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Community adult language, literacy and numeracy provision in Australia: Diverse approaches and outcomes

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Publisher's note

Additional information relating to this research is available in *Community adult language, literacy and numeracy provision: Diverse approaches and outcomes—Support document*. It can be accessed from NCVER's website <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/1796.html>.

To find other material of interest, search VOCED (the UNESCO/NCVER international database <http://www.voced.edu.au>) using the following keywords: non-accredited training, adult basic education, skill development, self esteem, literacy, numeracy.

Australian Government

Department of Education, Science and Training

Foreword

The Australian Quality Training Framework has been developed to ensure the integrity of accredited training and improved responsiveness to industry needs. Non-accredited training, not subject to the same reporting and auditing processes as accredited training, can be overlooked as an important contributor to the advancement of the community through education and training. This study examined a particular sub-sector of non-accredited training, specifically that focused on adult language, literacy and numeracy provision.

The study was managed by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) under the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Research Program. This is a national program funded by the Department of Education, Science and Training as part of the Adult Literacy National Project on behalf of the Australian Government and state and territory governments.

This research is the first attempt to gauge the extent of provision of non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy training in Australia—not presently captured in national training statistics. The report stresses the importance of such training for many people in the community, including those disengaged from education and lacking the self-confidence to undertake accredited courses.

The study also highlights the close relationship between the learning of language, literacy and numeracy skills and the development of self-confidence, and advocates for tools to better monitor progress in both these areas. As such, the report will not only be of interest to those in policy roles, but also to staff involved in teaching and administration in this area in both accredited and non-accredited courses.

Tom Karmel
Managing Director, NCVER

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Support also came from editors of newsletters and websites, including *Literacy Link*, *Write On*, Adult Learning Australia, the Local Community Services Association, NSW (Jeustelle Staver), National Disability Services (formerly ACROD—Australian Council for Rehabilitation of Disabled) and EdNA. Given the diversity of non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy provision in Australia, as revealed by this study, it is not possible to know the full extent of support provided by other organisations and individuals whose names are unknown to me and therefore not included here, but whose efforts are also nonetheless appreciated. Valuable feedback was also received from the audience at the presentation of the draft results at the Australian Council for Adult Literacy conference, Adelaide, October 2006.

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Key messages

This study explores the scope of non-accredited (where the learners do not receive a formal certificate) community adult language, literacy and numeracy provision in Australia. It looks at the extent of provision, the characteristics and motivations of the students, learning outcomes and pathways to other education and employment, and how providers can best be assisted to maintain and expand their programs.

♦ Thousands of adults each year receive non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy assistance in Australia. Many choose this form of assistance because they either do not need or would struggle with accredited courses.

♦ For learners, development of language, literacy and numeracy skills appears closely linked to the development of self-confidence. Both aspects need time to grow.

♦ Teachers and tutors have a key role in developing both skills and self-confidence. Therefore greater attention to initial training and professional development is essential, as is a broad approach to assessment.

♦ Providers believe that non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy teaching makes a valuable contribution to the community and that greater recognition and funding are warranted.

Executive summary

Purpose

Even a rudimentary scan of the educational marketplace reveals a wide range of organisations offering some sort of support for the development of English language, literacy and numeracy in adults. The purpose of this research was to map a particular sub-sector of that provision: non-accredited community adult language, literacy and numeracy. In contrast to accredited training, little is known about the extent and impact of non-accredited adult literacy, language and numeracy training. Furthermore, external reporting of non-accredited community education courses in Australia, unlike that for accredited courses, is more piecemeal.

Approach

For the purposes of this study, the term 'non-accredited' was used instead of 'community' when referring to language, literacy and numeracy provision in the context of the national collection of information. However, in the case studies and in the report, the focus is on the community aspects of provision. 'Non-accredited' was taken to mean any language, literacy and numeracy course for which no accredited qualification was awarded, including those for which a statement of attainment or statement of attendance was given. It also included courses where language, literacy and/or numeracy were embedded as a specific component, for example, in a cooking class or computer course. Work-based non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy courses were not a focus of this study, but are an aspect of provision which needs further research.

Data were collected by a national survey sent to providers identified through the Reading Writing Hotline database (a national referral resource administered through TAFE NSW), as well as through the cooperation of peak bodies such as the Australian Council for Adult Literacy, Adult Learning Australia, government departments, and a range of other key agencies. In total, 125 eligible organisations from each state and territory, except the Northern Territory, responded to the survey. In addition, seven case studies were undertaken at selected sites in three states. These case studies comprised interviews with 37 people, including program coordinators, teachers, tutors and students in urban and rural areas and from a mix of program types. The case studies provided the detail required to better understand this diverse area of educational provision.

Findings

The study found that in some instances non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy programs operate alongside accredited courses through a variety of organisations in most Australian states, including the full range of adult and community education (ACE) providers, community English as a second language centres and ethnically based associations, disability support providers, technical and further education (TAFE) institutes, and private registered training organisations.

Diversity of programs

The diversity of this sub-sector was considerable: examples of courses included *speaking English clearly*, *statement of attainment in foundation and vocational education*, *numeracy and literacy for special needs clients* and *literacy support group for students*. There were also embedded literacy courses, especially in the disability area. Course lengths ranged from six to 400 hours, with informal arrangements at drop-in centres. Those in one-to-one volunteer programs usually met for two hours a week, for as long as the need existed, sometimes for several years. Volunteer tutors contributed to just over a third of the programs, usually one to one, with a small group, or supporting a teacher with a larger group. About a third of providers used a structured curriculum, but in many programs the content was based on the learners' needs. There was a range of educational prerequisites for teachers and tutors, with some 30% of organisations having no minimum requirement except interest and commitment. Generally there was a strong commitment by providers to professional development, although less than half made specific provision for it.

Students

Because of the variety of ways in which organisations reported the data and the nature of learners' attendance, it was not possible to arrive at an accurate figure for the number of students who were receiving non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy help. However, there appeared to be around 4000 students engaged with the 125 providers who responded. The majority of the organisations indicated that most of their students were aged between 30 and 49 years, with strong representation from the 20–29 years and 50–59 years cohorts. A wide range of reasons why adults seek such help were given, with learning English for everyday purposes seen as the major motivation. The need for social contact and the desire to take more control over their lives were also strong motivations. Only around one-quarter of the program coordinators believed that students participated primarily for employment-related reasons.

Outcomes

All organisations believed that as a result of their programs there was strong development of learners' language, literacy and numeracy skills and self-confidence, with levels of self-confidence slightly higher than skills levels. In line with the general emphasis on learners' needs, assessment in about 75% of the programs was mainly through a combination of small assessment tasks, with assessment of progress based on observations and student feedback. Some providers had a fairly loose approach to monitoring learners' progress and in some instances tutor assessment was not closely monitored by coordinators.

Given the variety of motivations, the difficulties many of the students had experienced with education in the past and the various commitments and life issues they needed to deal with, a smooth linear progression along pathways to other education and training or to employment seems an unrealistic expectation. It appears that many learners through these courses simply want to improve the quality of their lives and their capacity to interact with the wider community—in whatever ways they conceptualise these at the time. Nevertheless, only a very small number of organisations believed that none of their students went on to other training or employment.

Amongst providers, particularly those in the community, English as a second language, and disability support categories, there was a strong belief that outcomes apart from vocationally related ones should be given more recognition. According to these providers, the contribution of non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy courses to both personal development and social capital should receive greater acknowledgement, particularly through funding support.

Implications

Three particular issues arose from the study that need further consideration: government recognition, professional development, and assessment.

