

The professional development requirements of Workplace
English Language and Literacy Programme practitioners

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Publisher's note

Additional information relating to this research is available in *The professional development requirements of Workplace English Language and Literacy Program practitioners: Support document*. It can be accessed from NCVER's website <<http://www.ncver.edu.au>>.



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Contents

Tables and figures	4
Acknowledgements	5
Key messages	6
Executive summary	7
Context	10
The Workplace English Language and Literacy Programme	10
The project	12
Research purpose	12
Research questions	12
Methodology	13
Limitations and why they matter	14
Reading the report	15
Literature review	16
The WELL practitioner	16
Professional development	17
Findings	19
Research questions	19
Main points in response to research questions	30
Implications for policy and/or practice	32
Competencies required for WELL practitioners in the future	32
Identifying appropriate professional development	33
Summary	37
References	39
Support document details	40

Tables and figures

Tables

1	Professional development on entry to the WELL Programme	19
2	Role of the WELL practitioner	20
3	Recent professional development opportunities	22
4	Membership of professional associations	22
5	Employment status of WELL practitioners	27
6	Qualifications held by WELL practitioners	27
7	Employment history of WELL practitioners	28
8	Pathway into the WELL Programme	28
9	Accessing professional development	37

Figures

1	Professional development for experienced WELL practitioners	35
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Key messages

This study explores the changing nature of the training services provided through the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Programme in response to the changing needs of industry and vocational education and training (VET) sector reforms. It examines the current and emerging professional development needs of WELL practitioners and proposes strategies to ensure that the professional development needs of both new and existing practitioners are met.

- ✧ Induction support for entry-level WELL practitioners is haphazard, and many practitioners believed they were not adequately prepared for the multitude of responsibilities required of them. An appropriate entry-level qualification is needed to enable design and delivery of language, literacy and numeracy in the workplace.
- ✧ Current opportunities for accessing ongoing professional development (in addition to entry-level/baseline qualifications) are limited and need to be improved; many practitioners had not received any professional development over the past two years. This includes both formal and informal opportunities to observe practice in the workplace and to gain project management skills.
- ✧ The provision of relevant and appropriate professional development for both new and experienced practitioners needs to be embedded within and supported by the VET system.
- ✧ Potential shortages of appropriately qualified WELL practitioners emphasise the need for the adoption of a national minimum education standard, such as the Advanced Diploma of Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice in VET.

Executive summary

The Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Programme is a Commonwealth initiative, created as a result of the 1991 Australian Language and Literacy Policy and funded by the Department of Education, Science and Training. The main aim of the program is to support the provision of language and literacy training integrated with vocational training to enable workers to meet the demands of their current and future employment and training needs.

The WELL Programme is managed in Canberra and administered through state-based WELL Programme Secretariats. Registered training organisations and employers work in partnership to access WELL Programmes, which are then delivered by specific WELL practitioners.

Practitioners, in line with other vocational education and training (VET) teachers, have faced continuous change in their work environments, a situation which is likely to continue. The ability to adapt teaching practice depends in the first instance on knowing about these changes; and secondly, having the opportunity to reflect upon and explore the implications of these changes for practice. The opportunity to access professional development is significant in supporting practitioners to meet these challenges.

This research aimed to address the following questions.

- ✧ What is the extent and nature of professional development activities offered to and/or undertaken by WELL practitioners currently?
- ✧ What changes in the nature of WELL training services and the changing needs of industry are impacting, or are likely to impact, on the competencies that WELL practitioners are expected to demonstrate?
- ✧ What competencies are WELL practitioners expected to demonstrate now and in the next five years?
- ✧ What competencies do WELL practitioners have now?
- ✧ What are the priority areas for the professional development of WELL practitioners now and in the next five years?

A literature review and three data-gathering techniques were used for this study. The data were gathered through email surveys, telephone/face-to-face interviews and workshops.

Managers from registered training organisations known to be accessing the WELL Programme were the initial point of contact. They were requested to forward the email survey to all WELL practitioners employed by them. Across Australia 106 registered training organisations identified themselves as accessing the program, and contact was made with 75 of these. A total of 42 responses from WELL practitioners were received; some of these were from the same registered training organisation and most were from staff employed on a permanent basis. This response rate represents a small sample of the current WELL practitioner population.

Following analysis of the responses to the email survey, follow-up contact was made with 17 WELL practitioners, 11 of whom participated in a more detailed face-to-face or telephone interview. Interviews were also conducted with 11 managers from registered training organisations responsible for managing the program.

The following are the key findings from the data gathered from respondents.

- ✧ Practitioners are predominantly female (71%) and mature-aged (81% over 40 years of age and 0% under 30 years of age).
- ✧ Practitioners have two or more qualifications; most of them (79%) had an undergraduate teaching qualification.
- ✧ 48% of respondents came to the WELL Programme after some other form of primary or secondary school teaching.
- ✧ There is a plethora of state-based undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications available in the teaching English as a second language and adult literacy fields, but there is currently no agreed minimum national benchmark for entry as a WELL practitioner.
- ✧ The apparently low number of young new practitioners was evidenced by the age range of current practitioners. In the absence of a recognised qualifications pathway, new entrants are being severely limited by an entry pathway based on experience.

Practitioners and managers identified a number of key skills and attributes required by a WELL practitioner over and above language, literacy and numeracy qualifications.

These included:

- ✧ experience working with adults
- ✧ understanding of workplace culture
- ✧ flexibility
- ✧ integrity
- ✧ empathy
- ✧ ability to work independently
- ✧ ability to deal with a range of stakeholder needs
- ✧ good communication skills.

WELL practitioners are required to use these skills and attributes in a number of roles in:

- ✧ face-to-face delivery
- ✧ the provision of advice to non-WELL practitioners and industry personnel
- ✧ the development of learning and assessment resources
- ✧ negotiation
- ✧ writing WELL Programme reports and submissions
- ✧ the capacity of a representative of the registered training organisation.

Practitioners commented that there were few professional development opportunities available to them, either as entry-level practitioners or accessible on an ongoing basis, noting that they were largely responsible for their own learning and development.

Key issues relating to the provision of current professional development activities included:

- ✧ decreasing opportunities to achieve adult literacy qualifications through the higher education sector
- ✧ lack of consistent induction training for entry-level WELL practitioners
- ✧ lack of opportunities for collegiate networking
- ✧ lack of opportunities to share experiences and resources
- ✧ inconsistent nature of current professional development for WELL practitioners

- ✧ lack of professional development specific to language literacy and numeracy. The most common forms of professional development were VET-related workshops, such as occupational health and safety (38%)
- ✧ lack of ongoing professional development; 36% had undertaken no professional development over the past two years.

When questioned about the possible changes to roles of WELL practitioners in the next five years and the professional development implications, respondents noted the following issues:

- ✧ It is likely that there will be a continuation of the multiplicity of changes that have occurred over the past five years, such as integration of language, literacy and numeracy and vocational training, and the broadening of the language, literacy and numeracy skills covered by the WELL Programme.
- ✧ There is growing emphasis on the need for flexible delivery.
- ✧ There is increased focus on team teaching, that is, using a vocational content specialist and a WELL practitioner.
- ✧ There is an increased need to access and use information and communication technologies.

In the final section of the report, a number of suggestions are made, targeted at three main areas:

- ✧ establishing pre-entry qualifications through the Advanced Diploma in Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice in VET
- ✧ facilitating professional development for entry-level WELL practitioners, including assistance in areas such as shadowing, mentoring, using the National Reporting System (a framework for reporting the language, literacy and numeracy outcomes of students) and resource development
- ✧ professional development for current WELL practitioners across a variety of issues, including assistance in areas such as the workplace environment, program management and language, literacy and numeracy practice.

Additional information relating to this research is available in *The professional development requirements of Workplace English Language and Literacy Programme practitioners: Support document*. It can be accessed from NCVER's website <<http://www.ncver.edu.au>>.

The Workplace English Language and Literacy Programme

The Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Programme, an initiative funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training, was created as a result of the 1991 Australian Language and Literacy Policy. The requirement for such a program was an acknowledgement of the impact of the globalised economy on workers, the need for continual upskilling to maintain competitive advantage and the pivotal role played by language, literacy and numeracy. The budget allocation reflected the uptake of the training opportunities offered by the program and was increased from \$2.3m in 1992 to \$11.7m in 1998. In the financial year 2004–05 it was \$13.8m. The main aim of the program is to support the provision of language and literacy training integrated with vocational training to enable workers to meet the demands of their current and future employment and training needs. It is an important source of adult language, literacy and numeracy funding, and many reports of the WELL Programme (Pearson et al. 1999; Millar 2001; Adams 1998) demonstrate the benefits of WELL-funded training. These benefits include better workplace skills, more effective communication, increased involvement in training and skill development programs, improved occupational health and safety, and increased productivity (Department of Education, Science and Training 2004).

