Australian Government

**Department of Employment and Workplace Relations**

# Future delivery of foundation skills training in remote Australia

Discussion paper – December 2022

# Contents

## Acknowledgment of Country

The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (the department) acknowledges the traditional owners of Country throughout Australia on which we gather, live, work and stand. We acknowledge all traditional custodians, their Elders past and present, and we pay our respects to their continuing connection to their culture, community, land, sea and water.

# Overview

At the Jobs and Skills Summit in September 2022 the Australian Government committed to reinvigorate Commonwealth foundation skills programs to improve access and outcomes for all Australians, including a particular focus on the design and delivery arrangements for remote[1] Australia. National Cabinet also included the critical importance of foundation skills in its Vision and Principles for the upcoming National Skills Agreement.

Foundation skills give people confidence to take part in daily life, training and employment. They include listening and speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and digital literacy, as well as skills like initiative and innovation, planning and organising, problem solving and teamwork. Foundation skills are the skills needed for a secure job.

An advisory group, bringing together representatives from foundation skills peak bodies, industry, employers, unions, educators, First Nations people and state and territory governments, has been established to oversee this work.

The Australian Government currently supports foundation skills delivery in remote Australia in four main ways:

1) The **Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program** offers registered job seekers training to improve their language, literacy, numeracy, and digital skills (LLND) for work or further training.
2) The **Foundation Skills for Your Future (FSFYF) program** offers LLND training to employed and recently unemployed Australians.
3) The **Remote Community Pilots (Pilots)** trial innovative and community led approaches to foundation skills delivery in remote Australia. The Pilots currently operate in four communities.
4) The **Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)**, established in 1948, offers English language and literacy training to migrants and humanitarian entrants to improve their English language skills and settle into Australia.

The Australian Government also supports national services like the Reading Writing Hotline.

This discussion paper seeks feedback on how foundation skills delivery in remote Australia could be strengthened to:

- **Recognise and build from the strengths of learners** in remote Australia, including that many First Nations people in remote Australia are skilled communicators, speaking multiple languages.
- **Increase access** for those who wish to improve their English language, literacy, numeracy and digital (LLND) skills.
- Ensure **cultural safety,** and support a variety of models that meet community and learner needs.
- Address the **range of training and non-training barriers** to participation.
- Support **Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and foundation skills training specialists, working in partnership**, to deliver in remote Australia.

Responses to this discussion paper are due on 13 February 2023 and will be critical to inform future foundation skills program design. Submissions can be provided via the online form. Or you may prefer to submit your response to SEEfuture@dewr.gov.au.

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[1] DEWR uses the ARIA (Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia) scores to determine a locality's remoteness. This may change from time to time as the ARIA is reviewed and updated. Further information on how this is calculated can be found at the ABS and University of Adelaide websites.

You may also wish to take part in a roundtable or online discussion. Please email SEEfuture@dewr.gov.au to register your interest.

## Current delivery in remote Australia

Commonwealth, state and territory governments provide support to develop the foundation skills of adults. States and territories design and deliver foundation skills training that meet their local needs, resulting in different approaches across the country.

Commonwealth programs deliver English language, literacy, numeracy and more recently digital (LLND) skills training. These programs focus on listening and speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and digital literacy, and learning. Programs draw on mix of accredited, Vocational Education and Training (VET) and non-accredited training.

All programs use the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) to assess LLN skills levels. They may also use the Digital Literacy Skills Framework to assess digital skills. The ACSF is a tool designed to describe an individual's performance in the five core skills of English: learning, reading, writing, speaking and listening, and numeracy.

## Skills for Education and Employment (SEE)

The SEE program delivers LLND training to assist job seekers to get the skills they need for a job, or as a pathway to further education. To be eligible for SEE, a person must be a registered job seeker aged 15 or over, and either be referred from Services Australia or an Employment Service Provider (ESPs) or be a volunteer job seeker. ESPs are providers of Workforce Australia (including Transition to Work), ParentsNext, Disability Employment Services and the Community Development Program (CDP).

SEE training is accredited and delivered face-to-face, mixed mode (a combination of face-to-face and online) and through a distance provider[2]. Nineteen Registered Training Organisations, contracted by DEWR following an open tender procurement process, deliver training through the SEE program.

21,787 job seekers participated in the program in the 2021-22 financial year, approximately 3% from remote regions. This is broadly reflective of the proportion of jobseekers in CDP areas being 4.4% of the national jobseeker caseload.