Recognition

The development of language, literacy and numeracy skills and a growth in self-confidence form the basis for individuals to interact with and make a positive contribution to the wider society. In this context therefore some respondents believe that more recognition by government of the value of community non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy provision is vital. As some states have shown, funding is one significant way in which support can be expressed by governments. Such funding should also take into account that, at this level, learners need time to develop both self-confidence and basic skills. In response, some providers believe they need to be able to demonstrate the quality of their programs; the implementation of an appropriate national reporting mechanism is one means to facilitate this.

Professional development

Because the development of language, literacy and numeracy skills for these learners runs parallel to the growth in self-confidence, the teacher–student relationship in one-to-one tutoring, in individual support in classes, and in small group work appears to be very significant. This is especially so for people who for various reasons have been academically unsuccessful at school, who are learning English for the first time, or who have an intellectual disability. It follows that the personal qualities of teachers and tutors are also crucial. If compassion, commitment and an interest in language (and sometimes numeracy) are complemented by initial training and ongoing professional development, the teaching and learning should be more effective.

Monitoring progress

A more sustained approach to monitoring progress may be warranted in some programs to enable a greater understanding of how students are faring in terms of both personal growth and skills development. A more considered approach to assessment is likely to ensure and demonstrate the efficacy of non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy provision. A broad approach to assessment will ensure that growth in self-confidence and in language, literacy and numeracy skills are both recorded and acknowledged.

Conclusion

This study has found that there is a strong continuing demand for non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy courses in Australia from the many adults who do not need or who have difficulty with accredited courses, and that a wide variety of agencies are currently providing such services. It has also shown that such programs are as much concerned with self-confidence as they are with developing language, literacy and numeracy. The report has also demonstrated that a combination of three factors is likely to ensure that this important sub-sector of education and training receives appropriate acknowledgement: firstly, government recognition of the benefits of language, literacy and numeracy provision; secondly, ongoing monitoring of the quality of provision by the providing organisations; and, finally, reporting of outcomes, in addition to that currently undertaken.

Introduction

Background

The first national report on adult literacy provision in Australia was published by the Australian Council for Adult Literacy in 1982 (Dymock) following some initial exploration in two special issues of *Literacy Discussion* (Nelson 1976). Since then, and particularly in the past 15 years or so, there have been significant changes in the national adult language, literacy and numeracy provision landscape. Despite the changes, however, two factors have remained constant: significant numbers of adults have continued to need help with their language, literacy and numeracy; and a diversity of provision has been regarded as essential in catering for individuals with a broad range of needs, motivations, personal backgrounds, and levels of skills and knowledge. The Australian Council for Adult Literacy (2004, p.2) observed: 'literacy and numeracy skills can and need to be developed in many ways. Pathways start from unpredictable points. Literacy and numeracy improvement is a whole of community issue.'

Beddie (2004) drew attention to the diverse literacy and numeracy needs of communities, while Kral and Falk (2004) showed the complexity inherent to meeting literacy and numeracy needs in an Indigenous community. McKenna and Fitzpatrick (2004) concluded from their research of international experience that adult language, literacy and numeracy programs depended on large numbers of community workers and voluntary agencies. The importance of these contributions was underlined by Wickert and McGuirk's (2005) research into community partnerships, which noted that literacy and numeracy were fundamental to the growth of social capital. These authors recommended 'creating a framework for community organisations which coordinates and supports diverse approaches and outcomes, and which is in consultation with the VET system but not constrained by it' (p.2). The subtitle of this report is drawn from the words of that recommendation. Balatti, Black and Falk (2006) confirmed that participation in literacy and numeracy courses produced social capital, but noted that the precise benefits vary according to age, English proficiency and background.

The diversity of provision in Australia, however, means that the contribution of non-accredited community courses has tended to be overshadowed by the focus in the last decade or so on accredited training and on registered training providers. The establishment of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) has seen an emphasis on accredited training and hence on certification. Statistics for accredited learning are obtained from the National VET Provider Collection. For non-accredited learning where learners do not receive an accredited qualification (even if the course they are undertaking is accredited or uses units from an accredited course), there is no national requirement for such reporting although, in Victoria and Queensland, figures for non-accredited adult learning are reported within the VET Provider Collection data. In the absence of nationally reported figures and within a diverse and diffuse educational environment, the initial challenge in this study was to identify the providers of non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy in order to explore the scope and impact of provision.

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to obtain a comprehensive picture of non-accredited community adult language, literacy and numeracy provision across Australia. Non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy was taken to include courses and other activities where students were given a statement of attainment or participation, but not accredited qualifications (for example, certificate I). It also included instances where activities with a specific language, literacy or numeracy aim were embedded in other courses. Furthermore, adult language, literacy and numeracy students were taken to include adult English as a second language students, adult literacy for native speakers of English, and adult numeracy students, respectively. The terms were not further defined on the understanding that any organisations responding would be those that would identify with one or all of those three terms; that is, they would self-select to participate. Any responses received which did not meet the criteria would be discounted at the analysis stage.

Research design

As this study was in an area of national provision not previously explored systematically, it was decided to use a national survey, supplemented with a small number of case studies.

An initial concern was the extent to which, by comparison with accredited training where reporting is mandatory, community adult language, literacy and numeracy provision is reported in Australia. Yet, in considering how to assess the extent of non-reported provision, it became clear that the use of the term 'community provider' in a national survey might exclude organisations that offered non-accredited courses, but might not necessarily see 'community' as an appropriate descriptor. To consider non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy provision as the domain only of 'community' agencies would deny the increasing blurring of the boundaries between formal and non-formal learning in Australia in recent years. It would also potentially exclude TAFE institutes, some other registered training organisations, and disability service organisations. It was therefore decided to keep the focus on community provision, but to use the term 'non-accredited' in the questionnaire, in order to capture the widest possible range of providers. However, the case studies were limited to 'community' providers, but even in this instance 'community' was broadly defined, as will be seen.

Research questions

The study aimed to answer the following questions:

✧ What is the extent of non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy provision in Australia?

✧ What sorts of learners utilise these programs and what are their motivations?

✧ How are learning outcomes assessed and to what extent do learners achieve successful outcomes?

✧ To what extent are pathways from non-accredited educational activities to other education, training and work encouraged and in what ways?

✧ How can community agencies providing non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy assistance best be helped to maintain, expand and improve their service to learners and hence impact on the wider community?

Survey

Questionnaires were administered nationally to literacy-related organisations between early May and mid-June 2006. The intention of the questionnaire was to obtain information about the types of providers, the nature and purposes of the adult language, literacy and numeracy 'courses' offered, the types and numbers of learners, the types of teachers/tutors, the perceptions of outcomes and

'pathways' to other training, education and/or work, the nature of reporting requirements, and what sorts of support would most assist such providers. The questionnaire was pilot-tested with a group of adult literacy students from a community education provider, with further input received from key individuals and the project reference group.

The primary mode of administration of the questionnaire was online. Email addresses for the organisations were obtained chiefly from the Reading Writing Hotline database, as well as from direct contact with potentially relevant organisations, through organisations' websites, and by searching the Yellow Pages online. For those organisations where email addresses were not available, hard copies of the questionnaire were sent.

Case studies

The purpose of the case studies was to explore in depth aspects such as why students sought out such programs; the notion of 'progress' for learners in non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy courses, in terms of both assessment and pathways; the issues that community providers had to deal with in providing this type of training; and how they perceived the 'impact' on the individual and on the community. Seven specific programs were selected to ensure a range of views, not necessarily fully representative, from non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy programs. The seven programs chosen were in Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia, and comprised three ACE providers (one urban—large city; one regional—large city; one rural—small town), two community-based specific literacy/numeracy providers (one regional— large city, one rural—small town), one church-sponsored community English as a second language centre (urban—large city), and one disability support provider (urban—large city). Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were undertaken with 37 people at manager, coordinator, teacher, tutor and student levels.

