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Building sustainable adult literacy provision

A review of international trends in adult literacy policy and programs

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Lynne Fitzpatrick

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Building sustainable adult literacy provision

A review of international trends in adult literacy policy and programs

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Compiled by Robin Ryan

The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author/project team and do not necessarily reflect the views of ANTA, DEST or NCVER.

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Key messages

This report provides a summary of an extensive study of policies and practices in adult literacy and adult basic education in Canada, the Republic of Ireland, New Zealand, the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Australia. The study concluded the following in relation to adult literacy provision and policy in Australia:

- Australia has achieved considerable success in the integration of literacy with vocational education and training (VET) which operates within national qualifications and quality assurance frameworks. It also has a strong base for developing national policy settings and putting in place an effective national reporting system on the outcomes of literacy provision.
- Australia has not refreshed its literacy policy since 1996, unlike the other countries studied, to take into account the new dimensions and approaches to literacy that have emerged in recent times. It is also unclear how these literacies relate to other recognised generic skills.
- Australia needs to pay closer attention to literacy teaching workforce issues and build the capability of the existing workforce in the light of an expanding range of teaching methods, new technologies, emerging new literacies (such as effective use of technology) and the diverse range of contexts for delivery. In fact, it appears that in Australia opportunities for professional development are decreasing. Improving certification to enhance professionalism might also be needed to aid the replacement of practitioners who are leaving or about to leave due to age.
- Efforts are needed to develop a better understanding of current literacy provision—in all its forms—and rates of success compared with apparent levels of literacy need. The best documented programs are those offered through the VET sector as accredited stand-alone courses, while Australia's provision through informal non-accredited courses is not documented. In addition, the effectiveness of literacy teaching that is integrated within VET skills programs is not currently measured.

Executive summary

This document summarises an extensive study of policies and practices in adult literacy and adult basic education in a number of countries undertaken by Rosa McKenna and Lynne Fitzpatrick. The original study contains considerably greater detail and analyses issues on a country-by-country basis and is available on the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) website as a support document to this summary report (http://www.ncver.edu.au).

The countries studied—Canada, the Republic of Ireland, New Zealand, the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Australia—are all western democracies, some with federal and others with unitary systems of government. All are primarily English speaking, although Canada is bilingual, and most have significant indigenous and immigrant minorities, often disadvantaged and with special literacy needs.

This summary report is organised around five headings related to the key features of effective adult literacy policy and program practices identified in the main study. These are:

- ✧ policy contexts and concepts
- ✧ program development and delivery
- ✧ regulatory frameworks, product development and quality assurance
- ✧ issues for the teaching workforce
- ✧ implications for Australia.

Methodology

A desktop audit of the available international literature and online information, including data from international organisations, provided the basic issues structure of the full report. Experts from each country were contacted to secure access to material covering a number of themes related to policy-making and program delivery. Many of these respondents provided access to published and unpublished research and policy documents. Others provided some commentary on developments in their countries. The views and commentary provided informally by these respondents have only been used when referenced in the literature.

Policy context and concepts

The study found that adult literacy issues are widespread in the countries studied and impact on their capacity to build high-skill, knowledge-based economies and inclusive societies. The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), conducted in the 1990s by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Statistics Canada (1995, 2000) in all countries studied, has acted in most cases as a catalyst for a review of literacy policy and practice, although less so in Australia than elsewhere. The survey revealed that all countries studied have

significant proportions of their adult populations—between 45% and 55%—with the lowest two levels of literacy proficiency, suggesting that these adults may have trouble with everyday tasks. The survey focused on print-based prose, document and quantitative literacies.

Following the survey, most countries identified national lead agencies for adult literacy. National strategies were developed, often through green and white papers, and involved the task of thinking through conceptualisations of literacy. New literacies, such as effective use of technology, effective communications and problem-solving, have been identified as critical in modern day life, in addition to the above-mentioned traditional basic literacies. Nevertheless, many countries' strategies remain focused on traditional, print-based concepts of literacy.

The recent refocus on literacy has also stimulated much debate as to how literacies are acquired, with trends moving towards what could be described as 'situated' or 'contextualised' provision; that is, approaches which engage adult learners by being highly relevant to their particular interests and needs as consumers, workers, parents and so on.

Program development and delivery

Most countries have appointed national agencies to promote their literacy strategies and programs, although they vary greatly in their powers, with federally governed countries especially, having to work indirectly through state or provincial jurisdictions.

Adult literacy in most countries studied is characterised by diversity and proliferation of providers. Titles of adult literacy programs vary from country to country but often include terms such as: adult literacy; adult basic education; adult basic skills; adult language literacy and numeracy; further education; English as a second language (ESL) and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL); reading, writing and numeracy; and a range of terms indicating basic education for adults.

Additionally, most countries rely heavily on volunteers and community-based organisations. All countries have programs which are community-oriented and aimed at a variety of personal needs alongside those aimed at the workforce, both the employed and job seekers.

Australia's community provision through informal non-accredited courses is not documented. The best documented programs are those offered through the vocational education and training (VET) sector as accredited stand-alone courses. However, Australia seems to put a greater emphasis than most countries on integrating literacy within VET skills programs, the effectiveness of which is not currently measured.

Funding is an issue in all countries but recently many governments have moved towards greater levels of investment.

Regulatory frameworks, product development and quality assurance

Federally governed countries tend to be less directive and centralised than unitary states, but even so, most countries exhibit increasing levels of national intervention, support, strategy and accountability.

Countries in which voluntary and community provision dominates are least prescriptive in matters of curriculum and standards-setting. There is relatively light prescription of curriculum frameworks, standards and quality assurance in Canada, New Zealand and Ireland, although moves are underway to improve reporting and accountability standards in some of these jurisdictions.

Countries with a vocational emphasis more clearly designate required outcomes, modelled on protocols designed for vocational competencies. Australia has made considerable progress with the integration of literacy standards within broader occupational training standards, and with using the country's National Reporting System. This trend is observable in other countries. New Zealand is moving closer towards the United Kingdom and Australian approaches, where adult literacy standards are mapped onto or integrated into educational standards, particularly in national qualifications frameworks.

Australia, through the Australian Quality Training Framework, also has a relatively advanced quality assurance system, at least in relation to literacy programs in the VET sector. Several countries apart from Australia are implementing or experimenting with national quality assurance mechanisms.

Issues for the teaching workforce

The teaching workforce in adult literacy again reflects the relatively marginal standing of literacy in the countries studied.

The volunteer ethos in most countries, despite its strengths, has created a tradition of a teaching workforce with minimal professionalism, with high degrees of casual employment, even in paid workforces, and a lack of clear training and career pathways.

Where the literacy instructors are professionally qualified, they have frequently been recruited from the school sector and may not have experience in teaching adults, specialist English as a second language, or adult literacy and numeracy, in the context of vocational education and training and the workplace.

The teaching workforce in Australia faces particular difficulties. The model of integrating literacy with vocational skills training means that both specialist adult literacy skills and vocational training skills are required by the VET teaching workforce. A growing number of literacies that demand professional development for the teaching workforce appear to be needed by adults in today's world. In some countries and especially Australia, however, opportunities for professional development are decreasing.

Implications for Australia

Compared with the other countries studied, Australia has a strong focus on the integration of literacy with VET standards and national qualifications, and a relatively advanced quality assurance system in relation to the literacy programs delivered through the VET sector. Australia also has a strong conceptual base for an effective national reporting system on the outcomes of literacy provision but it is not applied in all instances.

On the other hand, Australia can learn from a range of developments in international policy and practice. A framework for action would include:

- ✧ policy contexts and concepts
  - ♦ providing national leadership to create forums for dialogue to refresh Australia's literacy policy and develop action plans, taking into account the multiple dimensions of literacy in today's world, while at the same time being flexible and manageable
  - ♦ expanding research and development efforts to enable a better understanding of current literacy provision—in all its forms—and rates of success, and compared with apparent levels of literacy need

- ✧ program development and delivery
  - ♦ continuing to develop diverse models of delivery that are required to meet the multiple dimensions of literacy and expanding educational resources that support particular forms of provision
  - ♦ improving existing information dissemination services
- ✧ regulatory frameworks, product development and quality assurance
  - ♦ promoting consistent reporting frameworks. At present, stand-alone literacy programs sit to the side of the industry-related programs in which literacy is embedded and hidden in the assessment process, and it is not clear how the stand-alone or embedded literacies relate to other recognised generic skills
  - ♦ exploring new funding models that encourage partnership arrangements between different government departments or with business and the community
- ✧ issues for the teaching workforce
  - ♦ building the capability of the existing workforce to cope with the expanding range of teaching methods, new technologies, emerging new literacies and the diverse range of contexts for delivery, by improving certification to enhance professionalism. This might also aid the replacement of practitioners leaving, or who are about to leave due to age.

Introduction

The research brief

This document is an abridged account of an extensive study of adult literacy policies and practices in a number of primarily English speaking countries undertaken by Rosa McKenna and Lynne Fitzpatrick.

The countries selected for study were:

- Canada
- Republic of Ireland
- New Zealand
- United States of America
- United Kingdom
- Australia.

The countries chosen are industrialised Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member states facing similar economic and social challenges in what the OECD has described as the 'information age'. All participated in the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) over the last decade and have made significant policy responses to it (OECD & Statistics Canada 2000). In all of the countries studied, adult literacy appears to be a marginalised, comparatively under-resourced sector relative to the needs identified in the survey.

Most of these countries have aging populations and are facing skill shortages in emerging areas of their economies. Employment in rural, mining and manufacturing industries is in decline, while employment in the service and information technology sectors is rising. All have adopted lifelong learning policies focusing upon human capital development in order to address future labour market needs.

All the countries in the study follow western democratic traditions of governance, ranging from complex federal systems to unitary states with dominant national governments. The positioning of adult literacy within government systems and education traditions in each country has influenced the development of adult literacy policy and programs.