Literacy and workplace literacy

It is now accepted that there is no simple unitary definition of literacy. Rather literacy is described by a variety of dynamic discourses that define and redefine it in a wide range of ever-changing political, economic and social contexts.

A recent example of the evolving nature of the definition of literacy is provided by the National Adult Literacy Forum's recommendations calling for a redefinition of literacy to address:

- ✧ a focus on individual needs
- ✧ recognition of multiple literacies
- ✧ the constantly evolving nature of literacy
- ✧ the role of literacy in developing human and social capital
- ✧ the idea that literacy affects everyone (Ithaca Group 2004).

Within the broader definition of literacy sits workplace literacy, a particular kind of literacy that falls within what Watson, Nicholson and Sharplin (2001) call a social practice discourse because, 'the work setting requires prior knowledge of content, context and strategies to appropriately select schemas for understanding'. In other words, the workplace is the social context with its own unique literacy demands (Millar 2001), which differ according to the demands of different industries. In addition, within each workplace environment sit multiple literacies, again influenced by both the external and internal environments.

The WELL Programme specifically funds the development of workplace literacy. The WELL definition of literacy is based on the economic imperatives of improving the capacity of working human capital rather than on the social imperatives of welfare and equity. However, despite this

prime economic driver, the WELL Programme's definition also reflects a social approach within the workplace context. The WELL Programme guidelines state:

Literacy has been defined in many different ways. Some definitions focus on the skills needed by individuals for work, education, social interaction and negotiation of everyday living. Others have a more social focus, such as the notion of an empowered community. Literacy provision must be available to all so that adults can fully participate in the labour force; use literacy skills at work; participate in adult education and training; and use literacy at home and in the community. Literacy is not only about skills acquisition but the application of these skills in multiple environments for multiple purposes. Language literacy and numeracy are crucial underpinnings to learning to learn and generic skills and essential skills for the Australian population. (Department of Education, Science and Training 2004)

The WELL practitioner

A critical issue in terms of determining appropriate professional development is the identification of a practitioner. The program is explicit in relation to the qualifications that WELL practitioners must possess. They must have a Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training to meet the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) requirements and 'appropriate qualifications to deliver language, literacy and numeracy training'.

While the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training requirement is very specific, the interpretation of what constitutes 'appropriate qualifications to deliver language, literacy and numeracy training' is not so well defined. Internet-based research into the options for gaining 'appropriate qualifications to deliver language, literacy and numeracy' revealed 49 qualifications delivered by 51 training organisations in Australia. These are presented in appendix A in the support document. The courses range from certificate III through to masters level, delivered in both VET and higher education environments.

The qualification issue has muddied the waters in terms of ascribing a title to a person working within the WELL Programme—are they teachers or trainers and does it matter? The term 'trainer' is often seen as a broad term used to refer to those with a Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training and a specialist industry qualification, rather than a teaching qualification, both of which, in themselves, are insufficient to meet the WELL guidelines. The use of the word 'teacher' is also seen as inappropriate in the workplace context, bearing as it does the image of school-based learning. Use of the term 'practitioner' avoids these complexities. Whatever the nomenclature, it is clear that the role of the WELL practitioner is one that requires the application of language, literacy and numeracy specialist knowledge, along with training and assessment expertise.

While the WELL Programme clearly sits within the VET context, its focus is on the development of adult English language, literacy and numeracy skills within a vocational context. A key outcome is the attainment of vocational skills; however, the understanding and ability to use a range of adult language, literacy and numeracy pedagogies to meet learner needs underpins the success of this program.

In response to the need to ensure a minimum entry-level standard for WELL practitioners, a new course, the Advanced Diploma of Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice in VET, has been developed in South Australia with funding from the Department of Education, Science and Training. The course is currently being reviewed for accreditation and will provide a 'minimum national standard for adult English language, literacy and numeracy teachers' (Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology 2005). Information about this course is provided in appendix B.

Within the workplace context, WELL practitioners may be expected to assist groups of learners requiring support in any or all of language, literacy and numeracy skill development areas. In an effort to address this, three of the four core units within the new Advanced Diploma of Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice in VET specifically cover adult language, literacy and numeracy.

The project

Research purpose

The work environment of WELL practitioners has changed significantly over the past few years and is expected to continue to change in line with industry expectations and the broader VET environment. These changes pose potential tensions for practitioners who have responsibilities to a broad range of stakeholders; practitioners also have to develop and implement sound education and learning programs. How competently practitioners are able to respond to these challenges is, to a significant extent, dependent on their existing skills and the professional development opportunities they have for updating their skills and knowledge.

This project explored the changing nature of training services provided by the WELL Programme in response to the changing needs of industry. By doing this, the project aimed to examine the professional development opportunities currently available to support practitioners, as well as to propose strategies to ensure that future professional development requirements of WELL practitioners will be met.

Geraci (2002) identifies two main purposes for professional development for workplace educators in general:

- ✧ to develop capacity within the field, such as addressing a skills shortage or preparing new entrants
- ✧ to provide ongoing support or specialised training to practitioners already working in workplace education.

For the purposes of this paper, the term ‘professional development’ refers not to the initial qualifications, but to the ongoing development of the practitioner throughout his/her career. However, the need to review and address looming skills shortages, including strategies to prepare new entrants to the field, have also been identified.

Research questions

The scope of the project was framed by the following questions:

- ✧ What is the extent and nature of professional development activities offered to and/or undertaken by WELL practitioners currently?
- ✧ What changes in the nature of WELL Programme training services and the changing needs of industry are impacting, or are likely to impact, on the competencies that WELL practitioners are expected to demonstrate?
- ✧ What competencies are WELL practitioners expected to demonstrate now and in the next five years?
- ✧ What competencies do WELL practitioners have now?
- ✧ What are the priority areas for the professional development of WELL practitioners now and in the next five years?

Methodology

As there has been very little information gathered through previous targeted research about this specialised group of VET practitioners, a number of data-gathering tools were employed.

A literature review was undertaken to ensure that the researchers were aware of most current research and of issues that might impact on this study. The review focused on:

- ✧ the changing nature of work for VET professionals and, either overtly or implicitly, what this says about the changing professional development needs of WELL practitioners
- ✧ the changing nature of work of practitioners and what this says about their professional development needs.

It was expected that this initial analysis would provide the context for the subsequent empirical data-gathering and analysis. While the literature review did provide background information on the changing nature of VET practitioners generally, there has been little research conducted to date on WELL Programme practitioners specifically.

For this study, three data-gathering methods were used: email surveys, telephone/face-to-face interviews and workshops.

Email surveys

In accordance with the original research submission, responses from 45 WELL practitioners across 15 registered training organisations were sought from across Australia.

An initial list of 106 training providers known to be delivering WELL Programme-funded training services across Australia was constructed using information from the Victorian WELL Programme Secretariat, the Manufacturing Learning Victoria WELL network database and the researchers' personal contacts.

An email survey (appendix D) was designed and emailed to managers of 81 training providers asking them to forward the questionnaire to their WELL practitioners, whether full-time, part-time, casual or sessional. Email surveys were returned through self-selection. State characteristics, such as school holidays and the availability of state-based WELL practitioners' networks, such as the one facilitated by Manufacturing Learning Victoria, did influence the timing of returns. As the researchers all came from Victoria, personal relationships influenced the rate of return.

To maximise support for the project, contact was made via telephone with each manager prior to their being emailed the questionnaire. They were given a brief overview of the project, the process for collecting data and asked for the number of possible respondents.

While it is probable that the initial constructed list of WELL training providers was incomplete, this was not seen to be a critical issue, as there were significantly more contacts than were required for this project.

The data collected through the email survey are provided in appendix C. A description of the survey sample is provided in appendix I.

Respondents to the email survey were invited to participate in follow-up telephone/face-to-face interviews.

Telephone/face to face interviews

Two questionnaires were designed for telephone/or face-to-face interviews, one targeting WELL practitioners and the other targeting WELL Programme managers.

The questionnaire designed for practitioners (appendix E) aimed to explore some of the key issues that had been identified through the emailed questionnaires. It also allowed for the expression of individual views and stories, that some practitioners may have been reticent to voice in more public forums.

The other questionnaire was designed for managers (appendix F). Although this group was not originally included in the research proposal, it was decided to include them as an interview subset, as perceptions of both current and future issues impacting on WELL practitioners and the role of professional development from their perspective were possibly different from views held by practitioners, since the latter manage the business side of the WELL Programme and not necessarily the training delivery.

The results from the telephone/face-to-face interviews is presented in appendix J (practitioners) and appendix K (managers).