There are some key differences in the way SEE operates in remote Australia, when compared to regional and metropolitan areas:

- 75% of participants in remote Australia are First Nations Australians.
- Jobseekers in remote areas are referred by Community Development (CDP) providers rather than by Workforce Australia providers. Participation in SEE for jobseekers registered with CDP providers is voluntary.
- Delivery of SEE in remote locations tends to be short-term or project based, rather than based at permanent sites with rolling intakes. The standard SEE model, involving a permanent delivery site, is not suitable in many remote communities due to:
  - the smaller eligible population, compared to regional and metropolitan areas
  - a lack of teachers

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[2] Distance provider refers to a training provider that provides training solely via online platforms and/or using paper-based methods.

- ○ the importance First Nations participants place on local community and cultural events and the associated time commitment, which are not always understood or respected by mainstream service providers, for example sorry business, and seasonal issues
- ○ the funding model, which funds providers to deliver a LLND assessment prior to the commencement of training and for each hour the client attends.

## Remote Community Pilots (Pilots)

Commencing in 2020, four remote community pilots are currently operating, testing different approaches to delivering community-led LLND training in remote Australia. The total cost for the Pilots is $9.9 million over three years (to 30 June 2023).

These pilots are place-based and designed with the communities according to their local priorities. Training is a mix of accredited and non-accredited[3], depending on the needs of the communities and participants. The Pilots aim to improve the English LLND skills of all community members.

They also aim to identify new approaches to delivery to inform future program design. The Department is undertaking an evaluation of the Pilot program, with an interim report due in December 2022 and a final report due in June 2023.

There are four models of LLND training being delivered:

- In **Tennant Creek** (Northern Territory), the Literacy for Life Foundation has partnered with Julalikari Council Aboriginal Corporation, to deliver the *Yes I can* campaign-style model. It is a two-way teaching and learning model designed to raise literacy levels quickly. Training is delivered face-to-face in three phases consisting of socialisation and mobilisation, basic literacy lessons, and literacy activities. Each phase constitutes an interlinked, mutually supportive component of the overall curriculum. A critical mass of the community, locally recruited and trained classroom facilitators and coordinators, and campaign participants are all essential parts of the model.

- In **Doomadgee** (Queensland), Corporate Culcha has partnered with the Doomadgee community, Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation (ALNF) and My Pathway to deliver a platform based training model combining learning in English and the local language. It uses first language to improve English language skills. This model links English LLND skills with a community priority of building strength in first languages to engage learners.

- In **Djarindjin, Ardyaloon, Lombadina** and **Beagle Bay** (Western Australia) the Djarindjin Aboriginal Corporation has partnered with Business Foundations to develop work-based interactive virtual tools to focus learning. Local training delivers one-to-one self-paced training. The model links training to local jobs to increase the number of local people able to fill these roles.

- In **Ceduna, Yalata, Kooniba, Oak Valley (Maralinga Tjarutja)** and **Scotdesco** (South Australia) EyrePlus has partnered with the Australian Employment and Training Solutions to deliver accredited and non-accredited training. The program has rolling intakes, training is individualised, self-paced and opt-in/opt-out. They are using personal goal setting, individual

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[3] Accredited training refers to the delivery of an accredited training product (as listed on National Register) by a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) that leads to the awarding of nationally recognised formal qualification or award. Non-accredited training is structured training or instruction that does not lead to the attainment of a formal qualification or award, for example organisation-specific training.

learning plans and priority community projects to engage participants and provide opportunities for 'hidden LLND learning' and tangible outcomes. Foundation Skills for Your Future (FSFYF)

Commencing in 2020, the Foundation Skills for Your Future Program (FSFYF) provides LLND training to employed and recently unemployed Australians. Twenty-nine Registered Training Organisations, contracted by DEWR through an open tender procurement process, deliver training.

The total budget for the program is $52.5 million over five years. To date, 16 projects have been funded in remote Australia, supporting 324 participants.

## Examples of models that work in remote Australia

In addition to the services being delivered by the Commonwealth, there are a range of other successful LLND delivery models in remote Australia. These are funded by state, territory and local governments, private organisations and communities.

These are being delivered by Aboriginal Corporations, Indigenous Registered Training Organisations, Technical and Further Education (TAFE), Indigenous small to medium enterprises. There are a range of features that are common to their success:

- Real consultation with community to find out what is needed and wanted
- Specialist Adult Literacy teachers
- Long term programs, of at least 3 to 4 years, building relationships and trust between learners and program staff
- Employees (work-based training) are released from work to attend training
- Learning is customised to the interests and needs of individual learners
- Programs include wrap around supports that address the range of barriers that may prevent learners from successfully accessing and completing training.