English is the national language of all the countries in the study, although some, like Canada and New Zealand, support multilingual language policies. Several have significant indigenous populations which are disadvantaged in their access to education and other social services. All have increasing immigrant populations, linguistically and culturally different from long-term citizens. Significant proportions of the adult populations in each country are at literacy levels which suggest that they may have trouble with everyday tasks.

Methodology

The research has been conducted through a desktop audit of the available literature.

International trends, identified in significant reports of the major international bodies, were used to structure the report. Information on individual countries was gained through extensive web-based searches and through contact with key stakeholders. Many of these respondents provided access to published and unpublished research and policy documents. Others provided commentary on developments in their countries. The views and commentary provided informally by these respondents have only been used when referenced in the literature.

Data and analysis on individual countries studied is contained in the full report. This summary document is organised around five key headings:

- ✧ policy contexts and concepts
- ✧ program development and delivery
- ✧ regulatory frameworks, product development and quality assurance
- ✧ issues for the teaching workforce
- ✧ implications for Australia.

Categorising literacies

The study is primarily concerned with literacy in English. It does not enter into debates about definitions of literacy which have been identified in recent National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) research (Lonsdale & McCurry 2004; Falk & Miller 2001; Watson, Nicholson & Sharplin 2001).

Lankshear (cited by Lonsdale & McCurry 2004) provides the view of literacy found most useful in this study. This taxonomy identifies four types of literacy within the context of the new economy:

- ✧ the 'lingering basics', or those more traditional views of literacy which see it as a mastery of the basic skills necessary for understanding school work
- ✧ the 'new basics', in which the skills needed to contribute productively to a capitalist society are more abstract 'symbol-logical capacities'
- ✧ 'elite literacies', which refer to higher-order skills
- ✧ 'foreign language literacy' which enables participation in the operations and dealings of a global marketplace.

Policy context and concepts

International context

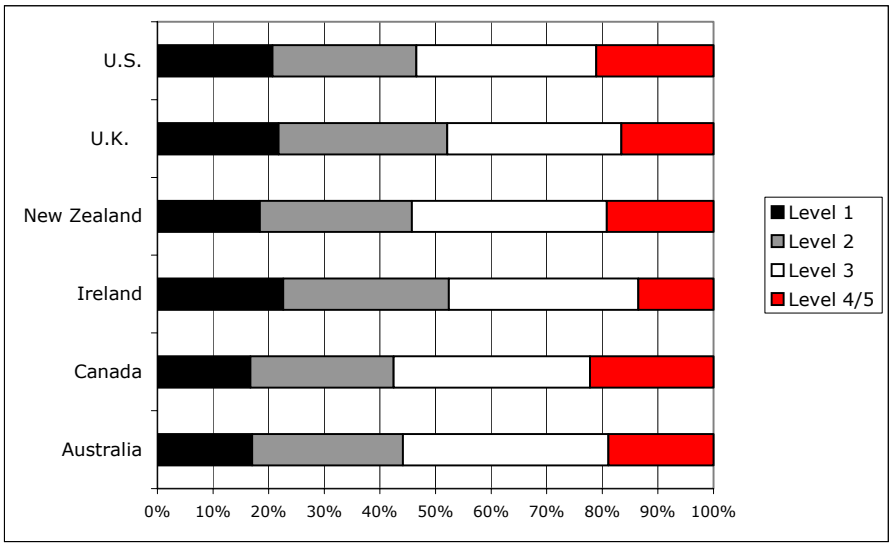
Within the United Nations, the International Labour Organization and the OECD, there has been growing recognition of the importance of literacy development for adults in a world characterised by globalisation, technological change and organisational development (OECD & Statistics Canada 2000, p.xiii; United Nations 2002, p.3; International Labour Organisation 2002, p.11). In particular, the international adult literacy surveys initiated by the OECD during the 1990s were important policy drivers in the countries included in this study.

The policy context developed in the international literature places the individual at the centre of learning: it is the skills and knowledge of workers which are important in responding to trends towards globalisation, technological change and the emergence of knowledge-based economies and societies. At the same time, the way skills and knowledge are acquired has shifted from formal transmission models to constructivist or learning-to-learn models.

As the global economy emerged more clearly in the early 1990s, the OECD concluded that cultivating and developing literacy should be an important element in any country's long-term policy strategies. In order to acquire an increased understanding of the distribution of literacy skills across countries and populations, the OECD, in cooperation with Statistics Canada, has since 1994 conducted systematic large-scale national comparative surveys of literacy in the adult population—the International Adult Literacy Survey. As a result, it became apparent that economic and social transformation was taking place at such a rapid rate that, if OECD countries were to maintain a competitive advantage, substantial literacy interventions and initiatives would be necessary (OECD & Statistics Canada 1995, pp.21–25).

Literacy in the information age: Final report of the International Adult Literacy Survey published in 2000, reported on a comparative study of 20 countries, using three dimensions of literacy across five levels. The dimensions compared were prose literacy, document literacy and quantitative literacy. Scores range on a scale from 0 to 500 points for each domain. Each of the scales is split into five different levels, from level 1 for the lowest literacy proficiency to level 5, the strongest level of literacy proficiency (OECD & Statistics Canada 2000). All countries were shown to have significant proportions, that is, between 45% and 55%, of their populations at levels 1 and 2 of the scale.

Table 1: Comparative performance among countries per cent of population 16–65 on the prose scale



Source: Hagstan (2002, p.19, selected countries from table 3, prose scale)

Impact of the International Adult Literacy Survey

The International Adult Literacy Survey has had a significant impact on understandings of literacy as a relative concept which needs to be put in a context of economic and social demands. It reminded industrialised countries that adult literacy was not simply an issue for developing nations. Most importantly, it provided insights into effective policy measures and targets. The survey has impacted significantly, although variably in each of the countries studied. In Ireland, for example, where the public was shocked by the survey's disclosure that 57% of the sample showed low-level literacy scores (levels 1 or 2), literacy issues were shown to be linked to age and to education and income levels, with a low association between literacy and second-chance education programs (Department of Education and Science [Ireland] 2000).

In the United States, outcomes were not dissimilar. Forty million adults were found to be performing at the lowest literacy level, ninety million at levels 1 and 2 (Kirsch et al. 1993; Department of Education [United States] 2003a). Linkages were established between low literacy levels and poor access to health services and high involvement in the correctional system. Literacy needs in the workforce and reinforcement of family literacy were highlighted. Some more recent media reports have questioned the extent of difficulties, but the survey has led to a reassessment of literacy needs and has been influential in policy development.

In Canada, relief at a better overall performance than Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom was tempered by an awareness that recent improvements in education retention had not translated into the overall performance, and that there were considerable differences between regions (Statistics Canada 1996). Health and social wellbeing issues have been important in the Canadian response and the survey has had a dramatic effect on policy development (Movement for Canadian Literacy 2003a).

In New Zealand the survey results prompted public debate and literacy came to be seen as integral to a range of wider issues (Cain Johnson and Benseman forthcoming, p.11). While generally results were similar to other OECD countries, much lower literacy scores were noted for Maori, Pasifika and immigrant groups (Ministry of Education [New Zealand] 2002, p.21). The survey fed into the review of post-school education pursued by the Labour Government from 1999.

Similarly the survey's British results were integrated into a range of government reviews, reports and green and white papers which were then in process, culminating in the strategy document *Skills for life* (Department for Education and Employment [United Kingdom] 2001).

In Australia the survey had a lesser impact. Although conducted within the country by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) as the Survey of Aspects of Literacy (ABS 1997a, 1997b) the survey results coincided with a change of government in 1996 and a re-thinking of many education policy strategies. The data were useful, however, for the 1998 Literacy and Numeracy Program introduced to support 18 to 24-year-old job seekers in meeting their 'mutual obligation' requirements and eventually were utilised as other programs were developed.

National responses

Several countries responded to the needs demonstrated in the survey by initiating national plans, often through government white papers, to deal with literacy issues comprehensively. In Ireland, for example, adult literacy received unprecedented funding and attention in a 1998 green paper, extended in a 2000 white paper which enunciated a National Adult Literacy Plan within the framework of the National Development Plan (Department of Education and Science [Ireland] 1998, 2000). The plan, developed by the National Adult Literacy Agency, set numerical targets and client priorities, implemented a quality framework and integrated literacy with employment, workplace and community-based initiatives.

A similar approach in the United Kingdom, focused by *Skills for life*, adopted a whole-of-government perspective. There were similar plans for targets, priorities, curriculum quality (with linkages to the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority), and employment support, but also a strong emphasis on building the capacity of the system to deliver services and integrating provision with intergovernmental and community partnerships.

In Canada and the United States, policy development had to adapt to the realities of federalism, in which national governments act by exhorting, supporting and funding state and provincial authorities. Both countries employed the device of a 'summit'. The 2002 Innovation Summit in Canada was followed by a parliamentary report*, Raising adult literacy skills: The need for a pan-Canadian response* (Parliament of Canada 2003). This proposed the development of a federal-provincial accord, a whole-of-government approach, additional funding for the National Literacy Secretariat and the Aboriginal Literacy Strategy, as well as enhanced research and additional spending through the *Employment Insurance Act*.

In the United States, the Federal Government has developed similar intergovernmental strategies, with the 1990 summit of Governors and the President a focal point (National Literacy Summit 2000). An influential practitioner-initiated summit in Washington DC in 2000 updated the whole literacy debate by refining the 'new basics' in a contemporary economy (Comings, Reder & Sum 2001, p.22). The most recent Federal Government intervention has been through the *Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) Act*, *2003*. The policy imperative is primarily economic (Merrifield 1998, pp.1–9) and the discourse is framed within a deficit model oriented to progress in post-secondary studies necessary for success in the labour market.