Workshops

Two workshops were also held. These were organised by Manufacturing Learning Victoria as part of their WELL practitioner network meetings. The function of the first workshop, attended by 26 people, was to explore some of the issues identified in the email survey. At the second workshop, discussion centred on the findings arising from the research. Workshop group participants were both practitioners and managers. The workshops were seen as important adjuncts to the email surveys and the interviews, as they allowed for the abstraction of issues from the personal to the general, and enabled the researchers to determine the extent to which the personal stories resonated across the sector. The workshops also enabled more generalised discussion about the sector, thus allowing the personal stories to be situated within the big picture environment.

A report from the workshop held in Sydney is provided in appendix G.

Limitations and why they matter

- ✧ The methodology included a small sample size and did not discourage multiple replies from registered training organisations. A more appropriate methodology might have been to target one WELL practitioner from each of the 45 different registered training organisations.
- ✧ There were only three surveys received from casual practitioners. This may have been because they are paid on an hourly rate and saw little value in completing the survey. This potentially skews the results, as they reflect the perspectives of permanent practitioners which may be different from those of casual and sessional staff.
- ✧ Although WELL Programme managers were very supportive when contacted and asked to send out the survey to their practitioners, dealing with managers rather than directly with practitioners adds a layer of complexity.
- ✧ School holidays vary across states and this impacted on the timing of the project—both in terms of sending out the survey and conducting follow-up interviews. Future projects involving public institutions need to take this into account during the planning stage.
- ✧ WELL practitioners are often based in industry, making it difficult to initiate contact and arrange times for follow-up interviews. In states where low responses were received, follow-up contact was made.
- ✧ The responses are from current practitioners only. Had we been able to access potential WELL practitioners, possibly coming from different pathways, it is possible that their responses would have been quite different. This a topic for a possible future research project into the untapped WELL Programme workforce.

- ✧ There is scope for further research within enterprises to interview employers, learners and WELL practitioners to identify how the program can be value-added and how professional development needs and opportunities can be better identified.

Reading the report

The literature review provides the context for understanding the workplace environment of WELL practitioners and identifies a number of key issues to be addressed through the research.

The section on findings provides an analysis of the data obtained in this study in answer to the research questions.

The final section identifies issues of interest for both policy-makers and program managers.

Literature review

The following is a summary of the literature review undertaken for this paper. The full literature review is provided in appendix H.

The WELL practitioner

There is limited information available about WELL practitioners in relation to their professional development needs or otherwise.

The Department of Education, Science and Training requires WELL practitioners to hold a Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training and an 'appropriate qualifications to deliver language, literacy and numeracy training' (Department of Education, Science and Training 2004). A new course developed by the South Australian Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology, the Advanced Diploma of Language, Literacy and Numeracy, available in 2006, has been designed to address the language, literacy and numeracy qualification requirement. It is anticipated that this qualification will address the range of skills and knowledge required for delivery of language, literacy and numeracy in the workplace in conjunction with the training and assessing qualification (TAA04).

The WELL practitioner is a VET practitioner with a language, literacy and numeracy specialisation working within the Australian workforce. Therefore the changes that impact upon Australian workers and VET workers also impact WELL practitioners, with implications for their current and future professional development needs.

The nature of employment for all Australians is being affected by globalisation, the nature and pace of technological change, a better educated and higher-income community, and productivity growth (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2003). This affects both the WELL practitioner and the clients they work with.

In addition, the VET sector has been changing for the past 15 years, driven by policy, and is expected to continue to do so. This impacts on the nature of employment within the VET sector. Studies (Dickie et al. 2004; Harris et al. 2001; Harris, Symons & Clayton 2005; McGuirk, Boothroyd & Highet 2001; Chappell & Johnston 2003) report significant employment trends in the VET workforce, including increasing casualisation, diversification, fragmentation and an increasingly ageing workforce.

The role of the VET practitioner is also being affected by these changes. Work roles and places have expanded, work roles have diversified, the balance between work and role has changed, and dilemmas and tensions in work are increasing (NCVER 2004a).

The position of language, literacy and numeracy in VET has changed from a bolted-on approach to an integrated built-in approach, blurring the boundary between the VET content practitioner and the VET language, literacy and numeracy specialist or WELL practitioner.

The WELL practitioner can also be considered a subset of the language, literacy and numeracy workforce by virtue of their common area of specialisation. This workforce is a predominantly female and ageing workforce (McGuirk, Boothroyd & Highet 2001) which accords with the

National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER 2004b) figures which found that VET teachers were significantly older than the general Australian labour force.

The WELL practitioner is different from the rest of the language, literacy and numeracy workforce in significant ways.

- ✧ They specialise in workplace literacy in contrast to the broader concept of literacy.
- ✧ They are committed to the drivers of industry and the economic imperative as opposed to a commitment to empowerment and public good (McKenna & Fitzpatrick 2004).
- ✧ They also perform very different roles and demonstrate different skills more akin to the VET practitioner.

The role of the literacy and numeracy practitioner in the workplace includes the following: workplace trainer; consultant with liaison and negotiation skills; project manager; team teacher; interpreter of standards; professional teaching advisor supporting other VET trainers; professional development facilitator; assessor advisor; developer of customised training; developer of resources for assessment; entrepreneur with political skills and industry specialist and resource (Watson, Nicholson & Sharplin 2001).

The literature search and the recorded experience of WELL practitioners indicate that the skills required are: flexibility to work well within macro and micro changing environments; negotiation skills to meet the sometimes competing needs of a range of stakeholders; understanding of learning issues sometimes faced by adult learners; ability to work cooperatively with workplace/content specialists; ability to work independently, often in isolation from colleagues; ability to perform various roles, some of which are outside traditional teaching roles; and the ability to use and adapt different modes of delivery, depending on the learner, workplace and literacy requirements.

They also need to keep abreast of emerging literacies. Foster and Beddie (2005) argue that traditional understandings of literacy need to change to reflect different and emerging ways of communicating. As they note: 'New technologies integrate separate modes of communication. Literacy and information and communication technology are enmeshed to the point that it may be inappropriate to treat them separately'. Harris, Simons and Clayton (2005) also found in their study that, over the next five years, technology will have the greatest impact on practitioners' work.

Professional development

Professional development is a not only a matter of Australian Quality Training Framework compliance for registered training organisations, it is critical in an environment of constant change as the role of the WELL practitioner becomes more complex.

The reduction and lack of professional development opportunities has been noted by several researchers (Harris, Simons & Clayton 2005; Chan Lee & Thompson 2001; McKenna & Fitzpatrick 2004).

Harris et al.'s 2001 report found that only half the VET workforce has the capabilities needed to meet critical future challenges. These challenges include operating in a competitive market; keeping up to date with changes in vocational training and education; understanding of the role of flexible delivery; understanding and working with training packages; and using technology. These are all areas relevant to the WELL practitioner. Foster and Beddie (2005, p.6) note that, without professional development, the system will not have '... the capacity to cater for contemporary adult language, literacy and numeracy policy and practice'.

Current professional development opportunities include:

- ✧ Reframing the Future: a national staff development program for VET professionals in relation to the implementation of the national training system and funded by the Department of Education, Science and Training
- ✧ Flexible Learning Initiatives: funded by the Australian Flexible Learning Framework to provide professional development on technologies required for flexible learning environments for VET professionals
- ✧ professional development for equity
- ✧ conferences such as those facilitated by the Australian Council for Adult Literacy, the Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association and NCVER
- ✧ in-house sessions and team meetings offered by some providers where practitioners can exchange ideas and participate in collegiate networking
- ✧ industry training advisory bodies providing networking sessions for WELL practitioners such as those offered by Manufacturing Learning Victoria.

Geraci (2002) identifies the benefits of delivering professional development in stages to avoid the trap of information overload. She also suggests a flexible model where professional development is accessed by practitioners as needed and contains a mentored component. Others such as Harris, Simons and Clayton (2005) also identified key areas that need to be addressed for successful professional development, including identification of needs by all stakeholders and negotiating access by all staff.

Findings

Research questions

This section of the report analyses the information sourced through the literature search, email surveys, telephone/face-to-face interviews and workshops in response to the five research questions.

Research question 1: What is the extent and nature of professional development activities offered to and/or undertaken by WELL practitioners currently?

Moving into the WELL Programme involves significant shifts, not only in actual employment conditions, but often in changing perceptions of self as a teacher. It requires a shift from the mental image of teacher and the pedagogies associated with teaching to that of trainer, facilitator, change agent, mentor and mediator. Each of these manifestations requires a different way of viewing the world and of engaging with the learner and other stakeholders. This section therefore explores the support required and offered to both new and experienced WELL practitioners.

Induction

Practitioners were asked to comment on their induction into the WELL Programme and the professional development they received to make the transition as shown in (table 1). The most common form was mentoring either by the WELL Programme manager or by a more experienced WELL practitioner. The use of the term ‘mentoring’ was used to describe a range of activities from a formal program to casual discussions with other practitioners.

