSF indicators from pre-training assessment (PTA).</p> <p>Tuition modes</p> <p>Training is delivered flexibly through full-time or part-time hours, via face-to-face or distance training and may be vocationally contextualised within each stream of training.</p> <p>SEE streams</p> <p>Initial Language stream (ESL below Level 1 ACSF); Basic LLN focuses on functional LLN skills; Advanced LLN for clients who are higher ACSF than identified in basic and generally achieve ACSF levels 3–5.</p> <p>Budget 2018/19</p> <p>\$93 million for the Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program to improve eligible job seekers' language, literacy and numeracy skills through the provision of up to 800 hours of free, accredited training.</p>	<p>Overview</p> <p>Established in 1948.</p> <p>(AMEP) provides English language courses to eligible migrants and humanitarian entrants and is administered by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.</p> <p>Up to 510 hours of free English language tuition.</p> <p>Aim</p> <p>Adult migrants and humanitarian entrants for settlement purposes</p> <p>Aims for outcomes in social participation, economic wellbeing, independence, personal wellbeing, all contributing to settlement and integration into, the broader Australian community.</p> <p>Entrants who arrive in Australia under the skilled migrant stream, who are eligible for the AMEP but are excluded from SEE.</p> <p>Tuition modes</p> <p>Classroom-based Distance learning Home tutor scheme Self-paced online learning</p> <p>Sub-programs (for eligible)</p> <p>Special Preparatory Program Settlement Language Pathways to Employment/Training Program</p> <p>Budget 2018/19</p> <p>\$303 million to the Adult Migrant English Program - to support refugees and other migrants to learn English language and literacy skills to help them confidently participate socially and economically in Australia</p>