An interesting policy variation occurs in New Zealand, where the government's *Tertiary education strategy* identified foundational skills as an issue for all levels of post-secondary education (Ministry of Education [New Zealand] 2002, p.36) and placed responsibility for implementation with the Tertiary Education Commission. Strategies for English speakers include community partnerships, workplace provision and system capacity and quality measures, while goals for speakers of other languages include affordability and dealing with diversity. Success in both strategies is to be measured against performance in future international surveys (Ministry of Education [New Zealand] 2002, p.7).

In Australia the survey results coincided with a time of broad policy change. A set of language-related initiatives from the 1980s, highlighted in the federal government's green and white papers, *Australia's language and literacy policy* (Commonwealth of Australia 1991a, 1991b), had largely run their course by 1996; with some commentators arguing that Australia went from the literacy vanguard to lag behind many OECD countries (Castleton, Sanguinetti & Falk 2001, p.5). Since the ending of specific Commonwealth funding, state priorities have dominated. However, the Australian National Training Authority's (ANTA) strategic plan *Shaping our future 2004–2010* (ANTA 2003b) explicitly acknowledges new literacy demands and NCVER research indicates the need to include adults with poor literacy and numeracy skills within proposed future designated equity groups (Bowman 2003).

Rethinking literacy challenges

In most countries, developing policy responses has led to a wider debate about the nature of the literacy challenge and the groups which should be targeted. In many cases tensions may be detected between the views of policy-makers and practitioners, between workplace and community-focused practitioners, between economic and socially inclusive emphases and between those favouring newer multi-literacy definitions and those whose concepts or practice are derived from traditional education models.

Several of these dimensions are observable in the United States debate. Comings, Sum and Uvin identified three areas of challenge: a language challenge group, including many immigrants; an education credential challenge group, including native speakers; and a new literacy challenge group (Comings, Sum & Uvin 2000). The last group includes people with a high school credential and traditional literacy, who require new skills in critical thinking, effective communication and technology use. However, federal legislation has re-oriented literacy issues towards greater alignment with school education and policy-makers show no evidence of accepting new literacies or multi-literacies (Mikulecky & Kirkley 1999; Gee, Hull & Lankshear 1996).

In Canada, while there is considerable debate on definitional boundaries and the interface between literacy, media and technology, many practitioners, most policy-makers and the public remain fixed on literacy as a print-based concept (Shohet 1999, p.21). There remains a strong 'lingering basics' approach along with some attempts to incorporate 'new basics'.

In Ireland and the United Kingdom, however, literacy is conceptualised within a skills framework which includes Lankshear's 'new basics'. The Irish approach incorporates diverse educational and workplace contexts and visual literacies and application of new technologies (Lynch 2003, p.3). Britain's *Skills for life* describes provision mechanisms but avoids defining the 'what' of literacy. Linkage to the national qualifications framework means that literacy may embrace the spectrum from 'new basics' to 'elite literacy'.

New Zealand's experience illustrates the tensions which can arise between community and workplace literacy practitioners. Literacy Aotearoa adopts a 'liberationist' definition as advocated by theorists such as Friere, while the employment skills-focused organisation, Workbase, favours a functional context definition. Tensions are exacerbated by the competency-based, criterion-referenced system applied by the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (Sutton cited in Johnson 2000).

In Australia, many of the same issues arise and multiple definitions are in use (Falk & Miller 2001, p.2):

- *Basic skills approaches* view reading and writing as perceptual and/or cognitive skills. There is an emphasis on how sight word recognition and phonics affect the acquisition of literacy.

- *Growth and heritage approaches,* 'whole language', focuses on the processes by which literacy acquisition occurs as part of the social context in which it occurs.
- *Critical–cultural approaches view* see literacy as social practice in a cross-cultural perspective.

Many practitioners are critical of the perceived vocational orientation of programs and are antagonistic to competency-based systems per se, perceiving them to be not 'learner centered'. There are pronounced ideological tensions among practitioners (Shore 2003) and between practitioners and policy-makers, and both may sometimes be at odds with recent theoretical advances (Lonsdale & McCurry 2004).

Falk noted that many practitioners persisted with traditional school-based methodologies (Falk 1995, p.142) and it is unlikely that new concepts of multi-literacies will be systematically included in curriculum until they are embedded in accredited frameworks for generic skills and supported by professional development for teachers.

Lessons from the international experience

- Adult literacy issues are widespread in industrialised countries and impact on these nations' capacity to build high-skill, knowledge-based economies and inclusive, cohesive societies.
- Most countries were spurred by the results of the International Adult Literacy Survey to develop systemic policy responses.
- Successful policy needs to accommodate varying literacy needs and target groups.
- Effective strategies must go beyond traditional print focus and school-based methodologies.

Program development and delivery

The multiple purposes and diverse conceptualisations of adult literacy, the effects of jurisdictional boundaries, especially in federal countries, and varying views of public sector responsibility, are evident in any attempt to summarise program development and delivery mechanisms in adult literacy. Readers are referred to the full report for a country-by-country analysis; only a broad account is included in this section.

Central coordination

In most of the study countries the national government has established or recognised a central agency for literacy initiatives, although the powers accorded to such bodies vary widely.

Canada's National Literacy Secretariat is established within a federal government department, Human Resource Development Canada, and works to coordinate and support federal and provincial government activities, but does not deliver programs. In the United States a similar role has been performed since 1991 by the National Institute for Literacy, a federal inter-departmental agency responsible to the Secretaries of Education, Labor and Health and Human Services. While the Canadian Secretariat is considered a viable model for the limited purpose of infrastructure development in a federation, the United States Department of Education admits it has not developed a cohesive education system for adult education (Department of Education [United States] 2003a, p.4).

The Irish government was slow to recognise the existence of a literacy problem (National Adult Literacy Agency [Ireland] website 2003b); rather, a membership organisation, the National Adult Literacy Agency, has set the pace since 1980 and began to receive government funding in 1985. Underneath the agency, networks of vocational education committees coordinate mostly volunteer activities. The government's National Adult Literacy Plan proposes to strengthen the system through a National Adult Learning Council and local advisory boards (Department of Education and Science [Ireland] 2000, appendix 1).

In accordance with its tradition of central government initiatives, the United Kingdom has established two core agencies within the Department for Education and Skills: the Learning and Skills Development Agency for the post-16 education and training sector; and the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit to oversee the national strategy enunciated in *Skills for life*, acting through nine regional coordinators. The Social Inclusion Unit in the Prime Minister's Office also supports local cross-agency solutions.

The New Zealand Government has established a Tertiary Education Commission with responsibility for funding all post-compulsory education provision by universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, private trainers, foundation education agencies, industry training organisations and adult and community education providers. It appointed a Chief Adviser, Adult Literacy, in mid-2001 with regional advisory positions for adult literacy, English for speakers of other languages, and adult community education, together with an interdepartmental committee

on adult education to promote whole-of-government responses. Even so, commentators argue that adult literacy, especially with a community focus, has not been easily located within new post-secondary policies and remains marginalised (Cain Johnson & Bensman forthcoming).

Australia has the least defined central focus of the countries studied, given the role played by states and by the informal and community sectors. Within the federal government, the Department of Education, Science and Training maintains an Adult Literacy Policy and Programs section, with an important research and awareness function. The department is also responsible for funding workplace, 'mutual obligation' and other literacy programs. The Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs administers the Adult Migrant Education Program.

The Australian National Training Authority and the VET sector it coordinates are major influences in literacy policy and practice. ANTA's national strategic plan, *Shaping our future 2004–2010*, acknowledges the role of traditional and emerging literacy needs (ANTA 2003b) while the ANTA-sponsored Australian Qualifications Framework and Australian Quality Training Framework are important elements in recognition of training and consistency of program standards.

Programs

Adult literacy provision in most countries in the study is characterised by diversity and proliferation of providers. Programs delivering adult literacy use titles such as: adult literacy; adult basic education; adult basic skills; adult language literacy and numeracy; further education; English as a second language (ESL) and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL); reading, writing and numeracy; reading for…; writing for …; return to study; return to work; workplace literacy; workplace basic skills; prevocational courses; and a range of terms indicating education for adults.

North America

Diversity is especially evident in North America. Delivery in Canada is mostly funded and coordinated through provincial and territory authorities and delivered largely through voluntary organisations. In 1999 more than 800 formal and informal programs were identified. As well, there is provision of both English and French as second languages for migrants and a wide variety of literacy services for indigenous peoples. Hoddinott has described the complexity of these arrangements, the lack of guaranteed access, paucity of credit-accruing courses and difficulties with funding and learning support (Hoddinott 1998, p.165–172).

The United States also has a strong voluntary sector, represented by ProLiteracy Worldwide, which offers support to 225 000 learners, 160 000 volunteers and 1450 local, state and regional providers annually (Sticht 2003b). Programs are usually either adult basic education, dealing with basic literacy skills, adult secondary education, or English for speakers of other languages. Federal legislation recognises the leadership role of the National Institute for Literacy and also prescribes performance agreements for states. In some states there are family and workplace literacy services and there is a strong tradition of business and philanthropic support. This is essential in many areas of the country; for example, in one state it has been estimated that only 10 of 130 programs receive government funding (National Literacy Summit 2000, p.19).

Ireland and Britain

Ireland has a more streamlined system but also favours the use of voluntary community sector bodies, with 23 000 learners typically receiving two hours instruction per week without fees through 126 regional vocational education committee adult literacy schemes (National Adult Literacy Agency [Ireland] 2001b, p.8, 16). There is also a Workplace Literacy strategy offering

basic skills programs, often on-site, through local authorities or vocational education committees. The agency has also developed: literacy tools using technology; programs for speakers of other languages; family literacy to address the intergenerational nature of literacy issues; health literacy; and integrated literacy through return to education programs.

The British model is equally centralised, with the Basic Skills Agency acting as a national development body and the National Learning and Skills Council planning and delivering funds through its local councils. Job seekers constitute an important target for services, as 32% are estimated to have literacy and numeracy needs (Department for Education and Employment [United Kingdom] 2001, p.13).These services are being extended to other beneficiaries and to the disabled.