Table 1: Professional development on entry to the WELL Programme

Professional development on entry	Number and percentage
Mentored by manager and/or other staff	18 (43%)
Other, such as Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings Scale, information and communication technologies	11 (26%)
None	8 (19%)
National Reporting System workshop	7 (17%)
Workshops such as Australian Council for Adult Literacy, specific network meetings	7 (17%)
Staff meetings	3 (7%)
Formal induction program	1 (2%)

Given that 19% of survey respondents reported that they had received no induction, it is possible that a significant number of new WELL practitioners are not adequately prepared for the new environments, roles and challenges they will be expected to confront. It is hardly surprising therefore if, as some researchers have claimed (see McKenna & Fitzpatrick 2004), they then tend to rely on inappropriate forms of engaging with the new teaching/training environment, given that they are influenced by traditional views of literacy and teaching practice.

It is possible however, that the figures are misleading. Practitioners were not asked to define what they meant by professional development and if, for example, only formal programs are seen as

professional development, then support such as mentoring may not have been identified by all respondents.

All managers but one indicated that all new WELL practitioners were offered professional development support on entering the program. Mentoring was again cited as the most utilised form. In most cases this was a formally designed program involving both the WELL Programme coordinator and experienced staff. In one case, shadowing was also being trialled as a component of the program. One provider had formalised the process in a booklet which was given to all new practitioners. Another provider said the support was informal and focused on learning how to customise materials and approaches, while another stressed the importance of showing new practitioners how to identify the language, literacy and numeracy components of training packages. The provider where no support was offered was a regional TAFE institute. This respondent claimed that there were no funds to allow new WELL practitioners to either travel to the main campus or to meet for collegiate support.

The difference between responses by practitioners and managers is quite significant. Again this could be due to a difference in perception of what constitutes professional development.

Recent professional development undertaken

Most respondents indicated that there was little professional development available and virtually nothing that was specifically targeted to WELL practitioners. Yet WELL practitioners, along with other VET staff, are subject to continuing and increasing pressure, due to changing environments and the concomitant need to respond to multiple stakeholders and take on additional roles.

Over the years practitioners' work roles have expanded from a largely single focus on teaching to a broad range of other responsibilities. Respondents were asked to indicate the roles they were now expected to perform, what support they had been given prior to taking on these additional responsibilities, and how confident they felt in performing them. Table 2 summarises their responses.

Table 2: Role of the WELL practitioner

Roles	Number of respondents who:		
	have performed role	have received professional development	feel confident to perform role
Workplace practitioner	42	24	32
Consulting, including liaising and negotiating	34	11	30
Developer of customised training	34	15	23
Report writer	26	2	21
Developer of resources for assessment	26	13	26
Interpreter of standards	24	12	24
Team teacher	23	9	23
Project manager	22	6	18
WELL Programme application writer	20	1	12
Professional teaching advisor to other VET practitioners	19	4	16
Professional development facilitator	19	3	17
Assessor advisor	17	9	14
Industry specialist and resource	13	3	12
Entrepreneur with political skills	9	1	12

It is clear that a significant number of practitioners perform a diverse range of roles, including consultation and management roles. These roles add a significant level of responsibility, and practitioners appear to have taken these on without any training. Yet practitioners are often seen as

the face of the registered training organisation, and the credibility of the provider and, indeed, the WELL Programme may stand or fall on the relationship of the practitioner with the enterprise.

Nature and extent of professional development offered

Managers were asked to identify what professional development opportunities were offered to staff to ensure their currency of knowledge, for example, on current industrial and workplace issues. Managers commented on the difficulty experienced finding time to get staff together. In response to this question one manager commented that they were hoping to schedule a full-day program at the end of the year during industry downtime.

Professional development activities included:

- ✧ mentoring
- ✧ team meetings
- ✧ creating opportunities for collegiate support
- ✧ structured WELL Programme training days
- ✧ National Reporting System workshops
- ✧ Australian Quality Training Framework updates
- ✧ access to general college VET professional development, such as budgeting, project management
- ✧ access to external opportunities such as conferences, workshops, assessor networks.

Some managers also commented that, as professionals, staff are expected to take on some level of responsibility for maintaining their own level of expertise. When asked whether contract, casual and sessional staff are paid to attend professional development sessions, there was considerable variation between responses. There was no consistency amongst managers from either public or private registered training organisations in relation to payment, with one enterprise-based registered training organisation not offering payment to WELL practitioners to attend any professional development sessions.

Practitioners did not report the same level of professional development undertaken, as would be expected given the managers' responses. Most commented that there was little opportunity to meet with colleagues even within the registered training organisation, partly because the provider did not schedule regular meetings, and partly because staff work on different days and different shifts; it is difficult therefore to agree on suitable times for meetings. A few sessional staff from public providers claimed they were not eligible to attend professional development. It is not clear whether they meant they would not be paid to attend, as is more likely, or whether they were not able to attend in any capacity.

It appears from the results of this survey that relatively few practitioners have had access to professional development over the past two years. It is not clear, however, whether this is because there are diminishing professional development opportunities available (Chan Lee & Thompson 2001; McKenna & Fitzpatrick 2004), whether what was on offer was not seen as relevant and challenging, or whether, if practitioners are not paid, they do not access the available opportunities—or a combination of these. One respondent commented that, although they were prepared to take up what was on offer, they found that external professional development tended to be 'hit and miss' in terms of relevance for WELL Programme delivery.

Table 3 shows the professional development opportunities attended by surveyed practitioners over the past two years.

Table 3: Recent professional development opportunities

Professional development opportunity	Number and percentage
VET-related workshops such as safety, computers	16 (38%)
None	15 (36%)
Conferences	9 (21%)
Language, literacy and numeracy workshops, including the National Reporting System	7 (17%)
Networking, such as Manufacturing Learning Victoria sessions	7 (17%)
Team meetings	3 (7%)
Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training	6 (14%)
Reading professional journals	1 (2%)
Updates from skills councils, industry training advisory bodies, the Australian National Training Authority, the Department of Education, Science and Training	1 (2%)
Mentoring	1 (2%)
Other	1 (2%)

These results also accord with those found by Harris, Simons and Clayton (2005) where respondents commented on the ‘... lack of accessibility to ongoing professional development for vocational education and training teachers and trainers’ (p.35). It is of concern that 36% claimed to have undertaken no form of learning they defined as professional development over the past two years.

In light of the limited professional development opportunities apparently available, it is interesting to view how many practitioners are members of professional associations as shown in table 4.

Table 4: Membership of professional associations

Professional association	Number and percentage
Language, literacy and numeracy, such as Australian Council of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages Association, Australian Council for Adult Literacy	9 (21%)
Other	5 (12%)
VET-related such as VISTA (the Association of VET Professionals)	1 (2%)
Assessor network	1 (2%)
Content-related	1 (2%)

The limited response could be due to the fact that most institutions are members of the relevant professional associations, so the respondents, predominantly permanent employees, feel they do not need to join. As workloads increase, practitioners may feel that membership of a professional association is just an extra pressure; furthermore, it is possible that WELL practitioners do not feel that these associations reflect their needs.

Research question 2: What changes in the nature of WELL Programme training services and the changing needs of industry are impacting, or are likely to impact, on the competencies that WELL practitioners are expected to demonstrate?

In the follow-up interviews practitioners and managers were asked how the WELL Programme has changed over the past five years and how they think it will change over the next five years. In light of these predicted changes, they were also asked to identify what new attributes, skills and knowledge will be required of WELL practitioners and what professional development opportunities need to be established to prepare practitioners to meet these challenges.

Respondents felt that there had been some significant shifts in the program over the past five years. Foremost amongst these is the stronger focus on VET and the integration of language, literacy and numeracy into training packages, with an increased emphasis on qualifications and the attainment of training package competencies. This in turn has meant that many WELL practitioners are now spending more time with content specialists, either from the enterprise or the provider. In some cases this may be for the purpose of obtaining background information, but also extends to co-designing, co-delivery and co-assessing.

Other changes include a more flexible interpretation of language, literacy and numeracy, which has led to a broadening of the WELL Programme to fund training at certificate III and certificate IV levels, for example, frontline management competencies from the Business Services Training Package. Practitioners have therefore had to work with different target groups and with a broader spectrum of needs.

In order to meet Australian Quality Training Framework requirements, WELL practitioners have had to see themselves as more than language, literacy and numeracy teachers, as they may also be required to hold qualifications in industry-specific modules, such as occupational health and safety, environment and customer service. Opportunities for professional development in these areas were accessed by 38% of respondents.