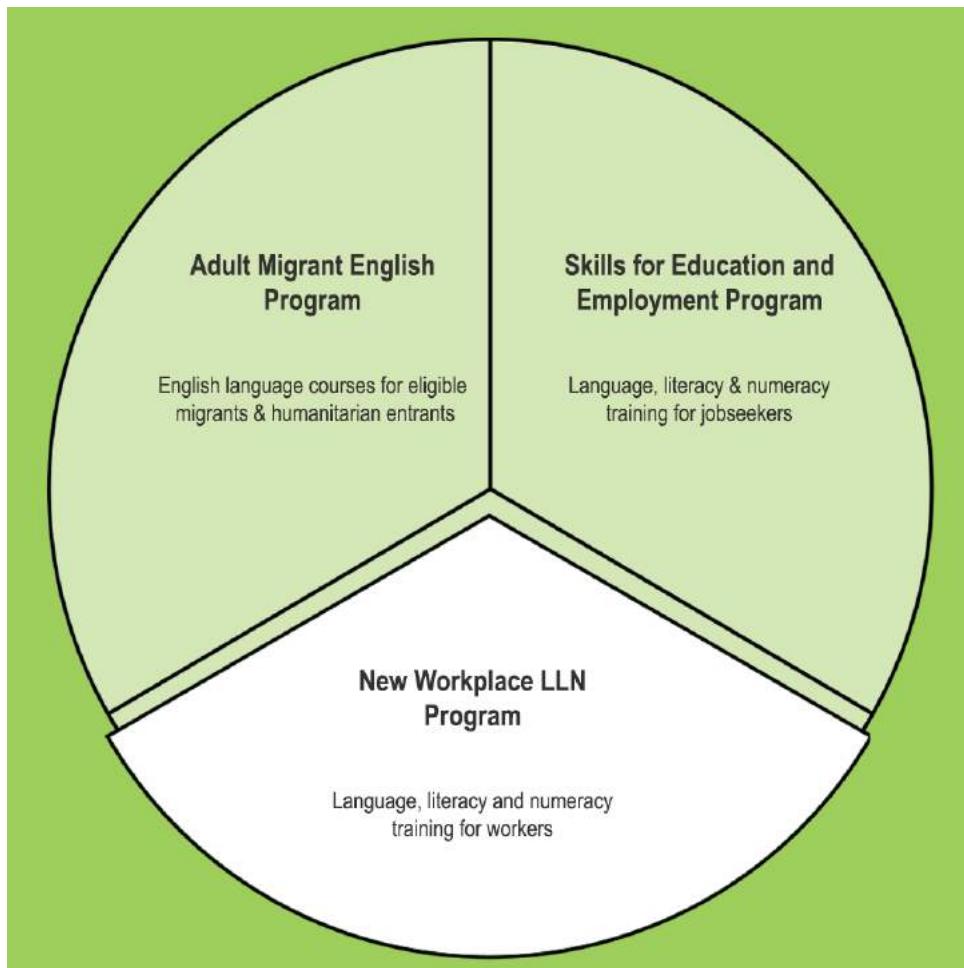


Figure 1: The LLN program landscape



Section 4

Proposed model

The policy framework

Structural changes in the global economy have resulted in a growing demand for a highly skilled and adaptable workforce. Life changing technology is emerging at such a rate that it has become impossible to predict what the roles, skills and jobs of the tomorrow will look like.

Governments, communities, businesses, individuals and society, more broadly, need to be prepared to take advantage of the opportunities that will arise in this complex and competitive environment. They must also take responsibility for ensuring that everyone has access to these opportunities, and to ensure fairness and equity.

A significant percentage of existing jobs across the globe are at risk of automation, particularly jobs that involve routine or repetitive tasks. Given that the landscape of work in the future is largely unknown and with new media, science and technology moving rapidly, a broader more holistic approach to workplace LLN and learning is required.

The program framework

Communication and administration

Most businesses that accessed the WELL program found it to be effective. But there were issues around broader recognition of the program in the business community. In order to achieve strong productivity returns, a new WELL model must include a strong communication strategy to ensure greater uptake of the program.

Information about the program, including program funding and service provision should be accessed via a simple and responsive website that:

- includes a roadmap for business and training providers to access the program
- provides a directory of approved service providers that are sufficiently diverse to meet the needs of different workplace contexts
- facilitates partnerships between business and training providers
- includes a helpline
- details program funding options; including reinstated grant funding for appropriate resource development
- includes a simplified national application process for business and providers that:
 - emphasises practitioner quality and appropriate credentials
 - includes training for a nominated workplace literacy mentor
 - details RTO and business responsibilities in terms of specifying needs and training requirements
- provides clear and concise program guidelines
- provides resources, skills audit templates, checklists and evaluation materials
- showcases success stories from employers and employees.

Delivery methodology

Collaboration and greater flexibility are key for a successful workplace LLN program. In order to achieve this, the new program should:

- allow for increased flexibility in delivery, methodology and outcomes
- encourage co-designed programs with employees, employers and/or training providers
- be delivered via pre-accredited and accredited programs that use an appropriate LLN framework, such as the ACSF, to deliver verifiable outcomes (pre-accredited LLN programs should also be mapped to the ACSF)