Workplace education is a major activity in Britain, with 30 national training organisations joining the Basic Skills Agency in mapping occupational skills to basic skills standards. The aim is for employers to integrate literacy and numeracy provision into their own human resource strategies. Ten thousand government workers have been targeted for assistance in a lead-by-example model. There are also schemes for prisoners, for community bodies, for family literacy and for the use of technology and media. At present about 70% of delivery is through further education colleges. Other significant provision occurs in community education settings and workplaces. Many of the University for Industry's flexible learning (*Learndirect*) activities are co-located with the colleges and other providers (Host Policy Research 2002).

Australia and New Zealand

The two principal strands operating within adult literacy provision in New Zealand are represented by two organisations, the community-based Literacy Aotearoa, a coalition of 65 community organisations originally founded in the 1980s as Adult Reading and Learning Assistance, and Workbase, founded in 1996 as an International Year of Literacy workplace initiative and renamed the New Zealand Centre for Workforce Literacy Development in 2003. Both are funded by the Tertiary Education Commission to coordinate delivery and develop support measures for community and other deliverers. Another major strand is the *Kia Ora* and other English as second language programs, delivered online or through polytechnics, multicultural centres or home tutor schemes.

Adult literacy provision in Australia falls into three main categories:

- ✧ informal, non-accredited programs
- ✧ accredited stand-alone courses, constructed using templates compliant with the Australian Qualifications Framework, with a competency-based approach and recognised within the framework and delivered by recognised training providers
- ✧ integrated approaches supporting the acquisition of literacy skills embedded in VET qualifications.

Most informal and non-accredited training occurs through community provision. Volunteer tutor programs still operate in Australia, and in some states and territories they are coordinated through the state training system and funded by grants from the ANTA Adult Literacy Program. Most of these activities focus on traditional views of literacy of the kind necessary to understand school work (Lankshear's 'lingering basics'), but some, particularly those working with disadvantaged community groups, emphasise the personal needs of the client. There are no statistical data on enrolments or outcomes of these programs.

The best documented programs are those offered by registered training organisations within the VET sector. These include stand-alone courses, accredited to Australian Quality Training Framework standards and leading to a plethora of certificates covering adult literacy, English as second language and foundation education. However, the preferred approach is integrated

delivery, with literacy and language skills integrated into skills set out in training packages within the Australian Qualifications Framework. However, there a lack of an across-industry view of the scope, range and demands of English language and literacy skill for workplace performance and workplace learning (O'Neill & Gish 2001, p.144). The current report, *High level review of training packages,* (Chappell et al. 2003) may impact on future delivery and provide a capacity to measure effectiveness of integrated literacy.

Funding

The full report provides information on funding available in the public domain on a country-by-country basis. In most countries, this information is fragmented and incomplete, obscured by definitional and jurisdictional boundaries and distorted by inadequate or recently developed reporting systems. In many countries observers note inadequacy of funding levels and marginalisation of adult literacy efforts. However, there is also evidence to suggest increased investment in adult literacy and basic education in many jurisdictions. For example:

- New Zealand claims that investment in adult literacy has been raised by 25% since the implementation of the *More than words* strategy (Lee personal communication 2003).
- Federal investment in adult literacy in the United States has grown from $1185.5m in 2001 to $571 262.5m in 2003 (Department of Education [United States] 2003b)
- In Canada the budget for the National Literacy Secretariat has been increased from $22m per year to $50m in 2003.
- In Ireland ∈ 0.85m was invested directly in adult literacy in 1997. The National Development Plan 2000–2006 has allocated ∈73.8m to the National Adult Literacy Plan and other amounts to further education, quality arrangements and qualifications.
- In the United Kingdom during the period 2001 to 2004, expenditure is planned to increase by 55%; that is, spending an additional £162 billion each year (Department for Education and Employment [United Kingdom] 2001, p.35).
- The level of investment in Australia is difficult to quantify, but indirect measures such as enrolments in multi-field VET programs between 1996 and 2001 suggest static or declining activity.

Lessons from the international experience

- Most countries have developed or designated a national lead agency, usually separate from delivery agencies, but sometimes with funding and accountability responsibilities.
- All countries studied depend on large numbers of community agencies and voluntary instructors, but some are also developing services for job seekers, workforces and workplaces, with literacy and vocational skill acquisition more closely integrated.
- There is also a growth in literacy training aimed at a variety of personal needs and circumstances.

Regulatory frameworks, product development and quality assurance

Regulatory frameworks and infrastructure

Federal states

Not surprisingly, the federal states covered by the study have relatively undeveloped systems of national regulation and infrastructure. In this respect Canada has the least elaborated national system, although increasing all forms of adult education participation is a major target of the Canadian Innovation Strategy, a whole-of-government approach to national goals. The National Literacy Secretariat is funded to develop learning materials, improve access, increase public awareness, improve coordination and advance literacy research. The Movement for Canadian Literacy is a coalition of provincial interests, and the Federation Canadienne pour l'alphabetisation en francais performs a similar role for French speaking literacy interests. The national Indigenous Literacy Association supports aboriginal literacy. The National Secretariat has also supported the National Adult Literacy Database, an online clearing house, and several research projects which link universities with providers in an attempt to connect theory and practice.

There is a somewhat greater sense of system in the United States, where the Office of Vocational and Adult Education within the federal Department of Education administers federal funding, and state governors are expected to designate lead agencies. The inter-agency National Institute for Literacy is a focal point for private and public agencies. Services provided by the institute include cross-agency planning, technical assistance to states and providers, independent evaluation, needs assessment and research. The National Centre for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy is funded as a research consortium, along with research centres for disability learning and English as a second language. Philanthropic trusts are also important in the American literacy movement.

In Australia, a substantial degree of consistency is provided by the activities of ANTA, which coordinates a wide range of federal and state programs in vocational education and training, including equity strategies. Literacy standards are integrated into the competency-based qualifications framework and, from 1997–1999, an ANTA project, the Workplace Communication Project, provided expert consultancy services and funded a number of specific initiatives to build literacy and numeracy into standards. There is little reliable data about the application of new technologies in adult literacy although some developments have occurred as part of ANTA Flexible Learning Framework funding.

Innovation and research programs are coordinated by the Adult Literacy Programs and Policy Section of the federal Department of Education, Science and Training and managed by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (research), TAFE NSW (referral and information) and the Australian Council for Adult Literacy (public awareness). Other areas of the federal department manage major literacy programs: Workplace English Language and Literacy; and the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (for job seekers). The Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs manages the Adult Migrant Education

Program. These programs operate outside the VET system but registered training organisations tender for delivery contracts.

Unitary States

The three unitary states included in this study naturally concentrate leadership roles in central government authorities. Ireland is to an extent an exception, in that it has chosen to work through a voluntary, membership-based body, the National Adult Literacy Agency. More recently, however, the national government has developed a National Adult Literacy Plan (Department of Education and Science [Ireland] 2000) which proposes a National Adult Learning Council, a consultative body, and a greater role for Foras Aiseanna Saothair, the national labour training organisation.

In New Zealand a the Tertiary Education Commission is the national lead agency, with an interdepartmental committee on adult literacy charged with ensuring cooperation among government portfolios interested in adult literacy. The Chief Adviser on Adult Literacy within the commission also has a role in facilitating partnerships, especially with Literacy Aoteora and Workbase.

The United Kingdom has a centralised system based in the Department for Education and Skills, centred on a Learning and Skills Development Council, with regional councils focusing on the formal post-16 education and training sector, and the Adult Basic Skills Unit, which operates with a semi-government body, the Adult Basic Skills Agency.

Product development, curriculum and quality assurance frameworks

It is in the area of product development and quality testing that the relatively marginal status of adult literacy education in most of the countries studied becomes apparent. Essentially, methodology and standards are either minimally prescribed or, in countries where literacy instruction is most commonly integrated with occupational skills, modelled on protocols designed for vocational competencies.

Low prescription models

The Canadian approach is the most laissez-faire. There is no national curriculum framework but a proliferation of learning models and innovative practices responding to local needs. Even in workplace literacy there is no federally endorsed approach but an encouragement of innovation and creativity (Hayes 2003). Gradually, functional methodologies are being supplemented by critical cultural perspectives (Folinsbee & Hunter 2002). A framework for essential skills has been developed by the federal human resource department (Human Resource Development Canada website 2003). A database links these skills to national occupation profiles and a test for workplace essential skills has been developed (National Literacy Secretariat 2003). Canada employs the American GED, a high school equivalency certificate, for literacy delivered in a general education context.

Similarly in the United States, there is no official framework, although the National Institute for Literacy has collaboratively developed a model to improve instructional methods and improve quality and results (Merrifield 1998; Equipped for the Future website). In addition, since 1998 the federal government has mandated an accountability and quality assurance system, the National Reporting System, which prescribes a number of levels of adult education and the skills to be achieved at each (Department of Education [United States] 2001a). These scores can be translated to other forms of standard tests for general education. The system allows the states, in

measuring learning gains, to devise their own procedures for instructional emphasis, goals and assessment procedures.

Ireland resembles Canada in its non-directive approach. There is no national, formal or standardised curriculum for beginner adult literacy learners. For one-on-one learners, the curriculum is negotiated, and assessment supports the learning objectives. Many practitioners oppose certification (Conboy 2000, p.61). Learners in group classes are typically working towards accreditation, such as the Further Education and Training Awards Council foundation modules. There is no national quality assurance system although the National Adult Literacy Agency provides curriculum and quality support and the agency's research activity has produced a quality framework and an assessment framework (National Adult Literacy Agency 2001a, 2002c, 2002e).