Some practitioners remarked that some companies see the WELL practitioner as unofficial industry trainers, and that 'there has been a shift from a language focus to a support with an industry focus and now could be described as being content-driven with a language overlay'. A number of practitioners voiced concern that the workplace focus is detracting from the development of workplace language, literacy and numeracy skills. This in turn is causing tension between the language, literacy and numeracy workplace specialist and the VET content specialist. These tensions are reflected in the findings of Falk and Millar (2001) who pointed out that there is a potential for diminishing quality in provision due to a lack of trainer literacy expertise, lack of resources and lack of clearly specified literacy requirements. While the VET content is clearly important, it was felt that on-the-job trainers could largely cover this, but the skills of the qualified language, literacy and numeracy specialist ensure 'a more holistic approach'.

This reflects concerns about the decreasing language, literacy and numeracy focus in workplace training by some practitioners. In their study, Chan Lee and Thompson (2001, p.25) quoted respondents as being anxious that 'industry and other vocational education and training providers [would] put their own trainers through a short program based on one or two literacy/numeracy competencies and then use these trainers to do the work of literacy/numeracy specialists'.

Harris, Simon and Clayton (2005, p.21) state that evidence suggests that the number of VET practitioners engaged in 'holistic' delivery of training is shrinking, with a greater number being given responsibility for a limited number of tasks. In the case of WELL practitioners, the range of tasks and duties has expanded, with these practitioners feeling that this has detracted from their ability to focus on training.

The United States Department of Education's (*PRO-NET 2000* [2002]) resource package provides an insight into the valuable skills and knowledge that the language, literacy and numeracy specialist brings to the workplace, while highlighting those skills areas critical to workplace delivery.

On the other hand, it could be argued that the skills required by WELL practitioners to meet their increasing range of responsibilities offer exciting opportunities for professional and self-development. Practitioner concerns largely centre on potential changes to qualifications requirements for WELL practitioners and what this means for the language, literacy and numeracy specialist. This concern may be resolved through the introduction of the Advanced Diploma in Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice in VET.

The Strategic Professional Development Project Report (Department of Education and Training [Queensland] 2002) provides a broad overview of the professional development needs of VET

stakeholders. It looks at five key components: working with the client base; training system knowledge; teaching and learning management skills; industry currency; and organisational capacity-building. These areas of development align with those identified in this study for the WELL practitioners.

This may be reflected in practitioner personal experience of the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training. Harris, Simons and Clayton also found that, amongst their respondents, many practitioners believe that acceptance of this qualification as the baseline qualification for training and assessment in VET is not conducive to 'lifting professionalism' (2005, p.67). It could be argued that this view is influenced by practitioners wanting to protect their own area of expertise. However, the dilemma has been articulated consistently by practitioners across a range of programs, and consistently raised in terms of the quality of the teaching and learning process. The new Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA04) qualification, endorsed in 2004 and being implemented in 2005, was designed with many of these quality issues in mind. It is too early to tell if this qualification goes any way towards alleviating the perception of lack of quality and whether it will be better received than its previous counterpart, the Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment. Implementation practices have played a key role in ensuring stakeholder acceptance of this new VET qualification and so should be monitored closely.

Research question 3: What competencies are WELL practitioners expected to demonstrate now and in the next five years?

Managers were asked to identify what new roles and activities practitioners are expected to perform as a result of the changing work environment.

Their comments included:

- ✧ need to take up certification in relevant areas, such as occupational health and safety
- ✧ participation in assessment validation
- ✧ greater administrative responsibilities
- ✧ negotiation with a broader range of stakeholders
- ✧ involvement in a number of industry training packages.

This last point also relates to a significant issue for WELL practitioners—one in which they currently feel unsupported.

There is an expectation that WELL practitioners have the ability to move from industry to industry and pick up the skills and knowledge required to interact within diverse workplaces with minimal or no professional development. Practitioners were asked to indicate how many industries they have worked in since working in the WELL Programme; this ranged from one to 15; they were then asked how many industries they had worked in during 2004. This ranged from zero (these practitioners had only started working in the program during 2005) to six. This was then followed by a question relating to the professional development they had received prior to commencing work in a new industry. Respondents indicated that they had called upon other WELL practitioners they knew either at the same registered training organisation or through other contacts for peer support or information exchange; however, they noted that, generally, their employers considered that it was their own responsibility to gather the necessary information. Although a number of respondents commented that they felt quite confident in developing new content knowledge, the main difficulty was the lack of paid time for this type of collegiate networking available for those who were not full-time. They felt that their experience working in one industry allowed them to transfer their understanding of the needs of industry across different industry sectors. They commented that the issues were similar, and it was a matter of learning about the specifics of an enterprise in order to embed those issues within a relevant context.

All respondents indicated that they relied heavily on personnel within the enterprise to provide the requisite content information.

The main forms of information sources were:

- ✧ company personnel
- ✧ internet
- ✧ skills councils/industry training advisory bodies
- ✧ colleagues.

Some practitioners commented on the frustration in not necessarily being able to build on knowledge gained in a particular industry sector because it was possible that the registered training organisation may not have another company in that sector. This led to a loss of potential expertise and a sense of frustration for the practitioner. The lack of any formal WELL Programme-sponsored professional development or networking opportunities meant that the skills and knowledge gained by any one practitioner are often not shared across the system, which in turn meant that practitioners may be developing programs and materials unnecessarily. This finding is in line with other studies in which teachers have commented on the lack of 'interaction with other staff' (Harris, Simons & Clayton 2005, p.35).

Contrary to the view expressed by many practitioners, most, but not all, managers believe that they do offer support to practitioners moving from industry to industry. They acknowledge the need for practitioners to constantly update their knowledge, but also point out that it is the nature of the WELL Programme for practitioners move from industry to industry, sector to sector and company to company.

Support is offered through:

- ✧ being mentored by someone who has worked in that industry
- ✧ having access to all support materials developed
- ✧ accompanying the practitioner to the company
- ✧ working through training packages together
- ✧ being available as a point of advice.

Working in the WELL Programme requires flexibility, not only in working across a number of industries, but working with a number of stakeholders. Forty-eight per cent of the respondents have a background of working in a traditional college or school environment. Working in the WELL Programme means that practitioners work with a different range of stakeholders who have different competing interests and agendas. The project sought to establish whether practitioners believed they were supported in developing the skills to manage these workplace situations by their managers and/or through professional development opportunities.

Most respondents had been in situations where the expectations of purpose and outcomes are not shared by all stakeholders. Practitioners believe that, in many cases, companies see them as change agents, wanting them to assist in implementing policies and procedures that may not have been part of the original WELL Programme application. In these circumstances most practitioners will refer the company back to the WELL Programme coordinator. Practitioners are often called in to assist with the implementation of workplace change by supporting workers to deal with the changed communication practices that may arise as a result of these changes. Some practitioners expressed concern in relation to their role in supporting the implementation of change, considering that this is beyond their brief and their expertise.

Language, literacy and numeracy provide a valuable tool in assisting companies to implement policies and procedures which also help in addressing morale and company relationship issues. These may provide new challenges for the WELL practitioner and require a commitment of time in

order to embed new learning practices; and necessary management support to enable them to understand these processes.

Respondents in this study commented on the challenges they face in maintaining impartiality, but noted that it can be difficult for the inexperienced WELL practitioner to avoid being drawn into specific enterprise issues. Tensions between different stakeholders in an enterprise may require the practitioner to facilitate sensitively communication between the different groups.

Competing interests and their related tensions were also deemed to be areas of concern to managers. Most believed that their practitioners were supported, and had implemented a number of strategies to deal with these issues. Only one manager indicated that they were addressed in a systematic way in an orientation program, although all managers, except the one based in a regional community setting, used one or more of the following strategies:

- ✧ mentoring
- ✧ holding regular team meetings
- ✧ discussing roles with companies prior to starting a program
- ✧ holding registered training organisation/company meetings
- ✧ providing professional development on issues such as understanding industrial contexts.

Research question 4: What competencies do WELL practitioners have now?

In order to estimate the skills and supporting professional development that will be needed in the future, it is necessary to understand the current situation.

Details of the background of participants can be found in appendix C, but in summary at least some of these data support findings reported by previous researchers in relation to VET practitioners in general.

Demographics and employment status

The large majority of practitioners who responded were female (71%) and 50% were aged between 51 and 60 years of age. Only 19% were under 40 years of age and none was under 30. This accords with NCVET (2004) figures that found that VET teachers were significantly older than the general Australian labour force. Based on earlier research (see Harris, Simons & Clayton 2005, p.28), we could hypothesise that perhaps another reason for the WELL practitioner cohort being older is the change in employment practices, whereby a significant number of VET practitioners are employed on short-term contracts or as sessionals and casuals. This may be less attractive for practitioners wanting a full-time career. For practitioners in the latter part of their career, having the flexibility to work part-time and even sessionally may suit their lifestyle. However, as detailed in the table 5, in terms of employment status, the findings from this research were surprisingly different, in that the WELL practitioners who responded to the email survey were mostly (66%) permanently employed and full-time (45%).