Limitations of the project

Although 'non-accredited' was used as the key term in the survey, as discussed above, it is recognised that non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy provision also takes place in various ways in workplaces, but workplace language, literacy and numeracy provision was regarded as a category distinct from 'community', as well as being a significant area of research in itself, and so was not included here. There is also a variety of private English language schools that offer short, non-accredited English as a second language courses of various kinds, but these are mainly for short-term visitors to Australia and were considered an area that might also be the subject of separate research.

Findings

In this chapter the responses to the national survey and the case study interviews are presented in summary form. Full accounts of the survey and case studies are provided in the support document.

Extent of non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy provision in Australia

For this study, 'extent of provision' was considered to include not only the numbers and types of providers, but also the nature of the courses, their target markets, and the training and support of teachers and tutors.

Response

Questionnaires were distributed to 1760 organisations. A copy of the questionnaire was also included, with a follow-up email to a number of peak organisations requesting its distribution through their electronic networks—although it is not possible to know the extent to which this occurred. Following the questionnaire and one reminder, ultimately 140 questionnaires were received, with 125 deemed to be eligible on the basis that they were clearly offering *non-accredited* language, literacy and/or numeracy activities. As the intention was to contact as many organisations as possible which appeared to offer adult language, literacy and/or numeracy support of some kind, with no attempt to differentiate between those offering accredited or non-accredited courses, the overall low response rate was not of foremost concern. The distribution of returned questionnaires by state/territory is shown in table 1.

Table 1   Number of questionnaires returned by state/territory

State/territory	n	%
Victoria	39	31.2
South Australia	39	31.2
Queensland	29	23.2
New South Wales	12	9.6
Australian Capital Territory	2	1.6
Western Australia	2*	1.6
Tasmania	2	1.6
Northern Territory	0	-
Total	**125**	**100.0**

Note: * One response from Western Australia was on behalf of 25 volunteer groups across the state.

Inquiries to the Northern Territory Council for Adult Literacy and the Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training confirmed that there is currently no funded non-accredited provision in the Northern Territory. It was suggested that, as in other states, the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme for Indigenous people can have a literacy and numeracy component, but this federally funded program is not represented in the responses to the survey. The extent of the response nationally is explored in the 'Discussion' section.

In order to identify the diversity of providers, respondents were asked to indicate the primary role of their organisation. The responses have been grouped under four headings in table 2.

Table 2   Primary role of organisations, expressed as a percentage of respondents

Role	n	%
Community	64	58.7
ACE	49	45.0
Specific adult literacy/numeracy improvement	9	8.3
Community information	6	5.5
Accredited training	23	21.1
English as a second language	14	12.8
ESL teaching/tutoring	11	10.1
Welfare/counselling	2	1.8
Health	1	0.9
Disability service provider	8	7.4
Total	**109**	**100.0**
Not stated	16	

Table 2 shows that general adult and community education (ACE) providers comprised 45% of those organisations that responded to the survey. However, if these providers as well as those identifying as 'community information' and 'specific adult literacy/numeracy improvement' are also considered as being part of community provision, then almost 59% might be regarded as being community providers. The nature of the field and the blurring of boundaries are shown by the fact that some 21% of the organisations indicated *accredited* training as their primary role, even though they also offered non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy skills development.

The two organisations in the 'welfare/counselling' group and the one in the 'health' group were found to be primarily working in the English as a second language field with migrants and refugees, so they were joined for the purposes of discussion with the 'English as a second language teaching/ tutoring' group, which together comprise almost 13%. Disability service providers (7%) are also reasonably represented among the respondents. Adding to the diversity and diffuseness, 46% of the respondents said that they were registered training organisations.

Courses

The extent of the diversity of provision in this sub-sector is reflected in the titles of the courses[1], including English for employment, *lifelong literacy*, *basic language skills*, *English language for refugees*, *reading, writing and numeracy for adults*, *statement of attainment in foundation and vocational education*, and *numeracy and literacy for special needs clients*. Course lengths ranged from six hours to 400 hours, but some of the responses referred to hours per term or semester, while others covered an entire year, making comparisons difficult. Where organisations indicated the numbers of hours per week allocated to the activity, these ranged from one hour a week to four hours a week, with two-hour sessions apparently the most common. Some respondents added riders such as 'during school terms'. One organisation offering computer-aided language learning for one hour per week added that students could attend in their own time for as many additional hours as they wished. Several said that it varied according to the needs of the individual, and another replied that it depended on the needs of the target group 'and available funds'.

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[1] While the majority of providers did offer 'courses', and that term is used throughout this report for ease of presentation, 'learning activities' might be a more appropriate, if clumsier, term, since some providers, such as the drop-in centre featured in case study six, the disability service provider in case study seven, and particularly those using volunteers, did not provide 'courses' as such, but ongoing support to meet individual needs. The term 'program' is used in the report in a broader sense than 'course'.

Just over one-third of the respondents said that they used a structured course or curriculum. Specific examples included *work-related literacy and numeracy* (30369) in Queensland (as a non-accredited course), *foundation and vocational education* (9566-9) in New South Wales and South Australia, or adaptations of those or similar courses. (For example, 'We use the old Certificate in English Language and Literacy as a base and add and subtract topics of interest or modify as the group requires'.) The majority did not follow a specific curriculum, with most of those indicating that their courses or activities were developed to meet learners' individual needs.

There were also some examples of embedded language, literacy and/or numeracy in such courses as *English through cooking*, *language of childbirth*, and *healthy eating*. Disability service providers generally embedded language, literacy and numeracy in other activities. A coordinator of a workplace program also pointed out that language, literacy and numeracy 'in workplace/industry contexts is generally integrated with industry/vocational training, for example, occupational health and safety, food safety, basic computer skills, working effectively in teams'. As noted earlier, however, work-based programs are not included in this report.

The question designed to identify the average number of students in a program at any one time may have been more effective if an annual figure had been requested. Due to the diversity of ways in which the courses are offered, there was a wide variation in how the figures were reported. The numbers ranged from '2–3 but growing' to a statewide estimate of '800–850 students currently, with a maximum of 1100–1200'. But these latter figures were a total for all courses, so cannot be compared with individual course figures. An English as a second language organisation said it had 70–80 students per week in conversation classes and 30–50 per week wanting a tutor, while a welfare organisation said it had ten students at any one time because 'that's how many computers we have'. Another English as a second language provider said that it assisted 500 people from 50 nationalities each year. An example of the diversity of provision within an organisation came from an ACE agency: 'English for beginners: 30; Improve your spelling: 8; Improve your spelling (computers): 5; Literacy special activities group: 10, Getting your learner's permit: 10'.

Teaching

Given the diversity of provision, it is not surprising that there was also a range of ways in which the teaching or training was organised. It was recognised that this range could apply within organisations as well as across them, so multiple responses were accepted. Just over half of the respondents used one-to-one tuition, and slightly under half of them taught groups of two to five and six to ten students, respectively. Twenty-eight per cent said they had classes of 11–15 students, while around 13% had classes larger than that.

Of the 119 providers who responded to the question about volunteers, 36% said they used volunteer tutors. In these instances, the use of volunteers was strongest in one-to-one tuition (30%), with a generally even spread across the other three categories: teaching small groups, a combination of one-to-one and small groups, and as support for classroom teaching. Several of the providers said they had no volunteer tutors at the moment, and some of those who said they used volunteer tutors did not indicate how many were currently on their books.