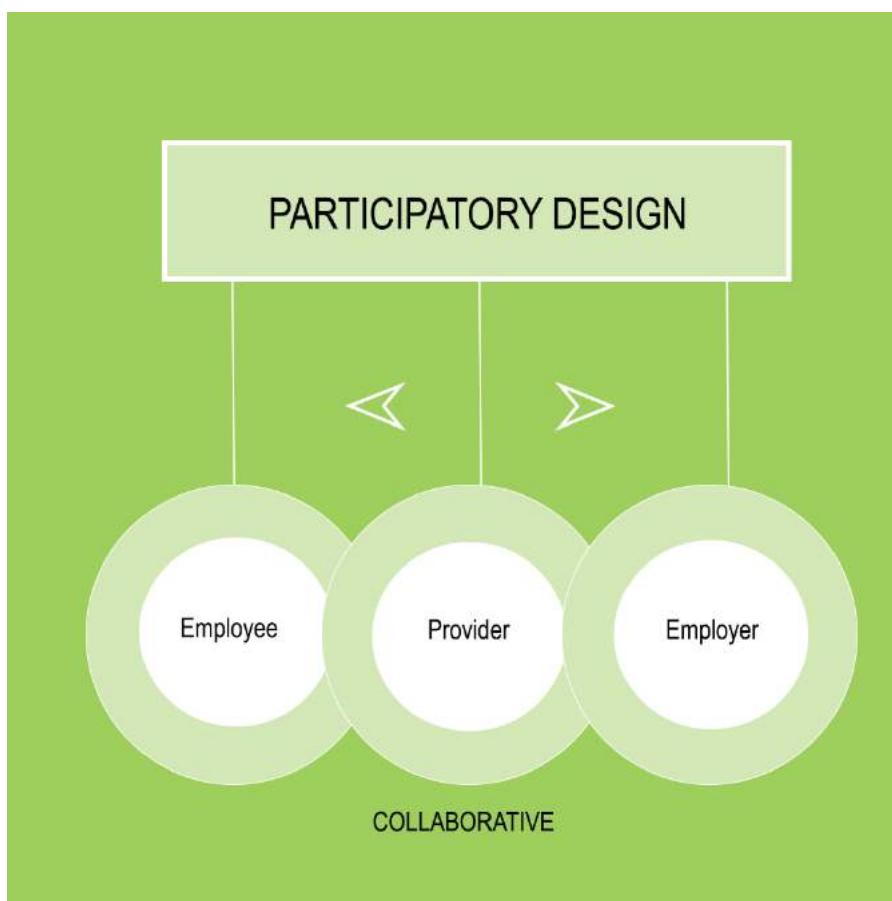


- be delivered via skills gap training, intensive or extensive LLN programs or formal accredited programs, as determined in co-design phase
- be delivered in a time frame specified in the co-design phase and that meets the needs of all stakeholders
- provide clear criteria for administering and evaluating program outcomes
- reduce the level of private capital required by participating businesses on an as needs basis
- be learner-centred and ensure diverse needs are catered for
- give special consideration to the projected increase in workers required for the Community Services and Health industries (e.g. NDIS and ageing population) as they often come from a low LLN background
- include funding for professional development, leadership programs and mentoring for all LLN educators; particularly those in regional or remote communities.

Accountability, sustainability and evaluation

The new program should ensure:

- a significant proportion of the funding is allocated for program delivery rather than administration
- consistent teaching rates across the system with possible wage caps
- identify literacy champions/mentors in the workplace to undergo professional development in supporting colleagues reading, writing, numeracy, digital etc.
- provide post program mentoring for the literacy mentors e.g. 12 months
- establish suitable program review mechanisms and performance measures that better monitor and support reporting of outcomes, including qualitative measures
- review of successful overseas workplace literacy, numeracy and communication training programs of relevance to Australian employers and employees.





Conclusion

The modern economy and society have created new demands for foundation and life skills, including literacy, numeracy and digital capability. Technological advancement and globalisation have decreased the availability of low skills jobs and increased the number of jobs that require high levels of information processing, digital and communication skills. Adults who are educationally disadvantaged are at even higher risk of being left behind.

It is now more important than ever for industry to build strong alliances within the education sector, with TAFE and with registered training organisations (RTOs) including adult and community education (ACE) providers. Many ACE providers deliver both pre-accredited and accredited LLN programs in local communities and have strong experience with low LLN cohorts.

A new national workplace LLN program must improve upon the previous WELL program to better support workers and industry in working towards a more sustainable and prosperous future; one where both workers and industry have the capability, capacity and willingness to deliver what is required for a productive learning economy.

The design of any new model should involve broad consultation with a range of stakeholders, including the ACE sector, to fully understand what systems, skills and training will be required for future implementation, and to ensure that we have a flexible and sustainable model that helps us create a clever and creative society.

What is needed is a government commitment to an overall policy of lifelong learning for all Australians, one that includes an ideal policy framework for addressing foundation skills in the workforce through workplace training and education.

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