The diversity of providers in New Zealand and differences between community and occupational approaches have limited standards setting. The government wishes to support the diversity of learning opportunities which include workplace, homes, local communities and iwi (tribes), instruction through Training Opportunities and Youth Training programs, foundation courses at tertiary education institutes, industry training organisations, and marae (Maori communities) (Ministry of Education [New Zealand] 2002, p.38). Some standardisation is gradually occurring through government-funded Training Opportunities and Youth Training programs and other vocational courses, whereby the Tertiary Education Commission registers providers and is developing specific adult literacy, numeracy and communications courses at level 1 and 2 of the New Zealand Qualifications Framework.

New Zealand is also addressing quality assurance issues, through the development of the Adult Literacy Quality Mark and the Adult Literacy Achievement framework. The first requires providers to show evidence of five best practice indicators, such as learning plans, teaching methods and assessment techniques (Cain Johnson & Benseman forthcoming, p.19). The achievement framework, recently trialled by the Tertiary Education Commission for introduction in 2004, consists of a number of profiles which contain descriptors of literacy behaviours, skills and knowledge (Tertiary Education Commission [New Zealand] website).

Vocationally oriented standards

The United Kingdom has a tradition of centralised assessment and prescription of standards, and has developed a clear framework which permits mapping of adult literacy to its skills and general education standards; adult literacy is conceptualised within a basic skills framework (Qualifications and Curriculum Council [United Kingdom] website 2003). Standards specify the skills required at each level of literacy, covering reading, writing, speaking and listening; and numeracy, covering interpreting, calculating and communicating mathematical information. The basic skills component could be described as being akin to Lankshear's 'new basics' with higher levels of the qualifications framework taking in 'elite literacy'. Mapping and associated resources are outlined in a series of booklets (Basic Skills Agency [United Kingdom] 2003a).

These standards are used as the basis for screening instruments and pre- and post-training assessments to gauge progress in meeting the strategy's objectives (Qualifications and Curriculum Council [United Kingdom] website 2003). Materials for a core curriculum and an assessment task bank have been created, which indicates a more prescriptive approach than the previously learner-centred ethos prevailing in the United Kingdom. There is some danger that the associated assessment regime may narrow the focus of provision (Hodgson & Spours 2002).

Providers of skills qualifications are subject to inspection to ensure the standards are being met. A guide (Department for Education and Employment [United Kingdom] 2002) covers the key skills of communication and application of numbers, whether delivered as stand-alone provision, as part of a vocational program or a discrete course, and whether delivered full-time, part-time or through self-study or information communication technology.

Australia

Australia exhibits some of the characteristics of the American and British regimes. Like the United States, there is a National Reporting System, although it more closely resembles that country's Equipped for the Future framework than its national reporting system, which is more akin to a quality system like the Australian Quality Training Framework standards for registered training organisations.

The National Reporting System for Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy (developed by Coates et al. 1996) was developed to report on outcomes of labour market programs. The development of the system was informed by an eclectic set of linguistic, education and assessment theories and practices, including work which underpinned the International Adult Literacy Survey methodology.

The system deals with social inclusion and technology and promotes a critical–cultural approach to literacy, but also covers understanding of the mechanics of language, including the basic skills and whole language approaches. It provides a reporting framework over five levels, covering six aspects of communication, and the macro skills of reading, writing, oral communications, numeracy and learning strategies. There is, however, a need to revise other components of the National Reporting System in the light of changes in technology, literacy practices and to the vocational training system since 1996.

In Australia, there remains a wide range of certificates offering stand-alone literacy, English as second language and basic education courses targeted at learners who have not benefited from a completed secondary education, They are registered on the national database, the National Training Information System (NTIS), but, unlike the United States and Canada, these certificates do not provide equivalent school exit qualifications.

Most of these courses have been informed by, or are mapped to the National Reporting System. They are used as the basis for purchasing student contact hours in adult language, literacy and numeracy by the Australian Government, state and territory training authorities, and adult community education boards and councils.

A strong tendency in Australian practice is the integration of literacy and other basic education needs within occupational training standards. The integrated approach is articulated in ANTA policy as part of strategies to achieve equity and mobility within the training system (ANTA 1999b), within guidelines for the writing of training packages (ANTA 2000a) and in resources to support the national VET system (ANTA 2000a, 2003b). Registered training organisations are responsible for addressing language, literacy and numeracy as part of compliance with *Quality standards for RTOs and auditors* (ANTA 2001a, 2001b), which is a component of the suite of measures making up the Australian Quality Training Framework. Language literacy and numeracy are specifically referred to in standards 6, 8 and 9 of the framework (ANTA 2003a).

Information from the National Reporting System has been used to inform the process of identifying underpinning language, literacy and numeracy skills (ANTA 1999b). Core units of 17 training packages have been mapped to the National Reporting System (Fitzpatrick & McKenna 2000, 2002) to assist providers and practitioners with the identification of language, literacy and numeracy in standards. The integrated approach is still evolving in response to the continuing development of training packages.

Lessons from the international experience

- ✧ Federal countries tend to be less directive and centralised than unitary states but even so most countries exhibit increasing levels of national intervention, support, strategy and accountability.

- ✧ Countries in which voluntary and community provision dominates are least prescriptive in matters of curriculum and standards setting, while those with a vocational emphasis more clearly designate required outcomes.
- ✧ Australia leads in the integration of literacy standards with broader occupational training standards, but this trend is observable in other countries.
- ✧ Several countries besides Australia are implementing or experimenting with national quality assurance mechanisms.

Issues for the teaching workforce

The teaching workforce in adult literacy again reflects its relatively marginal standing, in relation to teacher type, qualification requirements and availability, and professional development opportunities. The community-focused and volunteer-based nature of adult literacy education in most countries results in a workforce that is undertrained, underpaid or not paid at all, unstable and variable in numbers and quality. In most countries, central coordinating bodies have long conducted campaigns for greater professionalism, with only limited success.

The volunteer ethos

North America

The workforces in Canada, New Zealand, the United States and Ireland are overwhelmingly made up of volunteers. The Movement for Canadian Literacy has urged the professionalisation of the adult literacy field with the establishment of employment standards, opportunities for professional development (staff and volunteers), standards for (optional) certification of literacy workers, ways of sharing new knowledge and best practices, adequate compensation, and increased recognition (Movement for Canadian Literacy 2003c). However, there are no strategies for achieving these goals in the action plans currently being developed.

Each Canadian province is promoting consistency of training and evaluation, but there is no general agreement nationwide as to how adult literacy teachers should be trained and assessed. A number of universities offer adult education degree and certificate programs with the result that a community of practitioners with academic credentials has developed. Most other teachers have moved to the adult literacy field from elementary or secondary schooling systems. The National Literacy Secretariat has been proactive in research into the interface between adult literacy and the communication and information technologies (National Literacy Secretariat 1995) and in this respect teacher training has been recognised as a major concern

There are also few full-time literacy posts in the United States, and those are poorly paid. Nearly 90% of instructors are part-time; many are volunteers. Turnover among paid staff is high (Cranfall 1994). Certification of teachers is a state and employer issue. According to a 2001 National Institute for Literacy survey of state professional development systems, 22 states require instructors to be certified in K–12 (kindergarten to age 12), secondary, or adult education (Tolbert 2001, p.1). Pressures over the past decade have steadily accelerated the drive for professionalisation, especially federally legislated accountability and the development of the National Reporting System: evaluation and quality processes frequently count the existence of ongoing staff development and program planning processes as an indicator of quality (Sabatini, Ginsberg & Russell 2002).

New Zealand

The precise number of full-time, part-time and volunteer instructors in New Zealand is not known; however, it is clear that the country does not yet have a workforce of experienced adult literacy specialists. Most community-based programs rely heavily on volunteers, and while their efforts are valued, the need for full-time professional staff has been recognised. Salaried staff receive low pay and have low status, and the short-term and unpredictable funding streams provide little incentive for taking up work in the field (Cain Johnson & Benseman forthcoming, p.20).

A great deal of time and money goes into the training of volunteers, but retention of both volunteer and paid staff is difficult (Literacy Aotearoa cited in Cain Johnson & Benseman forthcoming, p.21). Research also indicates a shortage of Maori tutors relative to the Maori community's literacy needs and the preference among Maori learners for Maori tutors (Johnson 2000).

Increasing professionalism

Ireland

The smaller size of the Irish system allows the scope of teaching workforce issues to be more precisely defined and more effective planning to raise standards to be introduced. There are 126 locally based vocational education committee adult literacy schemes employing 61 full-time and 80 part-time adult literacy organisers and 27 full-time paid and 1255 part-time adult literacy tutors. In addition, a further 4136 trained volunteer tutors provide 10 000 hours of tuition per week.

The Irish Government has enacted legislation for the establishment of a National Qualification Authority of Ireland to develop a national qualifications framework for non-university vocational education and training awards at further and higher education levels. A National Certificate in Literacy Studies has recently been established and, in 2002, the Waterford Institute of Technology became the awarding body for future National Adult Literacy Agency–Waterford Institute of Technology accreditation programs. Certificate and diploma awards have become more streamlined, with tutors and organisers training together on common modules

There is agreement on the need for the Department of Education and Science to facilitate existing practitioners to gain at least the minimum qualification; the training section of National Adult Literacy Agency also offers a wide range of training and staff development programs.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has a much larger and more professional workforce but many issues remain. It is claimed that the workforce involved in basic skills provision in the post-16 sector is 25 000 (Brooks cited in Host Policy Research 2002, p.3). This figure includes those working in further education colleges, communities and workplaces, teaching subjects such as literacy, numeracy, and English to speakers of other languages. It is estimated that 10 000 volunteers (Department for Education and Employment [United Kingdom] 2001, p.50) assist in this provision.

The conditions under which this workforce works is highly varied. In further education colleges most are teaching in full-time and fractional positions and those in government-funded work-based learning are newer to the system and tend to be recruited for full-time or part-time work. Staff are frequently subcontracted from other providers. Change in work practices has brought

about a decline of casual work in these settings. On the other hand, work in the adult community education sector is typically casual. Overall, of workers in the whole post-16 sector, literacy, numeracy and ESOL teachers, are the most casualised (Host Policy Research 2002, p.5).