Given the diversity of provision, it is not surprising to find a range of qualifications and expectations about qualifications among the providers, with over 70% requiring a minimum qualification. These qualifications included a formal teaching qualification (34%), an in-house volunteer induction course (26%), Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (27%), and the Certificate IV in Language, Literacy and Numeracy Assessment and Training (9%).

Over 80% of respondents indicated that they provided some form of professional development for their teachers, whether paid or volunteer, although the attitudes to it varied. Two organisations indicated that conference attendance was their prime means of professional development and another three said it was conducted through regular meetings. One said it used annual mentoring. Fifty-one organisations had definite provision for professional development. Around half of these

required teachers/tutors/trainers to undertake a particular structured program. The other half had an explicit commitment to professional development, sometimes through an earmarked item in the annual budget; sometimes there was a requirement for teachers to identify their professional development needs to enable a specific program to be developed. Of the remaining 40 organisations, some 'encouraged' professional development, others said teachers/tutors/trainers had 'access' to unspecified opportunities, sometimes provided by their own organisations, for example, technical and further education (TAFE) institutes, and some simply noted that various external workshops or courses were available.

Learner characteristics and motivations

Respondents were asked to indicate the age ranges of the *majority* of their participants. Up to three age groups could be specified. Of the 122 who responded to this question, around 70% of respondents noted that most of their learners were aged between 30 to 39 years, with a similar proportion also nominating the 40 to 49 years age group. Half of the responses indicated that a large group of their learners were aged between 50 and 59 years. At the other end of the age scale, approximately 40% of respondents indicated that the majority of their learners were aged between 20 and 29 years (see the Support Document for more detail on the distribution of responses by age group).

In the 107 valid responses to the question on the gender balance of students, the mean was 68% females and 32% males. There were several courses that had only female students. The highest percentage of males, in two organisations, was 70%. Eight providers reported a 50–50 split. Overall, 87 of the 107 organisations had a majority of or exclusively female students. The lowest proportion of females in any course was 30%, and the lowest for males was 3% and 5% in two different courses.

One of the main questions about the need for non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy provision focused on the motivation of those requiring assistance. From a list established during the pilot phase of the project, the most identified reasons were: English improvement; returning to the workforce; a desire to feel more in control of their lives; and a social opportunity. Four per cent of providers thought 'no clear reason' was applicable for some students. Multiple responses were accepted for this question, but respondents were also asked to nominate from the list provided what they believed were the two main reasons. These are summarised in table 3.

Table 3   Main reasons for seeking language, literacy and numeracy assistance, in order of frequency of nomination by respondents

Reason	n
Learn or improve English for everyday living	41
Returning to the workforce/seeking employment	19
More control in their lives/self-esteem	15
Social opportunity/meet people	15
Changes in language, literacy and numeracy requirements at work	8
Required to attend language, literacy and numeracy course	7
Short-term specific need (such as obtain driver's licence)	6
Want to support children at school	4
Spouse/carer no longer available to support language, literacy and numeracy needs	2
Total	**117**
Not stated	8

Table 3 shows that improving literacy for everyday living was considered by far the most important single reason for students to seek language, literacy and numeracy assistance. This reflects the range

of organisations represented, including the predominance of ACE organisations, as well as the needs of English as a second language learners. For example, one provider wrote: 'In an area of high unemployment the courses offer those who are not employed a place to belong and grow socially and personally'. Another said the learners were 'lonely elderly migrants, young mums returning to work/study', and a third said the motivation was the 'realisation that improved literacy skills will enable them to function better in everyday life—including better job prospects and finally getting the courage to do something about it'. The next largest grouping is of those wanting to return to the workforce or seeking employment, which may overlap with the number who were required to attend language, literacy and numeracy courses, generally in order to fulfil government employment benefits requirements. A number of respondents said it was too hard to differentiate among the possible reasons learners had for participating.

Outcomes

The question of outcomes is an important one for providers and policy-makers because it has implications for the purposes of the courses, for the aspirations of the learners, the types of assessment, and ultimately often for funding. It also bears on the critical question, 'What is literacy?' with which numerous writers have grappled, including recently Lonsdale and McCurry (2004).

Around one-quarter of the organisations employed formal means to assess the learning outcomes of students. A number of these used the phrase 'ongoing formal assessment', while several used 'formal pre-training and post-training assessment' mapped to the National Reporting System. One mentioned formal feedback from the participants and another said that some were assessed against 'standardised levels by a portfolio of work'. Some of those who used formal tools said they supplemented this with informal assessment. In all cases the assessment reported here was related to non-accredited training. The complexity of assessment at this level is summed up by this response from a Queensland provider:

> Some volunteer tutors assess their students' progress against the 30369QLD [an accredited course but in this instance not used for accredited certification] and issue a statement of attainment. Delivery of [non-accredited] short courses is assessed using the 30369QLD framework to monitor students' competency against the NRS [National Reporting System], with the issue of a statement of attainment, although still non-accredited training. One to one tutoring is not reported to AVETMISS [Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard]; enrolment and achievement on short courses are reported on AVETMISS.

The informal assessment reported by three-quarters of the respondents included observation, feedback from participants, an ongoing portfolio, student satisfaction surveys and 'by what the student produces'. One ACE provider said that they were 'not interested in the assessment of skills—just the increase in confidence so they will take the next step to join a class'. Several indicated that the students undertook a self-assessment, either through feedback or at an interview, or by leaving a course at the point where their immediate goals had been achieved.

As shown in table 4 in relation to perceived skills development, just over half of the respondents considered that their students improved 'quite a bit' as a result of being in their courses. On the self-confidence aspect, more than half of the providers thought their students improved 'very much' through participation in their courses, with slightly more than one-third indicating their students improved 'quite a bit'.

Table 4   Perceptions of learner outcomes, expressed as a percentage of respondents

Extent of improvement	LLN* skills		Self-confidence	
	n	%	n	%
Not at all	-	-	-	-
Very little	-	-	-	-
Somewhat	28	24.1	7	5.8
Quite a bit	61	52.6	44	36.7
Very much	24	20.7	69	57.5
Not known	3	2.6	-	-
Total	**116**	**100.0**	**120**	**100.0**
Not stated	9		5	

Note: * LLN = language, literacy and numeracy.

Funding agencies often have expectations that improved literacy will lead to training or employment outcomes (for example, the Australian Government-funded Literacy and Numeracy Training Programme for job seekers [Rahmani, Crosier & Pollack 2002]), so providers were asked about the perceived extent of such transitions. Table 5 shows the various provider respondents (given in percentages) who estimated the numbers of students who went on to other training or to employment (shown in percentages). For example, approximately 26% of respondents believed that up to 10% of their students went on to other education or training, while around 7% believed that up to 75% of their students went on to employment. Only a small number of providers believed that *none* of their students went onto other training or employment.

The table also shows that around one-fifth of the organisations did not know the extent to which their students went on to other training or employment—one person interviewed said 'that's got very little to do with me'.

Table 5   Respondents' estimate of learner pathways

To other training	Estimated percentage of learners	To employment
Respondents (%)		Respondents (%)
2.5	None	6.9
26.4	Up to 10%	28.4
21.5	Up to 25%	20.7
10.7	Up to 50%	7.8
6.6	About 50%	5.2
11.6	Up to 75%	6.9
2.5	Up to 100%	1.7
18.2	Not known	22.4
100.0		**100.0**

Note: Four respondents did not state 'to other training' and nine respondents did not state 'to employment'.

Two-thirds of 120 respondents said they had partnerships, networks and other links with other organisations and agencies in the training and employment field. Around 20% of those said they had a formal agreement with another agency. These formal agreements included memoranda of understanding with other education providers, including primary schools, high schools and TAFE, and adult and community education providers; one had a formal agreement with the local library. Some of those with formal arrangements were also part of informal networks. As might be expected, the range of informal links was broad for the other 80% of organisations. The informal networks included the full range of educational institutions, from primary schools to TAFE institutes and universities, as well as with libraries and community organisations of all kinds. There was also some cross-referral among providers.

