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Dear Penelope,

The Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) is pleased to present for your consideration a response to the consultation paper *Scoping a foundation skills professional standards framework*. This submission has been prepared and reviewed by ACTA councillors and state and territory TESOL association members who have extensive expertise in the field of English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) education for adult learners. Feedback collected at consultations held in locations around Australia on behalf of ACTA has been included in this response.

ACTA is the national coordinating body of state and territory professional associations for the Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). ACTA represents and advocates on behalf of teachers, parents and carers, and English-language learners, including migrants, refugees, international students, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, in all education sectors and contexts across Australia.

ACTA seeks to advocate for and enhance the profile of the TESOL profession in Australia through a wide range of activities in local, regional, national and international contexts.

ACTA's objectives are:

- to represent and support the interests of teachers of English to speakers of other languages and dialects and their students



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- to ensure access to appropriate English language instruction for speakers of other languages and dialects
- to encourage implementation and delivery of quality professional programs at all levels
- to promote study, research and development of TESOL at local, regional, national and international levels.

ACTA represents the LLN practitioners identified in the National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults 'who specialise in the delivery of...English as a Second Language¹ programs to adults, using either stand-alone or vocationally-integrated delivery.' (page 11). EAL/D specialist practitioners work within a range of national and state programs in adult community, TAFE and other VET and post compulsory settings.

We hope these responses provide valuable input and help inform the next step in the process. ACTA looks forward to having further involvement in the development of foundation skills standards.

Yours sincerely,

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ACTA

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¹ English as a Second Language is now commonly referred to as English as an Additional Language or Dialect. The acronym ESL is gradually being replaced with EAL/D. This response will refer to EAL/D.

Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) response to the *Scoping a foundation skills standards framework consultation*

The National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults (2012) identified ‘adult learners whose first language is not English, particularly those with limited or interrupted schooling in their first language’ (p.6) as one of the learner groups requiring foundation skills support. Adult EAL/D learners are represented in a range of both national and state adult programs delivering foundation skills. These include the AMEP settlement programs delivering beginning English language, and SEE (formerly LLNP). ACTA’s submission to the 2012 LLNP Consultation paper noted that over 70 per cent of clients commencing in the LLNP are from [Culturally and Linguistically Diverse] backgrounds (p4).

Identification of the distinct needs of EAL/D learners in the adult LLN / foundation skills context is crucial in any discussion of foundation skills professional standards for specialist LLN practitioners. Benseman, Sutton and Lander (2005) writing about the New Zealand adult sector note:

With the advent of the concept of foundation learning, language and literacy are increasingly seen to be related parts of the whole and have become important components in the general tertiary sector. However, while ESOL and literacy provision are related, they are not the same and there are important differences between the fields that should not be overlooked. (2005:72).

The adult EAL/D learner’s needs differ from those of adult learners who have grown up in an English environment and who have literacy needs. Acquiring a new language as an adult is different from acquiring literacy skills in one’s first language. EAL/D students come from diverse, multilingual backgrounds and may have limited or no previous education, little or no literacy experience in their first language (or in any language), or they may have excellent literacy skills in their first language (or another language) and high levels of education. A foundation skills standards framework needs to recognise EAL/D and literacy approaches as distinct but at the same time allow for flexibility to combine them in supporting the needs of diverse groups.

Scoping a foundation skills professional standards framework

ACTA welcomes the opportunity to participate in the consultation on professional standards for foundation skills as this provides an avenue to develop a common understanding of the expertise required to deliver quality language, literacy and numeracy in a variety of contexts to adult learners, and to better understand the additional employment and other skills which are included in foundation skills. ACTA supports the notions expressed in the consultation paper that:

- a professional standards framework can be a mechanism to articulate the necessary attributes of a specialist foundation skills field. (Consultation Paper p 7)
- by starting afresh it should be possible to consider the nature and boundaries of the new field (Consultation Paper p 8)
- the field includes a diverse range of practitioners with varying skill specialisations applied in many contexts(Consultation Paper p 8)

It also acknowledges that the work ahead is complex and this is reflected below in the responses to the discussion points raised in the consultation paper.

Discussion point 1: scoping the foundation skills field

Boundaries

ACTA supports the need to define the foundation skills field but acknowledges boundaries are complex as new roles and as new skills requirements evolve in response to policy and program initiatives and emerging learner contexts. While there is often a clear distinction between EAL/D and Literacy foundation skills, it is sometimes difficult to place definite boundaries in LLN because of overlap. A Venn diagram would be useful to illustrate the commonalities and differences between practitioner roles and between learner needs across different foundation skills programs.