Working in basic skills is not attractive to new entrants to the labour market or to younger professionals. It is expected that turnover rates will accelerate as current teachers over 45 choose to reduce their working hours or retire. There are few teachers from minority groups—either ethnic communities or those with disabilities.

The Australian mixed system

The professional standing of the adult literacy workforce in Australia is coloured by the changing perception of the nature of the task, as it moves from a stand-alone educationally focused practice towards integration into industry training packages.

McGuirk studied a self-selected sample of practitioners, teaching accredited language literacy and numeracy certificates, finding that 85% of teachers are female; 50% are employed on a casual basis; 20% are on contract; and only 30% have permanent employment (McGuirk 2001, pp.17–26). Practitioners are frequently employed by more than one provider. The majority of teachers come from a primary and secondary school teaching background.

O'Neill and Gish, whose study relates to trainers of apprentices and trainees in the vocational system, identified the need for this group of practitioners to develop their own teaching skills in the language and literacy area (O'Neill & Gish 2001, p.129), but recognised that developing functional literacy skills in the context of VET is a specialist task (O'Neill & Gish 2001, p.148). Other research highlights the difficult issue of how to develop a specialist field of practitioners while also creating a literacy and numeracy knowledge base in all VET teachers and industrial trainers (Watson, Nicholson & Sharplin 2000, p.47). There are no agreed qualifications for teaching adult literacy, although there are requirements for those teaching in VET.

The Training Package for Assessment and Workplace Training is currently being reviewed. The range of qualifications is being expanded across six fields of learning to meet the expanding contexts of the VET system. Knowledge of literacy and numeracy is being embedded in the Certificate IV in Assessment and Training and the possibility of a language, literacy and numeracy qualification to create a framework for professional development and a career pathway for adult literacy practitioners is being investigated (Fitzpatrick forthcoming).

Another cause for concern is that professional development opportunities in adult literacy have diminished over recent years (Chan Lee & Thompson 2001, p.6). Few of the state and territory training systems or adult community education boards fund systemic professional development except to promote new initiatives. There is little offered to practitioners to update understandings of theoretical work or its application to specific aspects of teaching and learning.

Questions need to be asked about the capacity of current practitioners to teach some of the literacy practices incorporated in the new technologies used in education and workplaces. As Leu argues, as literacy itself changes, there has to be a commitment to include new technologies and their literacies in teacher education courses and provide for continuous professional development (Leu 2003, p.25).

Lessons from the international experience

- ✧ The volunteer ethos, despite its strengths, has created a tradition of a teaching workforce with minimal professionalism, with high degrees of casual employment even in paid workforces and lack of a clear training and career paths.

- ✧ Where literacy instructors are professionally qualified, they have frequently been recruited from the school sector and may not have experience in teaching adults or specialist ESOL or adult literacy or numeracy knowledge or knowledge of VET and the workplace.
- ✧ The integration of literacy with vocational education and training requires the development of literacy skills in all vocational trainers.
- ✧ While new demands for professional development are appearing, in some countries, especially Australia, opportunities for professional development are decreasing.

Implications for Australia

International trends in policy development

The trend among English speaking industrialised countries such as those in this study has been to develop policies for adult literacy in the context of broader education and social policies linked to improving economic competitiveness (Department of Education [United States] 2001a; Parliament of Canada 2003; Department of the Taoiseach[1] 2000; Department of Finance [Ireland] 2000; Department for Education and Skills [United Kingdom] 2002a; Ministry of Education [New Zealand] 2002). In the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Ireland there has also been a pronounced policy emphasis on the building of social capital (OECD & Statistics Canada 2000, pp.49–51).

All the overseas countries in the study have, or are planning, a discrete adult literacy policy or strategy, with supporting systems and infrastructure, to address identified education needs and to guide increased investment (Department for Education and Science [Ireland] 2000; Department for Education and Employment [United Kingdom] 2001; Department for Education [United States] 2003a; Ministry of Education [New Zealand] 2001, 2003a; Parliament of Canada 2003).

In Australia, the national infrastructure developed in policies subsequent to the International Literacy Year, including national collaborative structures, has not operated since 1996. On the other hand, other countries have noted Australia's success in the provision of workplace literacy and integration of literacy into vocational training.

In the process of rebuilding its adult literacy provision, Australia needs to respond to the United Nations Decade of Literacy plan of action by articulating its policy initiatives and preparing for the 2006 Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey, intended to monitor national performance.

The Australian National Training Authority's most recent strategy for the VET sector, *Shaping the future: The national strategy for vocational education and training 2004–2010* is an opportunity to articulate an action plan for high-quality, accessible adult literacy provision which accommodates the needs of business, individuals and communities flexibly and inclusively. On the other hand, the range of partnerships desirable in a comprehensive adult literacy policy may well extend beyond the formal VET sector.

A framework for adult literacy policy and provision

An analysis of the literature relating to adult literacy provision in the countries considered in this study demonstrates a number of common elements for national adult literacy policy and provision. Australia already has all these elements to some degree. Some could well be expanded and enhanced, and they need to be drawn together in a coherent framework.

[1] similar to a Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet

A framework for action would include:

- *policy contexts and concepts*: improving national leadership, expanding research and development, encouraging needs and performance analyses
- *program development and delivery*: developing diverse models of delivery, expanding resource development, encouraging innovation, widening referral and dissemination services
- *regulatory frameworks, product development and quality assurance*: refining evaluation models, promoting consistent reporting frameworks, exploring new funding models, deepening quality assurance systems
- *issues for the teaching workforce*: enhancing professionalism, developing adult learning contexts, improving certification and building capacity

Policy context

National leadership

Countries in this study have high-profile institutions and/or government agencies with a clear responsibility for implementing policies for improving adult literacy; for example:

- The United States has the Office of Vocational Education, an interdepartmental board located within the Office of the President and a semi-government organisation, the National Institute for Literacy.
- Canada has the National Literacy Secretariat; as well, the Movement for Canadian Literacy is a powerful coalition of providers which acts as a national focus for advocacy.
- The United Kingdom has the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit to oversee implementation of its adult literacy strategy and the Learning and Skills Development to oversee post-16 education. The Basic Skills Agency, a semi-government authority, effectively brokers many of the developments in the United Kingdom.
- Adult literacy in Ireland is administered through the Department of Education and Science. The National Adult Literacy Agency, a voluntary organisation is an advisory and brokerage body. Proposed national consultative structures are not fully in place.
- New Zealand has established a national structure for administering policy for adult literacy in the Tertiary Education Commission within the Ministry of Education. Separate bodies broker support for workplace literacy and community literacy initiatives.

Australia has structures for adult literacy provision, but there is no central government coordinating body at the national level, nor is there currently a vehicle for broad-based consultation. Existing structures could be further developed to provide national leadership and support in adult literacy.

Government unit

The areas of the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training concerned with adult literacy could act as a catalyst to utilise international and national research to raise awareness of literacy within other government agencies and to create forums for dialogue. In state and territory governments, responsibility for adult literacy-related activities is hard to identify. Here also, leadership is required for raising awareness of literacy issues across portfolios.

National coordinating authority

Australian practice places a strong emphasis on integrating language, literacy and numeracy with other forms of vocational training. Because of ANTA's overarching responsibilities in the VET sector, it has a key role in strategic planning, target setting and funding. It would also be an appropriate body to convene regular forums designed to develop policy and implementation structures to accommodate both national and state and territory interests in adult literacy and numeracy.

Broad-based consultation

Activists have played a leading role in the development of adult literacy policies in all countries in the study. Strong advocacy from a broad-based coalition of interests, promoting research and public discussion, have encouraged policy developments in most countries. This occurred also in Australia in the formulation of the Australian Language and Literacy Policy 1990–1996. Where such bodies have been lacking, governments such as New Zealand's have noted that this has formed a major barrier to policy development (Ministry of Education [New Zealand] 2001; Cain Johnson & Benseman forthcoming, p.17).

Advocacy for adult literacy in Australia and New Zealand has been relatively weak and fragmented in recent times and frequently divided between community and vocational outlooks. There has been a tendency to adopt stridently critical policies which damage credibility with policy makers (Shore 2003; Wickert 1997).

In order to advance adult literacy policy development, practitioners in adult literacy need to urgently re-engage with the 'messy business of making a policy problem tractable and manageable' and to broaden the base of stakeholders in adult literacy. National summits, involving advocates, researchers and community stakeholders as well as government, have been an effective strategy employed by other countries. In Australia such activities could make use of existing resources and may lead to a new coalition of advocates, as has occurred in the United States and New Zealand.

National research and development

Policy developments in most countries have benefited from strategic research and, at the same time, have invigorated the research effort. Systematic information about the current state of provision is needed by policy-makers to justify provision, to shift resources or to support new initiatives.

Worldwide, the trend has been for governments to adopt evidence-based policy formulation (Department for Education and Employment [United Kingdom] 2001, pp.48–9; Department of Education [United States] 2003, pp.2, 9). The United States has supported national research centres in adult learning and literacy during the 1990s, publishes an annual review, and maintains a national database (Kruidenier 2002). The United Kingdom has also established a national research centre based on a consortium of institutions with a broad set of themes, and including collaboration with practitioners. A research strategy outlining a program of research work has just been published (National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy 2003).

In all countries in this report, the research base for adult literacy is inadequate: the field of adult literacy is relatively unresearched (Quigley cited in Benseman 2003, p.5; Shohet 1999, p.11). The case for a systematic and balanced national research program to sustain quality adult literacy provision has also been made in Australia (Brindley et al. 1996; Australian Council for Adult Literacy 2001, p.24).