Support for non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy providers

This section goes beyond the courses to explore how the organisations themselves support non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy and ways in which they believe they can be better supported in order to enhance the service they provide.

Evaluation

With accountability a major factor in the funding of programs, organisations were asked to indicate whether they had any regular evaluation of their non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy courses (as distinct from assessment of learner outcomes), or a quality-assurance strategy. The majority of organisations responded, with two-thirds indicating they had some means of validating their courses. For 25 of them, this was conducted externally, usually by a government funding body directly, or through reports to the funding body. The nature of internal evaluations varied widely across the other organisations, including feedback from students at the end of courses, student satisfaction surveys, reviews by management committees and informal discussions among tutors, sometimes on a regular basis. Around one-third of organisations did not have a course review strategy.

Funding

In the light of the dominance of accredited courses in Australian education and training, funding for non-accredited courses is an ongoing issue. Table 6 shows the sources of funding which support the sub-sector. These categories were identified and modified through feedback from a variety of organisations during the pilot phase of the study. Respondents could select more than one source of funding; hence, the number of responses is greater than the number of respondents. From table 6 it can be seen that recurrent state government funding was the largest source of funding. In this context, 'recurrent' means usually available from year to year (but not necessarily guaranteed); 'non-recurrent' means the funds are provided only for a particular project or time period; 'non-literacy specific' means the funding was allocated for educational purposes and the receiving body decided that it should be spent on adult language, literacy or numeracy activities. 'Unfunded' means that the organisation uses its own resources. As shown in table 6, the revenue sources accessed by this sub-sector are diverse. The fact that specific recurrent state government funding was an important source did not seem to mean that such funding is guaranteed from year to year. The vast majority of suggestions for improvement indicated that funding should be on a longer cycle; for example, three years rather than one year.

Table 6   Sources of funding of non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy, expressed as a percentage of respondents (n = 119)

Source of funding	n	%
Recurrent state government funding – literacy specific	43	36.1
Non-recurrent state government funding – literacy specific	28	23.5
Unfunded – own revenue sources	27	22.7
Fee for service	26	21.8
Recurrent state government funding – non-literacy specific	20	16.8
Non-recurrent state government funding – non-literacy specific	18	15.1
Recurrent direct federal literacy specific funding	13	10.9
Local government funding	11	9.2

Note: Respondents could select more than one response.

Reporting

Organisations responding to the survey were asked to indicate whether they reported their non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy data to any external body. Almost three-quarters stated that they did, and there was a range of organisations and institutions to which they reported outside the program. In almost all cases these were the state and national government funding departments.

Providers were also asked to comment on whether non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy statistics should be reported in the same way accredited course data were. That this is a contentious issue is illustrated by the response: exactly half said that such reporting should be mandatory, almost 30% were opposed, and the rest did not respond. Those organisations that supported mandatory reporting generally felt that it would mean either better recognition of the benefits and/or extent of non-accredited courses or the possibility of increased government funding, or both. For example, one said:

> Non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy is a hidden piece of the jigsaw in education in Australia. If we want a complete picture and understanding of the learning that occurs in Australia, then these courses should be accounted for. Many people are not ready [for], or do not need, formal accreditation.

On the other hand, one respondent who was opposed to mandatory reporting believed that 'People can waste a lot of time reporting on little groups that are basically just part of the community working together'.

This tension between the need to report and the time and effort required is a constant theme in the discussion of this topic in the survey responses. It appears to be the smaller community organisations which were most concerned about whether they would have the resources ('I spend half my life reporting, and don't get paid for my time'), but some of those who supported reporting suggested they could do it if there were provision for it in the funding. Other respondents said they already reported non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy statistics, and several noted that they reported both non-accredited and accredited course data, one noting that 'the outcome codes are different'. However, several providers raised the question of whether non-accredited outcomes *could* be reported, given the variety of outcomes, with one suggesting that 'Community program outcomes are usually in regard to social networks, confidence, self-esteem, as well as skills-based outcomes. Accredited training does not always address such outcomes.' Another response was that volunteers may be 'so "scared" of reporting requirements they may decide not to continue'. Apart from the issues of time and resource implications, those opposed to mandatory reporting did so on the grounds that this requirement might impose a requirement for competency-based learning outcomes, that flexibility would be lost with the need for too much accountability and record-keeping, and that courses vary so much that the maintenance of statistics would not be 'either relevant or useful'. Some said that only data from publicly funded courses should be reported, that is, those utilising non-government sources should not need to report their statistics.

Significant issues

From a list supplied, organisations were asked to nominate the most significant issues for them in their provision of adult language, literacy and numeracy programs (table 7). Respondents could choose more than one issue; hence, the number of responses is greater than the total number of respondents.

Table 7   Main issues for non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy providers, expressed as a percentage of respondents (n = 116)

Issue	n	%
Lack of funding	56	48.3
Attracting students to the program	47	40.5
Students dropping in and out of program	46	39.6
Slow progress of students	42	36.2
Lack of support generally for non-accredited programs	34	29.3
Inadequate facilities (e.g. classrooms)	29	25.0
Lack of teachers/tutors	27	23.3
Lack of professional development for teachers/tutors	25	21.5
Inability to follow up students after the adult language, literacy and numeracy course	22	19.0
Low motivation of students	15	12.9
High student drop out*	11	9.5

Notes: Respondents could select more than one response.
           * Leaving course completely rather than dropping in and out.

Not surprisingly, table 7 shows that lack of funding again registers as a major concern. The next three factors, each identified by well over one-third of the respondents, are all student-related: attracting students to the program; students dropping in and out of courses; and slow progress. As noted in the discussion section that follows, student participation patterns are not necessarily negative features of these courses.

The types of additional support, apart from funding, that would help enhance or expand programs are shown in table 8. In a sense, this is the flipside of the question about issues (table 7), except that funding was excluded from the list provided. Respondents could nominate more than one type of additional support; hence, the number of responses is greater than the number of respondents. Overwhelmingly, the largest single request is for improved government recognition of non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy. This encompasses recognition of the value of the range of learning outcomes, as well as recognition of their achievements for the learners.

Table 8   Types of additional support needed, expressed as a percentage of respondents (n = 116)

Factor	n	%
Government recognition of the worth of non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy	77	66.4
More professional development for teachers/tutors	49	42.2
Improved links with other agencies	48	41.4
Better promotion of program	43	37.1
Assistance to follow up students after completion/non-completion	35	30.2
Assistance with preparing grant applications	24	20.7

Note: Respondents could select more than one response.

Providers were also invited to expand on their responses to the questions about issues and additional support which are summarised in tables 7 and 8. It was considered that such issues may be peculiar to each of the main categories of provider, so they are discussed here in the four groupings identified earlier in relation to table 2.

Within the group designated community, the 'community information' agencies said they struggled with offering an adequate service, either directly or through referral. They generally found making strong links difficult with other language, literacy and numeracy providers, for example, in ACE or TAFE, and one said that their key performance indicators did not include language, literacy and numeracy so 'these programs are run virtually without government support'. Amongst others in the

community group, government recognition of the role of community education and of the value of non-accredited learning were recurring themes, as exemplified by the call for 'recognition of the value non-accredited training can play in enhancing individuals' lives, in particular the role it plays in re-engaging individuals into some form of education'. Coupled to this was a recurrent concern: 'because of the slow pace of the learner it is very difficult for progress to be mapped using existing curriculum', something it was claimed government bodies often did not understand.