Occupations

The field should focus on developing standards for specialists and practitioners involved in specific foundation skills program delivery, but needs to acknowledge that the field includes 'associated' job roles. Standards will also need to distinguish between the various roles.

Examples of 'associates' include (but are not limited to):

- counsellors
- student support services
- pathways advisors
- tutors

The diagram on page 9 of the consultation paper provides a useful starting point for defining the foundation skills workforce. ACTA suggests the following could also be covered in the diagram:

- the diagram does not at present represent the full picture of provision in VET programs outside the commonwealth funded contexts, particularly in EAL/D.

VET includes a range of programs which are not well described under 'Learner support', for example:

- stand alone LLN programs within Foundation and Vocational Pathways and Access departments in VET which deliver state accredited LLN courses and qualifications such as the CGEA and ESL Framework (in Victoria), and the CEP and EaSD (in SA);
 - blended program delivery in which industry training is combined with LLN via accredited courses or industry qualifications and imported LLN units; and
 - New Arrivals Programs (in some adult re-entry colleges) - these are not funded by the commonwealth as settlement programs (AMEP), but are state funded;
- there is a need to include higher levels in the foundation skills field; for example, university education seems to have been left out, and there is still a need to address foundation skills in that area, particularly pathway programs between VET and higher education. This area could be included as an eighth domain;
 - delivery in the Corrections sector needs to be included; and
 - ELICOS programs may need to be considered as these also form part of foundation skills.

Defining a foundation skills practitioner

ACTA supports the notion expressed in the consultation paper on page 10 that there is a need for definitions of roles and their required expertise, skills and knowledge so that 'standards' can be developed.

Discussion Point 2: considering the purpose of a professional standards framework

ACTA supports the idea that a professional standards framework should include both foundation skills specialists and related occupations where a level of knowledge and skills in foundation skills is an addition to the required core skills and capabilities. We believe the priority is to initially define the standards for specialists.

Identification and clarification of what is meant by a foundation skills practitioner will assist the field in understanding the shared requirements and the distinct specialist requirements of diverse roles. Agreed definitions will also contribute to a better understanding within the field about, for example, the required skills and knowledge for competency based assessment covered in the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. Feedback gathered in ACTA consultations suggests this is not well understood, for example, there is a commonly held belief that the Certificate IV duplicates skills and knowledge acquired in university qualifications such as Masters degrees in adult education.

Establishment of a sustainable and relevant framework of professional standards will strengthen the identity of the field in a variety of ways and contribute to:

- recognition of foundation skills as a profession
- guiding existing and new entry practitioners in providing an awareness of their role and informing their professional practice
- guiding funding bodies and managers of programs

A framework needs to allow for the diversity of the field and levels within. For example, a matrix could be used to describe competencies and understandings at different levels.

Sample standards matrix

	Proficient	Highly Accomplished	Lead
Specialist			
Practitioner			
Associate			

A useful and sustainable professional standards framework would include, but not be limited to the following components:

- theoretical knowledge related to teaching and learning
- skills & practice including core teaching and assessment competencies relevant to LLN
- dispositions
- currency
- maintenance of PD
- nationally recognised qualifications (or internationally recognised as relevant)
- match needs of learner groups e.g. Indigenous / vocational / workplace

Management mechanisms

There should be a national body established to guide and maintain standards made up of state and national representatives. Membership of the national body should include representatives from the identified peak bodies. ACTA, together with other peak professional associations, should contribute to the implementation and management of any professional standards framework. Any body overseeing the development and maintenance of Foundation skills standards will need to include a



research and development capacity together with a leadership role in professional development associated with the standards.