## Research and evidence about what works

There have been a range of inquiries into remote delivery, as well as experiences and evaluations of current programs that will be drawn on in the work to reinvigorate foundation skills delivery in remote Australia.

Evaluations and experience from the SEE program, FSFYF program and the Pilots identify several challenges and opportunities for change.

SEE Program

In 2015 evaluation of the SEE program[4] found several differences in delivering the program in remote areas compared to urban and regional areas. The factors unique to delivering the program in remote areas include:

- extra challenges in employing suitably qualified teaching staff
- disproportionately higher costs associated with training delivery
- particular difficulties in establishing effective working relationships with employment service providers

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[4] ACIL ALLEN Consulting for the Department of Education and Training, *SEE Programme Evaluation Report*, 2015

- particularly low levels of awareness and understanding of the SEE program by participants and employment service providers.

The report recommended a review of approaches and funding models to improve sustainability.

<u>Foundation Skills For Your Future</u>

Providers delivering the FSFYF have also found that:
- participants' eligibility limited providers' ability to develop, apply and gain funding, particularly in regional, remote, and very remote areas
- providers face uncertainty around client numbers and meeting timeframes.

<u>Remote Community Pilots</u>

The Pilots, which have adopted a whole person and whole community approach to service delivery, have identified a range of factors that improve success, including:
- community preparedness, readiness, engagement, and buy-in
- governance arrangements that encourage a sense of ownership among community members
- skilled Indigenous small to medium enterprise providers to co-design pilot delivery
- a local workforce, including mentors, supported by skilled staff and organisations that may be located elsewhere
- a focus on the whole person through the provision of non-vocational support or linking learners to support services, before and during training
- delivering accredited and non-accredited training tailored to local needs and delivered flexibly. This may be through the workplace, at home, in a classroom or by distance during COVID-19
- providing opportunities for self-paced learning and time away to support non-training commitments
- seeking opportunities for ''hidden learning'' while learners work toward personal goals, for example getting a driver's licence.

## Commonwealth inquiries

The Commonwealth has undertaken a number of reviews in recent years that will contribute to future program design. These include inquiries into adult literacy and its importance, and education in remote and complex environments.

## Don't take it as read - Inquiry into adult literacy and its importance

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training released the report *Don't take it as read - Inquiry into adult literacy and its importance* (the Inquiry)[5] in 2022. The Inquiry received 111 submissions and held 10 public hearings.

During the Inquiry, evidence was presented on the need to support first languages, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. The Inquiry also heard that building English literacy enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to work in two worlds. It removes barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accessing jobs, assisting their children and being able to fully participate in the social and economic life in Australia. It also contributes to the effective governance

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[5] House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Don't take it as read*, 2020.

of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations to meet closing the gap targets.

The review made 15 recommendations, including 5 that relate directly to delivery in remote Australia. The report recommends that Government:

- Support whole of community and family LLND programs
- Improve data collection to drive evidence-based policy and outcomes
- Build the capacity of the adult and community education sector
- Support measures that raise English LLND skills in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, ensuring that these measures are consistent with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap
- Work together across Commonwealth, state, and territory governments to develop a new national foundation skills strategy.

## Education in remote and complex environments

In 2019 the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training looked at education in remote and complex environments. It explored the barriers that students in these areas face when accessing education, including unique learning needs. The inquiry looked at how to deliver better education outcomes for students living in those areas.

The report was released in 2020. It highlighted the need for foundation skills in remote Australia. It found that compared to those living in metropolitan areas, "Australians growing up in regional and remote areas have lower educational attainment rates in school, in Year 12 and in tertiary education"[6].

The committee made 14 recommendations to improve access to quality education for students in regional, rural, and remote communities. The recommendations included that Government:

- Develop policies and programs that:
  - generate investment, economic development, and employment
  - deliver essential infrastructure
  - improve access and affordability to services. These include health, disability and crisis support services. They also include infrastructure such as public transport, broadband, and phone reception.
- Further its commitment to Closing the Gap by:
  - providing adult literacy campaigns in communities with low levels of adult English literacy
  - establishing programs that support the development and professionalisation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workforce
  - establishing cultural induction and training programs which are culturally safe, for educators working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

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[6] House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, 2020

# Principles for program design

Program design for delivery in remote Australia must consider the unique community needs and geographic complexities of remote Australia. The program must be accessible, flexible, and sustainable.