The difficulty of providing language, literacy and numeracy support for the range of participants is also demonstrated by the comment that 'so often governments do not see the need for courses for people who will probably *never gain paid employment* but still wish to function better in the wider English-speaking community' (emphasis in original). One ACE respondent said that, because language, literacy and numeracy learners often had issues that competed with their learning, teachers sometimes provided 'hours of support' outside class time. Improving networking among language, literacy and numeracy providers also received several mentions by the community providers, along with the need for more professional development opportunities.

Among the organisations that identified their primary purpose as accredited training, there was a general spread of concerns—from links with other relevant agencies, including for professional development purposes, to encouraging students to enrol and persist, to policy issues. For the English as a second language group of providers, there was no outstanding issue, although improving links with other organisations, assistance with 'incredibly complex' grant applications, supporting volunteer tutors, and more professional development options were all mentioned. In the disability support provider group, there was concern from several agencies that teachers needed better professional development to deal with adults with cognitive or learning disabilities. One asked for funding to enable VET providers to work with non-government organisations to develop and deliver appropriate courses for people with disabilities. Another said that specialised employment agencies did not recognise non-accredited student outcomes or the potential of students.

Other comments

Respondents were able to make other comments that might help influence policy-making in non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy. Among the accredited training group, individual suggestions included: more consideration be given to rural areas because distance from home and staff training facilities were often a problem; the need for government policy-makers to recognise the requirement for 'low level courses' in TAFE to help clients progress to higher-level courses; and a more structured approach to assessing individuals' adult language, literacy and numeracy skills in community programs. Two providers in the disability support provider group pointed out the need for recognition of the slower rate of development of social and vocational skills. For the English as a second language providers, individual policy issues included the provision of childcare for their clients; that there was a demonstrated need for 'personalised small-scale tutorial style assistance with language learning' that could not be addressed through formal institutional classes; and the observation that 'the demand for English as a second language programs is huge'.

From the community providers, a major issue was the need to recognise the distinctive nature of the sorts of students they catered for. There were such phrases as 'people that have somehow slipped through the educational system', 'people who have the needs but are not able to fit into normal classes', 'people will not attend formal education courses if they have low incomes and low self-esteem', and that many were not looking for work. According to one community education coordinator, 'Adult language, literacy and numeracy is fundamental to meeting our commitment to social justice; it enables participants to gain basic skills that greatly improve their daily family and community lives and gives them better work/study options in life.' Overall, the community providers wanted greater policy recognition of the impact of their adult language, literacy and numeracy courses on the lives of learners and on the wider community.

Case studies

There are three categories of provider in the case studies: community, comprising two specific literacy/numeracy organisations and three ACE providers, one English as a second language organisation, and one disability service provider. The case study sites were in Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia, and comprised a mix of urban and rural locations. Altogether 33 individual interviews were conducted: four managers, nine program coordinators, 11 teachers or tutors, and nine students. A focus group of four researchers who had developed the literacy and numeracy program for adults with an intellectual disability (case study seven) was also undertaken. To maintain the confidentiality of participants, the case studies have been kept anonymous. The term 'provider' is used throughout the case studies for that reason.

Case study one

This fully volunteer literacy/numeracy provider was located in a rural town with a population of some 4000 and with a small migrant and refugee population. The coordinator gave examples of the range of motivations of the students in this program:

> We've had people who have got to be in their 50s and can't read and from there it's got to a stage where the wife's had enough and 'if you don't learn to read well that's it, the marriage is over, we're finished'. And so they've come to learn to read. There's the farmer also who all his life he's grown up with his dad looking after the Ford tractor, knows every part, knows exactly what to do, Ford tractor's done its dash, you can't buy parts anymore, we'll get a new tractor … But you've got to have a manual and you've got to know how to read it and you can't, so … they've come along to learn.

According to the coordinator, one of the attractions of this particular scheme was that 'the people that come to us come to us because they want to learn, not because they have to come to us, not been made to come to us … and it's a big difference from somebody being told you've got to go and do it, because there's this willingness, they want to do something.'

One of the students interviewed was in his mid-20s, had left school after Year 10 and had later been in an accident. He described his language and literacy experience following the accident as: 'just like your filing cabinet's been chucked out … and it's all on the floor … I lost all the tools to use all my words and to be able to understand it.' He said at school 'I wasn't the brightest but I wasn't dumb'. With one-to-one volunteer tuition of one hour a week over about six years, he had re-developed these skills. He said:

> It's hard for me really to do all this stuff 'cause I don't like it and having a teacher that can do it with me it's like being at school and having your own teacher with you all the time. You excel more than if you just had the teacher doing the whole class.

Two other former students in this rural-based program had migrated as young teenagers from a European country, and their parents arranged for them to obtain volunteer help with English language two days a week over about a year, since they did not speak English at the time. The older one then enrolled at the local TAFE college but continued to get language support, while the younger one continued until ready to undertake a TAFE course. At the time of the interviews, both were enrolled in the Certificate in General Education for Adults (CGEA), and were working part-time at a local supermarket.

One of the tutors interviewed had not yet undertaken the initial training, but seemed confident of her ability on the basis of her experience, her own children's schooling and her own interest in learning. The other tutor interviewed said that in her experience, 'establishing a rapport comes before the learning … and it builds from there. Once you establish trust it's a lot easier to get someone to learn.' She said that there was a basic assessment form and 'you mark that against the last review and the one before that and that's how you can see the progress'.

The main issue for the provider was finding voluntary tutors. There was a fairly high turnover of tutors, usually after two to three years. It also seemed that there were long periods between tutor training courses because of the town's rural location, and apparently not all the tutors were willing to travel to the state capital for professional development. On the question of the impact of the program on the local community, the coordinator said: 'I get a lot of feedback, word of mouth feedback, of how people think it's a very good thing to have, but not a lot is talked about because for most of your students, it's private, and so the tutors can't go and discuss with others. … So it's known about in the community but … it's not something of everyday conversation, but we do our best to keep what we do in the spotlight so that people are aware it's there.'

Case study two

This fully volunteer literacy/numeracy provider was located in a regional city of almost 80 000 people. There were around 20 students in the program at the time of the interviews. Some were referrals of TAFE students needing help with courses and a few were referred by Centrelink. Some also came from CRS[2] Australia, mainly men who had done manual labour all their lives and had had an accident and now needed literacy skills for re-employment. Sometimes workers from non-English speaking backgrounds were sent so they could read well enough to observe occupational health and safety requirements. Increased use of email in workplaces had also brought in students in their late 30s to late 40s, and parents with children starting school also sought help. One coordinator estimated that about a third of the students wanted to go on to further education:

> The others just want to improve their quality of life with their family. They just want to be able to live a life not feeling … put down by others and perhaps get information correctly rather than be misinformed because of their literacy skills.

Of the two students interviewed from this site, one was doing a TAFE course so he could move into a supervisory tradesman role, but had found his reading skills were not sufficient: 'I'll read that in an hour but if you want me to read that in five minutes, well forget about it, I'll start stressing out'. The other student had been in the program for two years and appeared to have a slight intellectual disability. She said she was doing the course 'for my kids when they go to high school'. They were currently at primary school. At the supported business service where she worked, she used the computer and the cash register and had completed a certificate I and certificate II. She said she enjoyed learning in the literacy course but had not enjoyed school.