Discussion Point 3: identifying knowledge and skills for the foundation skills field

ACTA believes a matrix is an effective way of describing the range of capabilities needed in the foundation skills field. The standards matrix above could provide a useful starting point for this. The following skills, knowledge and dispositions should be included:

Essential for everyone in the field:

- culturally and linguistically inclusive strategies
- intercultural competence
- good communication skills/people skills
- disposition
- ethics
- high level literacy
- self-awareness and evaluation - reflective practice and ability to change
- counselling skills
- training skills
- assessment literacy
- knowledge of measures and descriptors of LNN
- positive approach (not 'that's wrong')
- mentoring
- networking skills
- knowledge of resources
- willingness to share
- Adult Education principles
- IT skills
- Knowledge of:
 - mental health issues
 - socio economic levels
 - cultural
 - learning barriers

Specialisations that should be included in the framework:

- EAL/D
- Literacy



- Numeracy
- Disability

Additional specialisations that could be included in the framework

- Teaching LESSLA (Low Educated Second language and Literacy Acquisition) learners
- ICT and digital literacy
- LLN in industry

The EAL/D (TESOL) specialisation could draw on previous work done by ACTA on describing the expertise of accomplished TESOL teachers (Appendix D in the Consultation Paper – Standards for TESOL Practitioners). ACTA is presently reviewing these standards to include levels (graduate, proficient, highly accomplished (EAL/D specialist), lead).

Discussion Point 4: using qualifications to describe professional requirements

ACTA acknowledges there is no single qualification which defines specialist expertise in the field as the field is made up of practitioners and experts with diverse expertise. ACTA also acknowledges that qualifications are only one essential component of professional expertise. It is in the best interests of the field to support the maintenance and development of recognised LLN qualifications which could be mapped to a standards matrix. This mapping would also serve to highlight the additional needs of foundation skills practitioners not covered in qualifications. Additional skills could be gained and recognised through sustained professional development programs and management of practical experience.

In the LLN field, there is a range of recognised international and national qualifications in both VET and higher education for specialist practitioners. Examples include: Bachelor of Adult Vocational & Workplace Education; TAE80113 Graduate Diploma of Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice, TAE80213 Graduate Diploma of Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Leadership Examples of TESOL qualifications include Graduate Certificate TESOL; Graduate Diploma TESOL, B Ed with TESL/TESOL as a method. There are also Masters degrees which include a TESOL specialisation such as Masters of Arts (TESL/TESOL).

In addition, there is the VET trainer qualification (TAE40110 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment or equivalent) required by AQTF / VET Quality Framework Standards for RTOs and VET providers and included in Training Package and Accredited Course requirements for trainers and assessors.

Participants in discussions noted that TESOL courses currently available are appropriate for their needs, there are only a small number of subjects for some

qualifications, for example, Graduate Certificates include only 3 subjects. It was also noted that some TESOL post-graduate qualifications are being phased out.

Comments from participants also indicated that post graduate TESOL qualifications generally do not focus on adult learning but give good grounding in Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Qualifications with a practicum component give the opportunity for the student teacher to experience the adult teaching environment. Generally the qualifications do not cover all knowledge and skills - experience is vital. There seems to be a general lack of workplace training in existing qualifications.

Practitioners identified the following as generally not covered in TESOL qualifications which should be included in foundation skills standards:

Dealing with particular student issues:

- survivors of trauma and torture
- counselling
- mental health
- disability

In addition, IT skills need to be embedded within qualifications as LLN and employment preparation consistently requires learners to develop digital literacy skills.

One group commented: *Nothing fully covers the skills required, but we don't think there is a need for a 'one size fits all' qualification to cover language, literacy and numeracy specialisations.*

Another participant suggested need a range of qualifications for practitioners - AQF 8 for practitioners and higher for specialists.

Participants were strong in their defence of robust requirements for qualified TESOL practitioners.

Requirements for TESOL qualifications across the range of state and commonwealth programs and accredited courses are on the whole consistent, but there is a need to ensure some continuity across programs. Development of a standards framework would assist program developers and funding bodies to develop consistent requirements.

One possible outcome of the development of a comprehensive matrix could be the improvement of qualification offerings targeting specialists in the adult field. Identified gaps could then be addressed in additional professional development linked to the standards matrix.

Participants in discussions also emphasised the importance of maintaining a specialisation for practitioners and experts in teaching English as an additional language and to ensure that this does not become subsumed into literacy.

Discussion Point 5: defining on the job requirements

Comments from participants included the following:

Levels could be used to describe developmental stages of foundation skills expertise and experience, with the understanding that everyone picks up different skills at different rates so it is very difficult to have standardised progression. Does length of service equate with being a good practitioner? There is a need to be careful in framing this. The levels can be used to describe developmental stages of foundation skills practitioners (with the proviso that it is not just linked to 'years of service/experience').

Any process should be formal, consistent and documented. It could include peer mentoring with already well experienced or less experienced learners.