The present study indicates that adult literacy policy and provision benefits from a broad range of research approaches. These include needs analyses and participation rates and resource development to assist practitioners to respond to new methodologies. Research which promotes innovation by developing and applying new and emerging theories and understandings would also be timely.

Needs and performance analysis

From the International Adult Literacy Survey it was apparent that only a very small proportion of adults needing literacy education participated in existing programs. Poor participation and satisfaction rates were revealed in subsequent research in the United Kingdom, Ireland and North America (Brooks et al. 2001; Bailey & Coleman 1998; Quigley 2000). This research identified 'dispositional' barriers to participation and indicated the need for a greater range of learning options.

Similarly, Ireland and the United Kingdom both noted that the bulk of the population needing literacy education are already in the workforce and thus increased the workplace effort and other flexible options for out-of-work-hours learning.

Canada has undertaken significant follow-up research since the international survey and has gathered useful information about the needs of different groups, noting, for example, that learners over 45 predominate at level 1. This age group has little interest in the school equivalence programs offered but is interested in programs incorporating health and other life-style information (Sussman 2003, p.96). In New Zealand a study commissioned in response to the International Adult Literacy Survey (Johnson 2000) identified, as a major contributor to poor participation, the lack of capacity in the system to deliver a range of program options, especially to groups like Maori and Pasifika.

Needs analysis research has produced much needed data in other countries and it is likely that such endeavours in Australia would have similar outcomes, producing evidence of requirements for strategic planning and information about participation in existing programs, signalling gaps in provision and in the capacity of the system.

Program development and delivery

Diverse models of delivery

Recognition of the multiple dimensions of literacy in policy should lead to diverse delivery strategies (Lonsdale & McCurry 2004, p.31). The countries in this study have developed policies which have led to an expansion of program options for adult learners. Recent initiatives are moving towards integrated forms of delivery; that is, literacy integrated with training, health and welfare programs and with communications policies. A number of countries, in particular, Canada and New Zealand, are making real efforts to address the diverse cultural needs of Indigenous learners in innovative programs located within communities and with teachers drawn from those communities.

Contextualised learning

Trends in pedagogy are moving towards what can be described as 'situated' (Lonsdale & McCurry 2004, p.22) or 'contextualised' provision; that is, approaches engaging learners in interests relevant to adults which directly meet their needs by making meaning as consumers, workers, parents and so on. The literature suggests a range of approaches (Sticht 2001; Purcell-Gates et al. 1998).

Integrated models

Most countries have established, or are well on their way to establishing, systems for the delivery of workplace literacy programs and for targeting the unemployed. Australia has well-regarded systems in both areas, but it is possible to utilise integrated delivery on a wider front. Both the United Kingdom and Ireland, for example, have developed awareness and support guides for the professional development of corrections staff, educators and workplace trainers (Basic Skills Agency [United Kingdom] 2003a; National Adult Literacy Agency [Ireland] 2002b) as well as for child care, health, youth and community workers (National Adult Literacy Agency [Ireland] 2002f).

The intergenerational impact of literacy has been well understood in the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada, and was highlighted in the International Adult Literacy Survey reports (cited in Hagston 2002, p.37). However, there has been only limited activity in Australia. In Australia there is little in the literature on literacy needs among prisoners or delivery in the prison system. It is another area worth further needs analysis.

Unlike other countries, Australia has yet to expand the integrated model beyond vocational education and training to other areas of public policy. Other countries have used the International Adult Literacy Survey to look at the impact of literacy issues on a range of social policy problems (Hagstan 2002, pp.49–50; Falk & Guenther 2002). Research and innovation grants could be used to facilitate collaboration and to develop specific programs and resources and/or pilot approaches in these areas.

The United Kingdom has introduced new programs designed to teach aspects of financial literacy in partnership with the Financial Services Authority (Financial literacy website). Other interesting work has commenced in both Canada (Hoddinott 1998) and in Australia to identify and develop programs for older members of the community (Wooden et al. 2001).

Cultural diversity

Explicit policies and practices based on cultural diversity are most evident in New Zealand and Canada where the most educationally disadvantaged groups are indigenous populations and ethnic minorities. While Australia has a training strategy for Indigenous Australians, and literacy is rated as a major issue, there is little linkage between mainstream adult literacy practice and indigenous education. The provision of English as part of settlement services is also administered completely separately.

Flexibility

In the countries surveyed for this report, adult literacy programs have typically offered two hours of instruction a week in community settings with rolling enrolments. This model has now been expanded to include a range of options designed to attract adults who have other time commitments with work and family, or who require more intensive and contextualised assistance. New technologies have also made independent learning through online technology or the combined use of face-to-face, self-study and online, more feasible.

Resource development

Much effort has been expended in many countries on the development of resources to support particular forms of provision, special needs and the interests of target groups. Professional development has also been an area where a great deal of resource development has been undertaken. Currently in the United States, United Kingdom, Ireland and New Zealand, resources are being developed to support quality and assessment frameworks as well as the

infrastructure which manages accountability processes. A number of countries have developed resources to raise awareness among business leaders and unions, and for professional development materials for those working in health and children's services. Several countries are working on improving assessment materials.

In Australia, effort has gone into resource development to support accredited courses, activities in particular industries and to meet needs of target groups, online resources and toolboxes. Resources are increasingly being developed in new media, CD-ROM and websites, including enhanced visual information and interactivity. Unfortunately, there is no clearinghouse for the distribution of these resources at a national level, and until recently, few of these resources were subject to evaluation and many remain inaccessible due to price and the technology capacities of learners and teachers. Where print resources are produced using public funding, they should be produced in PDF and be downloadable from a clearinghouse website.

Other interactive material should also be available through a clearinghouse website as far as possible free of charge. The website provided by the Department of Education, Science and Training, *literacynet*, is partly fulfilling this function and could be expanded to hold more resources. Alternatively, the publications arm of ANTA, Australian Training Products, could include such resources in a designated category in its online and hard copy catalogues.

Innovation

A trend in several countries is to commission pilot programs as national development projects prior to general implementation. These types of projects propose new forms of literacy education, fund pilot projects, evaluate them, produce guidelines and training for practitioners and then promote that particular form of provision.

In Ireland, development of workplace literacy and literacy integrated with health provision (National Adult Literacy Agency [Ireland] 2002a, 2002b, 2002f) has proceeded in this way. The United Kingdom Pathfinder projects have experimented with a range of variables across different clusters of providers to discover what works and why (Department for Education and Skills [United Kingdom] 2002b). Workbase in New Zealand trials or documents innovations through case study publications as a means of supporting workplace provision (Workbase 2003b).

Australia's National Adult Literacy Grants provide small annual grants for innovative projects. Submissions are guided by broad themes. The Innovative Grants in Australia are highly valued by practitioners. Nevertheless, the Department of Education, Science and Training could explore other strategies for effective dissemination and implementation in the light of international models.

For innovations to be sustainable, there will need to be some collaborative forum between the Australian National Training Authority, the Department of Education, Science and Training and state and territory authorities to support the ongoing implementation of the innovation.

National referral and information dissemination services

Referral services

Most of the larger countries in the study have national referral systems. The Reading Writing Hotline provides a telephone referral service in Australia—answering questions and directing learners to local providers registered with the service. TAFE NSW manages this service for the Department of Education, Science and Training. The service is linked to periodic community service TV and radio announcements. Evaluations have shown it to be an effective referral system, reaching many clients who have not previously participated in adult literacy programs.

Information dissemination services

A number of excellent models of national information dissemination and resource-sharing services are being developed as agencies take advantage of electronic web-based databases and the capacity to link using shared platforms.

The LINCS system developed in the United States, whereby the National Institute for Literacy hosts a national database connected to state resource centres, seems the most effective model. There are a number of institutions in Australia which could collaborate to deliver such a service, building on existing services. There is a strong case for a gateway to a single national web directory which disseminates information about provision, resources and research in adult literacy. The Department of Education, Science and Training's *literacynet* site, easily identifiable and searchable, could be further developed to fulfil this function. Prominent links could be established to the Reading Writing referral hotline and to the NCVER as a national research and resource database.

Regulatory frameworks, product development and quality assurance

Evaluation

Since the International Adult Literacy Survey, many countries have carried out significant large-scale studies of provision in order to understand patterns of participation and distinguish between the needs of particular groups (for example, in the United Kingdom, Brookes et al. [2001]). In Australia the only systematic evaluation of programs has been carried out by the Australian Government in which the post-implementation of the Australian Language and Literacy Policy was addressed, along with evaluation of specific programs such as the Special Intervention Program (Rich, Murphy & O'Brien 1996), the Workplace English Language and Literacy program (Baylis 1995) and the Literacy and Numeracy Program (Rahmani & Crozier 2002).

In Australia there has been no thorough audit of programs since the Morey Report (Morey 1989), nor has there been an evaluation of the completion rates and outcomes of accredited adult literacy courses, although individual courses may have been evaluated or reaccredited. In the present system there is no way of identifying the extent to which vocational training undertaken through training packages develops literacy and numeracy.

Collection and analysis of relevant data are essential to evaluating the efficacy of adult literacy activities. The National Centre for Vocational Education Research has a brief to collect and analyse statistical data satisfaction and undertake destination studies and should be encouraged to conduct a regular analysis and report on adult literacy-related activities.

Consistent reporting frameworks

This study indicates that the development of consistent reporting frameworks is influenced by issues of governance and conceptualisation of literacies. Australia has developed national qualification and delivery structures but there remains a dilemma about how to fully deal with generic skills like adult literacy.

Governance

Jurisdictional issues in federal countries present specific challenges to the development and implementation of national policies and strategies for adult literacy, particularly in the

specification of nationally consistent reporting systems. Shohet (1999, pp.11–14) cites extreme jurisdictional anomalies in Canada, as does Merrifield (1998, p.vi) in relation to the United States, and Castleton and McDonald (2002, p.9) in Australia.