This could be due to a number of factors. Firstly, the sample size is relatively small, reflecting the status of those who chose to respond to the questionnaire. It is also possible that those employed casually or sessionally would have to complete the questionnaire in their own time (unpaid) and therefore chose not to respond.

TAFE managers varied from employing staff entirely as casuals to having a mix of permanent, contract and casual staff. All but one private registered training organisation employed staff on a contractual basis, whether full- or part-time, for the duration of the WELL Programme contract. The registered training organisation that was the exception employs on a monthly basis.

Table 5: Employment status of WELL practitioners

Employment status	Number and percentage of respondents
Permanent full-time	20 (45%)
Permanent part-time	9 (21%)
Contract self employed	6 (14%)
Contract full-time	3 (7%)
Casual part-time	3 (7%)
Contract part-time	1 (2%)
Total	42

According to research by Harris, Simons and Clayton (2005) on the increasing numbers of practitioners employed on a sessional or casual basis, we expect to find that a number of practitioners would be employed by more than one registered training organisation. This was not reflected in this sample. This is consistent with the finding that the majority of respondents were employed on a permanent basis, either full-time or part-time as shown in table 5.

Qualifications held and sought

The qualifications of respondents are shown in table 6. Most respondents reported a Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training and an undergraduate and postgraduate qualification. Seventy-nine per cent had an undergraduate teaching qualification; 15% of this group reported that they had English as a second language as a teaching method, and 45% had a postgraduate English as a second language or adult literacy qualification.

Table 6: Qualifications held by WELL practitioners

Qualification	Number and percentage
Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training	36 (86%)
Undergraduate degree—teaching	33 (79%)
Undergraduate degree—non-teaching	21 (50%)
Postgraduate—TESOL/adult literacy	19 (45%)
Postgraduate—education	8 (19%)
Other TESOL/Adult Literacy qualification	8 (19%)

Note: TESOL = Teaching English to speakers of other languages

The 2004 NCVER study (2004b) found that less than 30% of VET practitioners held a bachelor degree, with less than 20% holding a postgraduate qualification. One in three TAFE VET practitioners have an education and training qualification but only one in ten VET practitioners working for non-TAFE providers have an education or training qualification. This report does not provide information specifically on the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training.

It is interesting that 14% of the respondents did not cite the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training as a qualification held, although it is a requirement for working in the WELL Programme. In the face-to-face/telephone interviews practitioners were specifically asked whether the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training had been of any value. The responses were varied; this could be as a result of their own experience with this certificate and whether they accessed this qualification via recognition of prior learning or via a condensed course. One respondent specifically made the point that it might be useful for a teacher moving into industry from a structured classroom environment. Another respondent felt that, for industry personnel wanting to move into the VET sector, it would provide useful skills. All respondents claimed that they had enrolled only because it was a mandatory requirement and that they had not learnt anything new. In some cases this was because they were simply given recognition of prior learning by their providers. Others who had undertaken the course felt that the time allocated was too short

to be able to explore any issues in depth. In other words, in some cases the implementation issues associated with delivery impacted on the rigour and quality of the qualification. Practitioners also believed that they had already developed an understanding of the VET environment and the specific skills required to develop language, literacy and numeracy training programs for adult learners within the workplace.

The figures in table 6 also reflect the qualifications that managers in this survey said they look for when employing practitioners to work in the WELL Programme. All managers said they required a teaching qualification in teaching English to speakers of other languages or adult literacy as well as the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training. Industry-specific qualifications were not raised by any manager as a prerequisite. This may be a reflection of the manager's own pathway into the WELL Programme and may be limiting entrants from a diversity of qualifications and skills backgrounds.

Pathways into the WELL Programme

The research also found that the traditional pathway into WELL Programme delivery is via teaching, with almost half of the respondents citing the adult literacy field as a site(s) for previous employment. Some respondents cited more than one category. This is shown in table 7.

Table 7: Employment history of WELL practitioners

Previous employment	Number and percentage
Adult literacy	19 (45%)
Teacher—secondary	12 (29%)
Teacher—primary	8 (19%)
TAFE—non language, literacy and numeracy	6 (14%)
Industry—other	6 (14%)
Industry trainer	4 (9%)
Other educator	3 (7%)

Practitioners were asked to describe their pathway into the program. Table 8 shows that the majority either saw an advertisement or heard of a position and applied, looking for a change in direction.

Table 8: Pathway into the WELL Programme

Pathway	Number and percentage
Applied for work through own interest	21 (50%)
Approached by WELL Programme coordinator	15 (36%)
Approached by other staff e.g. Head of Department	2 (5%)
Brought in by industry	1 (2%)
Other	3 (7%)

Skills and attributes

Given the comments made by researchers (McKenna & Fitzpatrick 2004), about the (in)ability of teachers practised in teaching school-aged children in a structured classroom-based environment to adjust their practice to teaching adults within the work environment, it is useful to look at the skills and attributes that WELL practitioners believe are important for this area of work.

All respondents identified that WELL Programme practitioner need to be:

- ✧ flexible
- ✧ able to think on their feet

- ✧ tactful
- ✧ able to act with integrity
- ✧ responsive to the needs of all stakeholders
- ✧ aware of different agendas, including personal agendas
- ✧ able to demonstrate good communication skills
- ✧ independent workers
- ✧ assertive.

The managers' list of the key skills and attributes they would look for when employing WELL practitioners is almost identical. They reported that a practitioner should be:

- ✧ flexible
- ✧ adaptable
- ✧ empathetic
- ✧ non-judgemental
- ✧ confident and experienced in dealing with adults
- ✧ able to demonstrate good communication skills
- ✧ enthusiastic
- ✧ conscientious
- ✧ able to self-reflect and evaluate practice
- ✧ able to demonstrate good time management skills
- ✧ autonomous and independent.

Some managers made the point that the transition to the workplace can be quite challenging, as it requires a broadening of approaches from a strictly adult learner-centred focus to a multi-stakeholder-focused approach. Stakeholders, including the registered training organisation, enterprise managers, employees and the Department of Education, Science and Training, impact on the work of the WELL practitioner and the practitioner needs to balance the demands of each.

WELL Programme managers were also asked what, if any, experience they required of potential staff. Responses included:

- ✧ minimum of one year teaching
- ✧ experience working with adults
- ✧ industry experience with a language, literacy and numeracy focus
- ✧ knowledge of the National Reporting System.

Some commented that it depended on the program.

Some managers indicated that previous industry experience is ideal, although this does not have to be in a specific industry. The ability to understand workplace culture is important; however, the specific content knowledge and cultural differences between industries and enterprises can be learnt by the right person.

They were then asked whether they had experienced any difficulties in recruiting appropriate staff. About half of the managers have had some difficulty recruiting staff with the preferred qualifications and requisite experience. This largely reflects the fact that there are not enough practitioners with the qualifications and experience who can, or want to, adapt to the demands of working within a WELL Programme. This may be due to the hours that practitioners may be

expected to work to enable coverage of all shifts and to accommodate downtimes within a specific company. Managers from regional registered training organisations also commented on the additional difficulties associated with the need to travel quite long distances in country areas. These requirements are shared by all VET practitioners.

Research question 5: What are the priority areas for the professional development of WELL practitioners now and in the next five years?

Practitioners felt that the next five years were likely to bring a continuation of changes, both in terms of their own employment and in the workplaces where programs are implemented. They stressed the future need for networking opportunities which link to the WELL Programme, such as workshops, seminars, validation meetings and the potential for online facilitation. Networking provides opportunities to break down the isolation that comes with working in the WELL Programme and allows for the sharing of ideas and resources. One practitioner commented that this needed to be formalised to ensure that WELL practitioners were up to date with content and pedagogy.

WELL Programme managers looked at future needs from two perspectives: the industrial/economic environment and the impact of this on teaching practice. They saw an increasing focus on integration of language, literacy and numeracy with workplace competence, leading to closer relationships between the language, literacy and numeracy specialist and the content specialist. Some felt that this would lead to even greater fragmentation of work for the WELL practitioner, as they will be required to move between more sites. WELL practitioners are likely to have to take on greater administrative responsibilities to accommodate Australian Quality Training Framework compliance and assessment validation. Managers saw a need for professional development in the following areas:

- ✧ collaborative work with content specialists
- ✧ strategies and methods of working more flexibly in the workplace
- ✧ use of alternative modes of delivery such as information and communication technologies
- ✧ flexible resource design
- ✧ development of sophisticated web-based search skills
- ✧ customisation of resources.