Over the years the ages of the tutors had ranged from 18 to 80. The coordinator said they had different reasons for volunteering but they all had people skills and they liked helping the community. One of the tutors interviewed had taught 12 to 14 students over about ten years. Because of her experience, as well as time pressures, she rarely went to a professional development activity as a participant but had been invited to present at a couple of recent workshops. Another tutor who had also been involved with the provider for ten years said that he left it to the student to decide the time period, but 'if they're starting off at the very basic level and they want to become fluent in reading and writing and spelling … one hour a week is going to take a long, long time', so he normally arranged two-hour sessions. He said he believed 'if you want to live in a good community, well that's dependent on how much effort you put into your community and I'm not a fire fighter, so can't do the SES thing, so I try to do this, and I coach young kids at footy as well'.

The main issues identified by the coordinators were making sure all the paperwork was up to date, ensuring the student and tutor match-ups were going okay, and that a student was not waiting too long for a tutor. More local training for the volunteers was also a request. In terms of local impact, it was suggested that there was a level of reluctance at local government level to acknowledge that some people in the community had literacy difficulties. However, at the individual level, the coordinator said that 'the impact is huge because people's lives are changed through coming to us … so long as they're willing to learn'.

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[2] Previously called Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service.

Case study three

This adult and community education provider in a small rural town had been operating for about 20 years and had conducted a literacy program since the 1990s. There was a paid part-time coordinator and volunteer tutors. The area had a population of about 3000 people.

At the time of the research at this site, there were only a couple of students in the one-to-one program, and no student was interviewed. One of the major issues for the provider was attracting students into the volunteer literacy program, particularly men. A member of the provider's management committee said that she knew ten men who would benefit from the program, who were intelligent but just not educated and not literate, but 'no matter how much you publicise it, you won't get them to come because it's a small community'. However, in the previous few years there had been a couple of instances where significant groups of men became involved, particularly when the local council had encouraged its outdoor workers to obtain certificates in such areas as chainsaw operation and chemicals handling, and they needed literacy and numeracy support for that. Another burst of activity came when the mill in a nearby town closed down.

In addition to these particular groups, there had been requests for literacy help resulting from work pressures to obtain certificates or to undertake further training from people who wanted to read to their grandchildren and from those who were at home and just wanted to improve their reading and writing. A committee member and former tutor said that a lot of people were looking for help before going on to accredited training, and that they often had the ability but not the confidence, 'Sit them down, relax them, there's no pressure. They can do what they want to … Just give them the confidence and a few extra skills and away they go.'

Tutors were from the local area, from a variety of backgrounds, often retired teachers and predominantly women. Both of the tutors interviewed had volunteered because they thought they could help an adult with reading and writing—one was asked to help Asian high school students requiring conversation practice, and the other had started helping a European migrant whose written English was good but who had a problem with spoken English. Professional development for tutors was fairly informal, with a once-a-year refresher and occasional individual support sessions with the coordinator. Attendance at the provider's computer classes was free for tutors. When tutoring, they were asked to keep a log book to record what was done in sessions for discussion with the coordinator on request. There was no formal assessment of progress.

There was sometimes difficulty in sustaining the volunteer program even when tutoring was required, because tutors 'did not work out' or 'got bored'. Funding was a constant issue but the provider's management committee sourced funds through as many avenues as possible, acknowledging that the state government funding was always limited. Asked to assess the impact of the literacy program on the local community, the coordinator said that:

> I think it does have an impact and I have seen people go on to further study or improve their personal circumstances because of what we do … It hasn't reached … out to [nearby town] … that you would like to see happen and are logical things to happen, but in terms of this town it's made a difference; but it's been hard work to get it perceived in that way.

Case study four

This provider in a major city offered adult community education programs and community development programs, coordinated by a single manager. The programs were intended mainly for people in a nearby housing estate in the inner suburbs of a large city. There were classes at the community centre as well as an outreach program and partnerships with local groups. The provider was also involved in local and state government-funded projects addressing particular social, health and economic issues. There were a number of language and literacy classes offered, but only the one-to-one volunteer literacy program was not accredited.

Asked on what basis students end up in a literacy class or had one-to-one tuition, the coordinator explained the sifting process that takes place:

> It's fairly clear at the time of interview when we make the assessment as to whether they would want one-to-one or to be in a class. You know, if the person's unemployed and has the time to come to class and is willing to, then we would always put them in a class or perhaps the class and suggest some one-to-one support as well. There's people who come in very specifically wanting one-on-one, they don't want to be in a class and that may be to do with the fact that they can't be anyway, they're working full-time or that they don't want that stigma of being in a class with other people and having what they perceive as a stigma of learning problems.

The one student interviewed was a man estimated to be in his late 20s who said he hoped to improve his spelling because he wanted to get a different job, which had a spelling test as part of its entry requirements. He said that at school he had not been interested in learning, and his spelling there had been '50–60 per cent'. Following a face-to-face interview with the coordinator, he was matched with a volunteer tutor and 'it worked out perfect'. This student had been in classes in the past but found that in a class they focus the attention on the whole group but in one-to-one 'they're really just working on you'.

One of the coordinators said that in recent years the tutors appeared to be younger and more had tertiary qualifications than in the early 1990s, but that some of the best tutors had no tertiary background: 'Its more about a love of language and reading, that passion coming from within the person'. There were resources at the community centre but the tutors were encouraged to develop their own. Assessment was basically left to the tutors. After the session and before they left the provider (where all meetings were held as a matter of policy), the tutors wrote the date and a brief progress report for the coordinator. Professional development was through term meetings, with any in-between contact with the coordinator by phone or email. Tutors were also encouraged to send in a 'mid-term' report, but this was not mandatory, particularly given that tutoring did not start and stop to a particular timetable. Overall, the volunteer tutor program was a small part of the provider's operations.

One of the two tutors interviewed had been helping a student over a period of three years. The tutor described the changing needs and motivations of the student over that period. These ranged from literacy needs as a truck driver, to wanting to read to his toddler son, then writing resumes when he lost his job, then needing to do management reports and presentations in a new job.

> So … it is tricky sometimes, and I think … understanding that you just need to be flexible and ultimately [the learners] will drive to some extent … their own path because unless they're motivated they're not going to do it.

The other tutor was helping the student mentioned above with his spelling. The main issue for the coordinators was keeping up the energy and enthusiasm for the program, particularly when it was in a 'little trough' as it was at the time of the interviews. It was suggested that, with the push for accreditation, measurable outcomes and student contact hours, providers 'aren't able to … take the risk or take a gamble with something that's not got an accredited curriculum to it'. Another view was that because the volunteer program was small and operated mostly in the evenings when the education centre was not otherwise used, it was 'a little bit hidden'.

Case study five

This provider was located in two rural cities in adjacent local government areas (total population approximately 35 000). The adult and community education centre was a registered training organisation with a fairly extensive scope of registration, as well as a registered provider of high school qualifications. In addition to providing a wide range of accredited programs, including Australian Apprenticeships, the provider offered a range of non-accredited programs and

supported active University of the Third Age groups at both of its campuses. In addition, the provider had successfully tendered for a wide range of government (state and federal) projects, including, more recently, various programs promoting active recreation.

In terms of adult language, literacy and numeracy, the provider's literacy provision began as a volunteer effort, with non-accredited programs in the early 1980s. Since the early 1990s a number of accredited programs had been provided, including Certificates in General Education for Adults and a broad range of non-accredited programs. These were for people with intellectual disabilities; those whose first language is not English; and 'second chance' learners. Some of these programs had a specific focus, for example, *getting your learner driver permit*. In recent years the provider had also established, through a grant from the Australian Government, a Volunteer Literacy Support Program, to better cater for the needs of students. Trained volunteer tutors worked with learners, mostly one to one, to enhance their literacy skills.