Conceptualisation of literacies

It is extremely difficult to provide an overview of the conceptualisation of literacies across these countries. The treatment in policy is extremely varied, with terms such as 'basic skills' and 'new literacies' used with quite different meanings and, in all countries, with a multiplicity of understandings and motivations. Reporting systems need a conceptualisation of literacies with the capacity to capture this diversity.

The United States and, to a lesser extent Canada, are concerned about 'what' is taught and this is largely conceptualised in terms of school credentials. For example, the application of Lankshear's taxonomy to adult literacy policies in the United States reveals an approach based on school education, or maintaining the 'lingering basics'. At the same time, school literacies are being recast as 'new basics' to include use of computers, problem-solving and cooperative learning.

In the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Ireland, views of literacies are represented in policy as being concerned with 'how' they are taught. The literature from these countries is infused with notions of 'learner centeredness', or how best to engage adults in learning which suits individual and social purposes. In these countries the 'what' has been included in education standards. The descriptions of these skills have been upgraded to accommodate what Lankshear might describe as the 'new basics' and, at the higher levels of the standards, the 'elite literacies'.

All countries in the study have developed, or are the process of developing, reporting or curriculum frameworks; that is, a framework to guide provision and measure outcomes. The United Kingdom, Ireland and New Zealand are implementing policies which will ensure nationally consistent reporting frameworks which will facilitate pathways through the education system and utilise notions of lifelong learning. Other countries have developed frameworks, but they are not nationally implemented nor connected to other education sectors.

The Australian dilemma

Policy-makers in Australia are caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, literacies are 'built in' to the post-compulsory education system and conceptualised as a continuum which allows development in relation to changing workplace and social practices, accepting at least the first three of Lankshear's categories of literacies—the lingering basics, the new basics and elite literacies. On the other hand, the industry specificity and focus on outcomes in training packages as the vehicle for delivery have made it difficult to deal with generic skills such as literacy and numeracy. Unlike the qualifications frameworks of other countries, a certificate level gives no indication of the complexity of the literacy practices involved. The delivery of stand-alone language, literacy and numeracy currently sits to the side of the formal system, connected neither to industry-related certificates nor to recognised generic skills, such as the key competencies.

Within the context of the high-level review of training packages and by updating the National Reporting System, ANTA can facilitate the development of a model to include literacy and numeracy in the post-compulsory education structure. Such a model could describe employability skills in ascending levels, in terms of enabling, gaining, establishing and ensuring mobility within employment. A set of foundation employability skills (levels I–III), for example, could provide basic introductory skills to enable individuals to gain employment, while higher-level employability skills (level IV and above) could focus on establishment and consolidation of skills to maintain employment, with the highest level facilitating mobility and transfer to new jobs or to emerging forms of work.

Funding models

The trend in countries within this study has been not only to increase government funding, but also to explore flexible funding models to encourage partnership arrangements between different government departments or with business and the community.

The *Adult Basic and Literacy Education Act* in the United States facilitates direct provision through agreements with states. In Canada, funding from the National Literacy Secretariat is usually in the form of annual project grants, making continuity of staffing and programming difficult. The United Kingdom and Ireland have adopted a more 'whole of government' approach through which various departments make allocations to meet specific goals.

In Australia funding for delivery of VET, including adult literacy, is determined such that each state and territory authority attaches a nominal rate per student contact hour to accredited courses or training packages. Depending on eligibility, participants may get access to financial assistance, travel allowance and childcare. The federal government also directly funds literacy in workplaces, for job-seekers and for English as a second language for new arrivals. The only example of partnership funding in Australia is the Workplace English Language and Literacy program which requires a contribution from business. This funding model could be applied in other areas. An NCVER project in 2004 is exploring these options more fully.

Additional options for development could include funding for adult literacy infrastructure and activities in ANTA agreements with the states, as in the United States. Funding for innovative practice and for incentives for partnerships could also be included. The National Reporting System is available as a reporting framework. Both North American systems also provide models for business and philanthropic partnerships.

Quality assurance processes

Providers need to be accountable for financial management and governance. Standards for maintaining and reporting student participation, progress and the issuing of awards should be established and should ensure that appropriate staff are employed and supported to deliver programs to the target groups they serve. Such standards should ensure a safe and suitable physical environment for adult contextualised learning.

The United Kingdom and Australia have implemented quality assurance processes within their post-compulsory education systems which include adult literacy provision. The British Quality Mark, developed for the primary and secondary school system, will be reviewed and applied to adult literacy provision. Ireland has developed a Quality Framework (National Adult Literacy Agency [Ireland] 2002e) and is providing professional development on its implementation to organisations. Literacy Aotearoa in New Zealand is developing an Adult Literacy Quality Mark to ensure compliance with five indicators of quality. However, this framework is not connected to systemic quality provisions, nor does it cover financial and governance issues.

The United States has been implementing the National Reporting System for Adult Education since 1998 as an accountability and quality assurance measure, of which measurement of student progress and information on student background and participation are components. Canada has no national quality assurance system for adult literacy.

In Australia, in order to conduct recognised training and receive public funding, providers must meet a set of standards for registration. They are subject to regular and spot audits to ensure that standards are maintained. State and territories also follow standards for accreditation and recognition of training. The package of standards in the Australian Quality Training Framework (ANTA 2001a, 2001b) is due for review in 2004 and, during this process, systems for more

effectively defining literacy issues in relation to equity, and the integration of literacy in assessment and training, and qualifications, should be addressed.

Teaching workforce issues

Workforce profile

In all countries in the study the literacy workforce was considered marginalised in the education sector. Most teachers come to the field from other education sectors, usually primary or secondary teaching. The situation in New Zealand echoes the situation in most countries (see Shohet 1999, pp.24–7; Sabatini, Ginsberg & Russell 2002; Host Policy Research 2002).

> Those that work in the field receive low pay, have low status and … unpredictable funding streams provide little incentive for taking up work in the field.
>
> (Cain Johnson & Benseman forthcoming, p.20)

In most countries examined by this study, including Australia, the development of a professional workforce to deliver adult literacy in a range of environments is a fundamental ingredient for building the capacity of post-compulsory education systems.

Adult contexts for learning

Teachers' work in adult literacy now covers many contexts and must meet accountability and quality standards. These contexts include not only a broad range of educational contexts—community, institutional and workplace—but also new contexts related to health and welfare, for which different types of knowledge and skill are required.

Countries like Ireland, New Zealand and the United Kingdom have developed guidelines (National Adult Literacy Agency [Ireland] 2002g, p.31; Workbase 2003b) for working in these environments and have developed accredited courses for teachers in these new contexts. In some instances, such as in Ireland, these courses are counted towards recognised qualifications.

In Australia, the adult English language, literacy and numeracy sub-project of the Training and Assessment (TAA) Training Package project commissioned by the Department of Education, Science and Training, has identified a number of key areas for development of teachers of adult literacy in the Australian context. As Fitzpatrick notes, this new package has a role to play in facilitating the entry of new literacy teachers into the market: 'Including English language, literacy and numeracy teaching in the TAA Training Package is one means of addressing this impending shortage of skilled teachers' (Fitzpatrick forthcoming).

With the emergence of 'new literacies', it is likely, given the ageing profile of the current workforce, that considerable professional development will be required. Research in both Australia and the United States shows that many teachers are not up to date in literacy theory and pedagogy, and fall back on 'school literacies' in their practice (Falk 1996, p.142; McGuirk 2001, pp.17–26; Garner 1998). The literature indicates that old transmission models of learning are no longer appropriate and that pedagogy for adult literacy not only needs to deal with new literacies, but the way these are taught will require a different set of skills (International Labour Organization 2002, pp.3–4; Chappell et al. 2003; Leu 2003, p.25).

Certification

In three countries, the United Kingdom, Ireland and New Zealand, qualifications have been developed, or are being developed, to cover work in the field. Some work has been undertaken in the United States, but like Canada and Australia, employment of teachers and the industrial conditions of their work are the responsibility of state jurisdictions.

Australia is currently reviewing the qualifications structure for teachers in the VET sector, in which most adult literacy practitioners work. The Training and Assessment Training Package provides standards for ensuring that all vocational teachers are aware of literacy issues in assessment and training, and have the ability to employ teaching and learning strategies to ensure that literacy required in the performance of work can be attained, or that special needs can be identified, and individuals referred for appropriate support.

Professionalisation of the field is recognised as an important step in improving the quality of delivery as well as in regulating the remuneration and conditions of work for teachers. As higher education becomes involved in the training of literacy teachers, the opportunities also increase for engaging these institutions in research.

Building capacity

All countries in the study, but particularly, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Ireland, have identified the need to build the capacity of the workforce involved in managing and delivering adult literacy as crucial in the strategic planning for adult literacy. Their strategies all target the building of their workforce capacity. All have identified that certification of appropriate knowledge and skill for adult literacy practitioners is an essential building block in this process.

The VET strategic plan for 2004–2010, *Shaping our future*, has identified the need to build the capacity of the entire vocational education and training system. The workforce needs and partnership-building required for adult literacy should be addressed as part of that strategy.

An immediate problem is the replacement of practitioners who are leaving or about to leave the system, along with the provision, for those remaining, of opportunities to increase their knowledge and skill base in the light of an expanding range of pedagogies, new technology, emerging literacy practices and a diverse range of contexts for delivery.

Future initial teacher training and professional development will need to cover the expanding pedagogic repertoire required by the system (Chappell et al. 2003), be specific to stand-alone and integrated provision (O'Neill & Gish 2001; Watson, Nicholson & Sharplin 2001) and effective within the expanding range of partnerships being proposed.

Countries are building capability by developing qualifications within their national credentialing structures and by setting specific targets to be met within specific timeframes. The United Kingdom, for example, has designated targets and provided funding for further education teachers and has invested significantly in volunteers in the community sector. Through the review of the Assessment and Workplace Training Training Package and by the development of a specialist field within this training package, Australia has taken the first step in this process.

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