Geraci (2002) also lists the broad areas for workplace educators. These include: principles and philosophical underpinnings of adult education; understanding of the workplace; program set-up, and curriculum development and instruction.

Main points in response to research questions

Both practitioners and managers felt that the key driver for change in the WELL Programme has been the push to integrate language, literacy and numeracy with the delivery of workplace skills.

One of the critical issues identified is the ageing population of WELL practitioners, with apparently small numbers of practitioners joining the field.

Gathering accurate and timely information, such as statistics on the WELL workforce, will be essential to enable the development of appropriate strategies to attract and retain a highly skilled and experienced body of professionals.

Currently, the WELL Programme consists of highly qualified practitioners, but strategies will need to be implemented to attract new practitioners with appropriate qualifications and the appropriate skills and understanding of the complex work environment in which they will be operating.

The Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training is one avenue by which vocational knowledge can be obtained, although respondents to this survey displayed mixed feelings about it. A qualification which incorporates language, literacy and numeracy skills in a workplace context would be a valuable pathway into the WELL practitioner role. The new Advanced Diploma of Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice in VET, with its emphasis on adult language, literacy and numeracy within a VET context, particularly if it allows for more in-depth study and analysis of current VET issues, may meet this need—in conjunction with the Training and Assessment (TAA04) qualification.

An increasing focus on the achievement of industry qualifications has led to a perception of a possible deprofessionalism of the WELL practitioner, especially if enterprises move the focus of the WELL Programme delivery away from language, literacy and numeracy support.

While practitioners and managers were largely in agreement on the roles required of WELL practitioners, there was some disparity between the support and professional development that managers believed they offered and that which practitioners believed they received.

Most practitioners did not identify any degree of substantial participation in professional development activities, including membership of professional associations. Furthermore, they considered that the updating of their knowledge is not primarily gained through any collegiate activity, but rather through their own independent efforts. WELL practitioners need to have the opportunity to participate in both formal and informal professional development.

Managers take a holistic view, identifying the primary professional development needs as strategies to work more effectively in the workplace and closely with content specialists, to develop more highly sophisticated web-based skills as an aid for resource development, and an ability to customise these to effectively meet the needs of a range of learners.

Implications for policy and/or practice

This research has been concerned with investigating the impact of the changing VET environment on the work of the WELL practitioner, both now and in the future. In light of the multiple roles expected of practitioners, the research sought to identify what professional development is currently available to support practitioners and what professional development is considered necessary to support WELL practitioners in the future.

WELL practitioners are crucial contributors to the successful achievement of VET outcomes, not only for individual learners, but for the industries in which they are employed. Given the role they play in supporting the implementation of change, it is imperative that they are kept abreast of macro and micro changes in the areas of policy and economics (figure 1). The emergence of new forms of literacy is likely to have implications for practice. Attending to practitioners' needs for professional development will help to ensure the quality of the teaching and learning that occurs through the WELL Programme.

In this section implications for future action arising from the study are explored.

Competencies required for WELL practitioners in the future

Fundamental to the identification of future professional development needs is an understanding of the identity of the WELL practitioner of the future and their likely pathways into the program. With declining enrolments and fewer opportunities to access higher education qualifications in teaching English to speakers of other languages or adult literacy, it is likely that the Advanced Diploma of Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice in VET will become the national minimum benchmark for WELL practitioners. It will be important to monitor the implementation of this new qualification in conjunction with Training and Assessment (TAA04) Training Package to determine whether completion of these qualifications is sufficient for a WELL practitioner. Identifying the concomitant implications for ongoing professional development will also be important. Harris, Simons and Clayton (2005, p.70) in discussing the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training, note the importance of ensuring that the qualification does not 'reinforce an overly "technical" view ... rather than one of teachers as professionals who are reflexive, critical and who transform the VET system through their work'. This will also hold true for the Advanced Diploma of Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice in VET.

At the very least, the WELL practitioner must be able to:

- ✧ understand that learning is contextual, with each workplace having its own specific cultural and social environment, which will shape language, literacy and numeracy requirements
- ✧ determine and provide any language, literacy and numeracy support required by individuals participating in the WELL Programme
- ✧ integrate the language, literacy and numeracy requirements of the workplace, of the learners, and of the training package units of competency
- ✧ address language, literacy and numeracy in the design of learning and assessment tools.

Since one of the minimum requirements for entry to the Advanced Diploma of Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice in VET is a satisfactory score in the South Australian Tertiary Admissions Test or equivalent, it is possible that some new entrants will be younger, not originating, as is largely the current situation, from a primary or secondary teaching background, but rather as school leavers. This qualification, in conjunction with practical work experience, will provide the minimum competency base for effective WELL Programme delivery. If prospective entrants were then offered the opportunity to work in a WELL Programme, they would bring limited experience, in their understanding of both adult language, literacy and numeracy within a workplace environment and of the VET environment itself. Designing appropriate professional development will therefore need to take into account the possible broadening range of audiences.

Identifying appropriate professional development

One of the critical functions of professional development is giving practitioners the space to reflect and question their practice. In this context this includes looking at shared assumptions of literacy and at the need to continually reread literacy in new and emerging political, economic and social contexts. Increasingly, practitioners need to address multiple forms of literacy, including the ways they are used as meaning-making tools within a range of contexts. It will be important to ensure that practitioners in the future do not lose the critical ability to challenge and reframe understandings of literacy.

In a Reframing the Future report (Mitchell et al. 2005), the authors indicated that VET practitioners have the capacity to develop the skills and knowledge needed to work in new ways—if adequate and appropriate staff development and other supportive measures are taken.

It is likely that there will continue to be two major groups of practitioners requiring professional development: entry-level and experienced practitioners. Entry-level practitioners may include:

- ✧ teachers coming from a primary or secondary school background with an English as a second language or adult literacy qualification
- ✧ language, literacy and numeracy teachers moving from another sector, such as the adult and community education sector
- ✧ young and inexperienced graduates of the Advanced Diploma of Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice in VET
- ✧ VET practitioners undertaking the Advanced Diploma of Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice in VET
- ✧ industry personnel undertaking the Advanced Diploma of Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice in VET.

Professional development for entry-level practitioners

There are a number of ways whereby appropriate professional development could be developed and offered to entry-level practitioners. While potential new entrants from different pathways will bring with them a range of different understandings and experience which may impact on the amount of support required, it is unlikely that any of them will have both the practical working knowledge of adult language, literacy and numeracy in the workplace and experience in a workplace culture and environment. It is suggested therefore that all new entrants would benefit from access to both shadowing and mentoring. The extent of support offered would need to be determined by the manager and practitioner.

Shadowing

New entrants to the field could shadow experienced WELL practitioners in the workplace. It would be useful to observe more than one experienced practitioner, as programs will vary according to the specific project and according to the practitioner themselves.

Mentoring

A formal mentoring process could be implemented by the provider. The length of time required would be determined on an individual basis, partly according to previous experience and the ease with which the new entrant adapts to the new work environment. Each new WELL practitioner would be assigned a more experienced practitioner as mentor, who would be available to review programs, answer questions, provide advice on resources and generally support the new entrant.

WELL Programme support

Using the National Reporting System in a WELL Programme as well as reporting on the WELL Programme are areas that could be covered within the mentoring process, but which may also require input from a manager and/or attendance at appropriate workshops

Resource development

A WELL Programme ‘handbook’ available online for all providers to use with new WELL practitioners would help to ensure this group was offered consistent support and advice. The handbook could include areas such as: the roles of the WELL practitioner; essential skills and attributes to meet these roles; understanding workplace culture(s); working with content specialists; dealing with potential challenges; using the National Reporting System; completing WELL Programme reports; fulfilling Australian Quality Training Framework requirements; and meeting specific provider requirements. A professional development packet has been developed by PRO-NET 2000 in the United States called *An introduction to ESL in the workplace* (United States Department of Education 2002). This resource could be used as a valuable base for the development of a resource in the Australian context.

Professional development for experienced WELL practitioners

Current WELL practitioners indicated that most of their new learnings were sourced through their own efforts. They claimed that what they really lacked were opportunities for collegiate support and networking. They stressed that, since WELL practitioners tend to work in isolation with limited opportunities for collegiate support, networking opportunities, which allow for sharing of ideas and issues and also provide space in which to reflect on practice, are essential to ensure good practice through continuous improvement.

There are also new skills and knowledge that WELL practitioners need to be able to access to inform their own practice, some of which were identified both by practitioners and managers.