It should allow people to draw on their strengths and existing knowledge to improve their foundation skills and recognise that within remote Australia, there are very different delivery environments, including:

| 1 | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled communities and outstations, for example Maningrida, Bamaga, Yalata or Beagle Bay. |
|---|---|
| 2 | Small towns such as Weipa, Port Hedland, Roxby Downs and Nhulunbuy usually linked to a major industry with significant fly-in, fly-out workforces and typically low unemployment. |
| 3 | Small service towns such as Tennant Creek, Ceduna, Longreach, Carnarvon and Bourke which may or may not have a high proportion of residents who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. These towns may have a broader economic and demographic base to distinguish from location type 2 and may experience higher rates of unemployment. |
| 4 | 10 cities and towns that are located within remote Australia but currently excised from the Community Development Program (CDP) – Alice Springs, Broome, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Esperance, Port Lincoln, Whyalla, Port Augusta, Broken Hill and Mt Isa. This location type might include people living in smaller nearby centres currently receiving services by the CDP. |
| 5 | Farms, stations, service stations or sole residences, migratory persons, and seasonal workers. |

Priority Reform 3 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap[7] commits government, in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, to transform mainstream government services to work better for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In keeping with all priority reforms, the program needs to:

1. Foster partnership and shared decision making between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and governments

2. Build the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled service sector in agreed outcome areas

3. Build better data access and increase sharing of the right data to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to make informed decisions with us.

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[7] Commonwealth of Australia, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, 2020

In developing any new program, consideration will be given to the following principles.

**Policy design**

| Principle | Definition |
|---|---|
| Equitable | Program supports consistent access to quality training and outcomes. |
| Sustainable | Settings ensure program delivery can be predictable and effectively managed within the agreed parameters. |
| Value for money | Policy design should consider how best to achieve value with available money. That public resources are used in an efficient, effective, economical, and ethical manner that is consistent with the policies of the Commonwealth. |
| Inclusive | Ensures that all Australians living in remote areas, who have LLND needs, can access this support, ensuring no Australians are left behind and no-one is held back. Eligibility criteria should be straightforward, easily understood and effectively communicated. |

**Practical**

| | |
|---|---|
| Simplicity and transparency | Program design is transparent and easy for individuals, communities, and government to understand and administer, and for providers to comply with. |
| Administratively efficient | That the level of administrative effort and resource is proportionate to the investment and the risk for participants, providers and government. |
| Effective | Program delivery meets local community needs and leads to real and sustainable outcomes. |

# Discussion questions on future foundation skills delivery in remote Australia

**How can the foundation skills training be designed to draw on the strengths, and meet the needs, of learners in remote Australia?**

- DEWR is seeking views from First Nations Australians and other stakeholders on how the Government can best support foundation skills development in remote Australia.

**How should a foundation skills remote program be designed to respond to local needs?**

- Recognising that each remote community is unique with different social and economic priorities, varying levels of engagement with support services and cultural sensitivities, DEWR is seeking views on how best to design a program that can be tailored to the needs of individual communities. This also means making sure that communities are involved and give support for the design and delivery of any potential foundation skills initiatives.

- In thinking about different elements of program design, stakeholders could consider how people would access the training, the type of training that should be delivered, funding models and how performance should be measured.

**How could Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations be better supported to deliver appropriate training?**

- DEWR is interested in stakeholder views on examples of program delivery that meet the needs of individual learners and communities and deliver quality LLND outcomes.

- What are some of the ways face to face and distance modes of training delivery could be made more relevant and engaging to support learners to complete training and achieve their learning goals?

**How should results of the foundation skills remote program be measured, monitored, and evaluated?**

- DEWR is interested in stakeholder views on how this investment should be monitored with meaningful data collected and how this is then made accessible to demonstrate clear progress.

**How could the foundation skills sector, including the workforce, be better supported to deliver in remote Australia?**

- DEWR is interested in which staffing roles and capabilities are needed to successfully deliver LLND training in remote areas.

- What is needed to support a strong pipeline of First Nations LLND teachers?

- Delivering in remote areas can present barriers to recruitment, development, and retention of staff. What professional development activities could the Commonwealth support to improve recruitment and retention?

**What opportunities are there for the Commonwealth, state, and territory governments to work together to better support foundation skills delivery?**

- States and territories design and deliver foundation skills training that meet their local needs. This results in different approaches and varying levels of provision across the country.