We would urge caution considering these as 'mandatory'.

ACTA supports the importance of linking on-the-job learning with formal professional development as part of the process in the development of expertise. The opportunity to develop and enhance skills and knowledge within the professional context cannot be overemphasised. ACTA would support development of support mechanisms for practitioners to gain on-the-job experience which is also linked to formal professional development.

Discussion Point 6: creating a system for continuing professional development

A system for CPD could and should be created. A successful system would be one which is flexible and which acknowledges the differing needs of individual practitioners and organisations. ACTA would recommend a system for Professional Development overseen by a single entity that offers research-based, evidence-based discussion papers and related professional development opportunities (such as *AMEP Research Centre* used to provide. This needs to be funded to develop and deliver the training and resource development so that teachers can attend face to face sessions and access resources.

It needs a proven, recognised communication system, highly organised network through professional organisations, in addition to financial commitment by management within organisations involved in foundation skills program delivery.

Professional organisations should be financially supported to provide locally developed CPD.

We recommend annual conferences, workshops in rural and regional areas, online webinars and courses, downloadable resources and social media sharing opportunities.

Foundation skills casualised workforce:

More effort is required to increase the opportunities for people to be able to earn a full time income in this field (if desired). It is important to support rather than exclude casual employees from ongoing access to professional learning opportunities.

A priority for all practitioners would be to target skills for developing knowledge of all components of a foundation skills program as identified in a standards framework, e.g. Numeracy teaching for EAL/D teachers, Adult ESB literacy teaching for EAL/D teachers.

Support for teacher led research in LLN and foundation skills practice and application of research findings are essential components of any foundation skills professional development program.

Discussion Point 7: establishing requirements for specialist areas

ACTA strongly supports a foundation skills field which ensures development of expertise in particular skill areas. TESOL / EAL/D specialists will be an important group within the foundation skills field, alongside Literacy, Numeracy and other specialisations.

A broader understanding of the place of EAL/D specialisation is required. While ACTA agrees that there has been a focus on settlement and stand alone EAL/D provision, blended programs, concurrent support, industry training combined with EAL/D support, contextualised learning for specific vocations and similar have been a feature of EAL/D programs in VET and community settings for many years. EAL/D specialists need to be involved in supporting other foundation skills practitioners in delivering to diverse groups. In turn, EAL/D specialists benefit from collaboration with other specialists and shared understandings about foundation skills learners. The development of standards together with professional development and research into foundation skills will be enhanced by such collaboration.

In the case of TESOL, the best way to describe the unique knowledge and skills requirements of the specialisation is to provide opportunities for the profession, led by TESOL professional associations, to gather examples of the research into the specific needs of adult EAL/D learners, to synthesise key findings for specialist and non specialist practitioner audiences, and to provide examples of best practice. An example of this kind of approach is in the school sector with the development of resources by AITSL e.g. the Illustrations of Practice Project which exemplifies best practice for different career stages (See <http://www.teacherstandards.aitsl.edu.au/Illustrations>).

Key understandings of TESOL theory and approaches for all specialist practitioners would include (but are not limited to) the following elements:

- second language acquisition
- grammar and syntax
- pragmatics
- metalinguistic knowledge
- genre-based/text based teaching
- accessing prior knowledge
- high level oral and written English
- high communication skills
- understanding the effective domain - positive learning environment
- learning how to learn
- socio-cultural understanding
- cultural understandings and practices
- ability to be reflective and critical
- ability to design and sequence language learning activities
- language assessment principles and practices
- classroom based language education research principles and practices
- connecting learning to family/community

There is a distinction between delivery across contexts and delivery in different contexts. In dealing with delivery within a context (e.g. WELL), some adjustment is required by the specialist. This can be handled by 'work shadowing' to bridge the divide between classroom and industry - but the distinction does need to be recognised.

Discussion Point 8: determining the need for a code of practice

ACTA supports general principles that outline ethical practice in the field currently in use as outlined in the consultation paper on pages 19-20. It would support the development of a code of ethics to guide delivery and assessment of foundation skills as outlined on pages 20-21 of the consultation paper.

Reference:

Benseman, J., Sutton, A & Lander, J. 2005. *Working in the light of evidence, as well as aspiration: A literature review of the best available evidence about effective adult literacy, numeracy and language teaching*, Ministry of Education, Auckland NZ. Viewed 30 September 2013, http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/tertiary_education/27773/5727