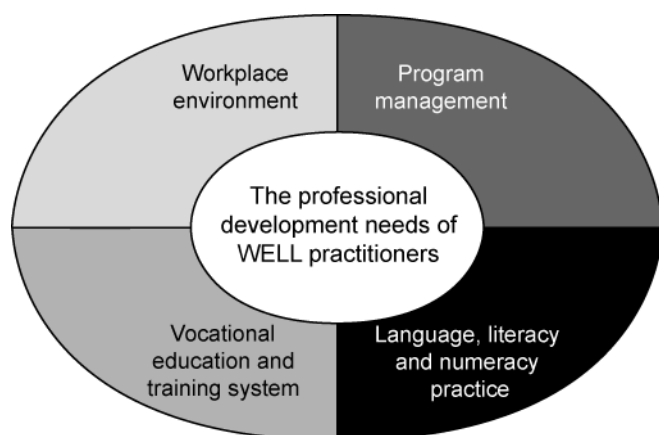
Figure 1 identifies the three key learning areas in which professional development activities may need to be offered.

Workplace environment

This area covers:

- ✧ workplace issues—industry and enterprise-specific
- ✧ government policies—federal and state
- ✧ VET system
- ✧ new technologies in the workplace, such as computer technology, production monitoring and reporting systems.

Figure 1: Professional development for experienced WELL practitioners



As WELL practitioners are increasingly viewed as change agents, they need to be adequately informed about the impact of the global economic situation and federal and state government responses. These issues have implications for specific industries, as well as possible policy implications for the education sector. At this level then, practitioners will need to be updated on the economic drivers affecting the economy and the resulting government policies that will impact on the training and education field. The economic context will also be important to the changes to the VET system, both in terms of the implications for workplace delivery and on employment conditions for practitioners.

Many workplaces are implementing new forms of technology that employees are required to use routinely across a range of job functions. It is likely within particular industries that there will be similar forms of technology designed to address the needs of that industry. Thus WELL practitioners will need to be provided with opportunities to become familiar with these technological changes in order to understand their implications on language, literacy and numeracy requirements and practices.

VET system

This area covers:

- ✧ government policies—federal and state
- ✧ training packages
- ✧ accredited training.

The VET system ties together the arrangements for the consistent delivery and outcomes of industry skills and knowledge and the provision of nationally recognised qualifications. A good understanding of the VET system is required for effective facilitation of government resources to achieve national standards and the implementation of government education objectives.

Program management

This area covers:

- ✧ project/client management
- ✧ writing WELL Programme reports
- ✧ writing WELL Programme applications
- ✧ budgeting
- ✧ curriculum/resource development
- ✧ using new technologies as aids to program development.

The areas identified here encapsulate a number of the roles practitioners identified as part of their jobs (table 10). Some of these issues will best be addressed by individual registered training organisations, since many of them will be specific to particular organisations. However, the more generic aspects can also be addressed through a number of professional development activities across all registered training organisations. Of particular importance is the ability to effectively manage client expectations and demands within the parameters of WELL Programme projects. Both practitioners and managers identified these skills as critical. Practitioners are also increasingly expected to have the skills required for administrative functions, such as writing WELL Programme submissions and reports, and for using technologies to source information and as aids for delivery.

Language, literacy and numeracy practice

This area covers:

- ✧ competence in the three areas of language, literacy and numeracy
- ✧ new literacies, such as multimedia and the impact on pedagogy
- ✧ identifying language, literacy and numeracy components in training packages
- ✧ identifying language, literacy and numeracy in workplace tasks and practice
- ✧ developing learning and assessment strategies, tools and programs
- ✧ using new and emerging technologies as teaching tools
- ✧ working with content specialists
- ✧ supporting content specialists in their understanding of language, literacy and numeracy in the workplace.

In the interface between the WELL practitioner, the learner and workplace personnel, the quality of the training program is crucial and depends upon the practitioner's knowledge of how language, literacy and numeracy can be addressed within the context of vocational training in the workplace; it also depends on understanding how to address the needs of individuals within the program. Keeping up to date with current practice is essential: as new and emerging literacies appear, pedagogical practice needs to be adjusted to accommodate these.

Individual practitioners will have preferences for how they wish to engage with learning activities, these being partly determined by what is on offer and partly determined by a range of other factors, such as time commitments and individual learning preferences. Table 9 lists the content areas identified earlier, and suggests possible professional development activities to support these.

Providing appropriate professional development

To ensure the quality of the program, coordinated provision across the system is essential. Collecting and maintaining accurate data on WELL practitioners by state WELL Programme Secretariats will help inform the planning of appropriate professional development options. Other federally funded language, literacy and numeracy programs such as the Adult Migrant English Program and the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Programme have professional development built in. They are funded to offer either national conferences or statewide moderation/professional development days. At a provider level, a resource for managers which gave information required by WELL practitioners, including checklists, could be developed and would assist managers in making sure that appropriate professional development is available to WELL practitioners as they deal with the changing context of language, literacy and numeracy in the workplace and the consequent impact on educational practice.

Table 9: Accessing professional development

Professional development required	Professional development opportunity				
	Conference	Networking	Workshop*	Moderation /validation	Other**
Workplace issues	✓		✓		✓
Policy issues	✓		✓		✓
VET system	✓		✓		✓
New technologies			✓		✓
Learning resource development		✓	✓		✓
Assessment resource development		✓		✓	
National Reporting System (NRS) review			✓	✓	
Language, literacy and numeracy practice	✓	✓	✓		✓
Emerging literacies	✓				✓
Program management			✓		
WELL Programme reports/ applications			✓		
Workplace support strategies, such as support person, team teaching		✓	✓		✓

Notes: *Workshops could be inter- or intra-providers.

** This could include professional journals, industry newsletters, WELL Programme resources, web-based searches and online facilities such as chat rooms.

There are a number of possible ways in which the WELL Programme Secretariats could take responsibility for ensuring that WELL practitioners are offered and have access to appropriate professional development. They include the following:

- ✧ The WELL Programme Secretariat could arrange annual national conferences.
- ✧ The WELL Programme Secretariat could fund the development of both an online induction handbook for practitioners and an online resource handbook for managers of WELL Programmes.
- ✧ State Departments of Education, Science and Training offices could be responsible for state quarterly networking meetings.
- ✧ Industry skills councils/state industry training advisory bodies could be funded to conduct regular networking meetings. These could either be done according to individual industries or across industries, as many WELL Programme providers work across multiple industries.
- ✧ Providers could tender to organise both national conferences and state networking sessions. It would be preferable that attendance at these be sponsored to ensure access by all WELL practitioners.
- ✧ The WELL Programme Secretariat could encourage and support further research. In order to inform the development of appropriate professional development, further study is needed to clarify industry's prediction of emerging skills needs and the role that the WELL practitioner and the program can play in meeting these needs.

Summary

The ageing profile of WELL practitioners highlights the need to develop an appropriate qualification pathway with ongoing professional development to attract new entrants. It also highlights the need for managers to look beyond teaching qualifications as a prerequisite.

Changes in the WELL Programme in response to changing industry needs will continue to highlight a requirement for flexibility and responsiveness within the delivery of the WELL Programme. The continual development of practitioner skills through effective professional development activities is required to address these. The competencies required by practitioners reflect the need for: the ability to deliver WELL programs in the workplace; specialist language, literacy and numeracy skills; the ability to understand and work within the VET system; and the development of effective and responsive programs.

This research has highlighted gaps in the competency requirements of WELL practitioners as reflected in the traditional qualifications pathways and the limited professional development accessed by the practitioners. These gaps may be addressed through the newly accredited Advanced Diploma in Language, Literacy and Numeracy practice in VET, the Training and Assessment (TAA04) Training Package and responsive ongoing professional development initiatives.

The priority areas for professional development have been clearly identified by managers and practitioners. These areas are: workplace and policy issues; the VET system; new and emerging technologies; learning and assessment resource development; the National Reporting System; emerging literacies; application and report preparation; effective language, literacy and numeracy practice; and program management and support.

The provision of structured and coordinated professional development activities is critical in enabling WELL practitioners to confidently and competently meet the challenges of language, literacy and numeracy in the changing work environment. This includes the need for generic resources for use by managers and new entrants to the WELL Programme, as well as the need for a strategic centralised dissemination strategy for information and resources.

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Support document details

Additional information relating to this research is available in *The professional development requirements of Workplace English Language and Literacy Programme practitioners: Support document*. It can be accessed from NCVER's website <<http://www.ncver.edu.au>>. The document contains:

- ✧ Appendix A: A list of related courses
- ✧ Appendix B: Advanced Diploma of Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice in VET course information
- ✧ Appendix C: Email survey results
- ✧ Appendix D: Email survey
- ✧ Appendix E: Telephone/face to face interview—practitioners
- ✧ Appendix F: Telephone/face to face interview—managers
- ✧ Appendix G: Workshop report
- ✧ Appendix H: Literature review
- ✧ Appendix I: Survey sample description
- ✧ Appendix J: Telephone/face to face interview results—practitioners
- ✧ Appendix K: Telephone/face to face interview results—managers



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