All prospective learners were interviewed for at least an hour by the program coordinator to determine their literacy and numeracy skills, attitudes and their learning goals. In the case of 'second chance' learners, the interview mostly involved pre-assessment using the National Reporting System, and learners were encouraged to join classes so that they could work towards one of the Certificates in General Education for Adults. Sometimes this was not possible, for reasons of time availability (the classes ran three mornings a week), transport (public transport was rarely optimal in rural areas), and confidence (sometimes even 'shame' in not being able to read and write, often because of poor school experience). Volunteer tutors were provided for these learners, and some students in classes also had additional support from a volunteer tutor, either in class or at another time.

In 2005, 12 learners were matched with trained tutors. Some were in accredited courses (for example, at TAFE, as a trainee, doing the Victorian Certificate of Education) and others had particular goals (for example, getting their learner's permit, or, as in the case of a professional man whose first language was not English, wanting to feel more comfortable with social conversation at work). There were also two women whose literacy skills were very low and they did not (initially) want to join classes 'because of the shame'. They had made exceptional progress. One joined a class and the other intended doing so in 2007 (when her youngest son is in kindergarten). Almost all the learners indicated that they had made significant improvements in their literacy skills and that their needs had been met. Progress was monitored through regular conversations with both learners and tutors and, in appropriate situations, through assessment using the National Reporting Service.

Resourcing was the main issue identified by this provider. Better resources—of time and money—were needed to develop and coordinate programs, for professional development, to support students (many of whom had very high needs, especially young people), and to source and purchase suitable materials for teaching and learning. Development of and access to suitable programs was often difficult in rural areas—for both students and tutors—because of the paucity of public transport and the high cost of petrol.

Government funding was seen as often not adequate or flexible enough to respond to students' needs. This provider's non-government programs had always been reported via the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard (AVETMISS), because the annual statistical collection was also used by the funding authority to audit contractual delivery. The provider considered that any additional reporting under current funding arrangements would be onerous, particularly if it was of no benefit to learners.

Case study six

Located on a main road in a small suburban shopping area in a large metropolitan city, this English as a second language program was established primarily for refugees several years ago by an organisation linked to a Christian church. There was a part-time coordinator and a part-time

assistant, both paid. All the tutors were volunteers and the provider encouraged students to drop in rather than enrol in a class, as the coordinator explained:

> I've always promoted it as supplementary to other learning, not as a course in itself, just because we take a continuous enrolment really. A person can roll up and stay that day as far as I'm concerned, but because there's a fair volatility in the students, you know, if something happens at home or they move onto something else, it's very hard to really get a cohort of students and say you start at Lesson 1 and go through to Lesson 50 or something; it just doesn't work that way.

The students were mostly from the surrounding suburbs, with a high proportion from Horn of Africa countries, with a minority from such areas as Latin America, Vietnam and occasionally European countries such as Russia. While the focus of the state government funding for the program was on making people employment-ready or preparing them for further training, many of the provider's clients were English language beginners, so much of the tutoring was aimed at helping them function better in society. Some were not yet ready for vocational education and training courses and some had been to such courses (mainly in TAFE institutes) and had either dropped out or needed language support to keep them going. The coordinator said there were also some who 'come when they first arrive and haven't got themselves oriented yet … they come here because it's a sort of trusted space and a comfortable one, and they just come here and hang out … and get a bit of English on the way.'

One of the students interviewed was an older man from Europe and who had come to Australia several years ago. He had been a plumber in his home country and had started a TAFE course to get his plumbing certificate (level III) but had found the English too hard, but 'now it's much better because my English is getting better'. A female student from an African country had also been in a TAFE English class, but thought that the TAFE reading and writing tests were very hard but 'here it's easy'. Both students ultimately wanted to get a vocational certificate for employment purposes.

While the curriculum used was an accredited course at state level and had a number of levels, assessment was mostly informal, as the coordinator explained:

> When someone progresses from being able to sort of haltingly fill out the name, address and phone number to working their way through more complex forms and being able to ask what does this mean and things like that, and interact, well then they've gone on to the next level, it means they're able to engage, and so it's really through interaction rather than a test … But I've got like a check sheet as to what they should be able to do.

There was no prerequisite training, qualifications or experience required of the tutors, just 'the willingness to be here'. Some were former or practising teachers, a couple had English as a second language qualifications, and all were encouraged to undertake volunteer tutor training.

Funding was a major concern, and a senior manager of the church organisation that ran the program said that short-term funding meant they had contingency plans and were 'in troubleshooting mode rather than strategic planning mode'. She said they could not operate without volunteer tutors. The nature of the program also meant that a significant issue for the coordinator was maintaining student motivation—those that were motivated seemed to benefit but for those with erratic attendance the outcomes were less certain. On the question of impact, the coordinator said:

> We've had direct feedback from a significant number of people saying that it's made a difference and we have had people that come back over the years; they've gone on with their lives but when they need some assistance they sort of drop in here as an easy spot that they sort of feel confident in, which I guess gives it its own flavour.

Case study seven

This post-school program for adults with an intellectual disability was located in an inner suburb of a large city. Based on research, and developed and owned by a university, it was operated under licence by a large statewide disability support services agency. A major aim of the program was to develop literacy and technology skills in young adults with Down Syndrome. This particular program operated over four terms a year for two years and was limited to two small groups of students, each group attending two days a week. It was aimed primarily at school leavers with intellectual impairment in order to develop 'the sorts of skills that other kids have developed during their 12 years of schooling'. The teaching staff comprised a paid coordinator and two paid part-time tutors. There was a relatively high annual fee.

Assessment was by standardised tests for reading ability and comprehension, and the students were streamed into ability groups. A file was also kept of each student's work to check how skills had improved. The coordinator commented that in the three years she had been involved with the program:

> We often see great increases in communication skills. Even if the literacy levels don't increase markedly, it's very rare that we don't see quite significant improvements in their ability to get on with other people, their social skills, their communication skills, their sight vocabulary, things like that that make them much more able to go out into the community and socialise, have a job, just to learn to respect one another.

Reports were given to parents on the students' reading, writing, communication and technology skills—a big part of the program was using the computer in a variety of ways—and social skills. Standardised test scores were not included in those reports, but general indications of progress were provided. In relation to this research, two of the students in the program, with a little teacher prompting, mentioned such aspects as writing using the computer, using PowerPoint, scrap booking, art, and gym. One had a regular shift one day a week at a fast food outlet, and the other helped her father with 'shredding and labels' in his home office. This latter student also said she was good at reading. When asked about how they liked the program at the provider, both used the word 'happy' in their brief reply.

At the end of the course students received a statement of attainment. It was suggested that its not being accredited allowed for more flexibility of content and the absence of an employment focus.

> It's providing them with that opportunity in a safe and supported environment to talk about and read about and write about things that they're interested in without focusing on very specific learning outcomes that may or may not be appropriate.

The coordinator had professional educational qualifications but the two tutor positions did not require that (although at the time of the research both had them). There was provision for professional development within the agreement between the owner organisation and the disability services organisation.

A major issue was the lack of learning options for school leavers with intellectual disabilities.

> Most of the post-school services options for people with disabilities are employment focused or community access focused, so they're not getting much opportunity, even if they've got reading and writing skills when they leave school, to continue to use the skills and certainly not to develop them further and therefore often … they go backwards because they haven't got the need in their life to use the skills that they may have developed.

Discussion

Research questions

What is the extent of community language, literacy and numeracy provision in Australia?

It is difficult to know the extent to which the responding organisations represent non-accredited community adult language, literacy and numeracy provision across Australia. No doubt there were some organisations, particularly in the community sector, that did not respond because they simply did not have the time or resources. One respondent said 'I am funded for 20 hours per week and work a minimum of 30+. I am filling this [questionnaire] in at home in unpaid hours.' Some state comparisons might help fill out the picture. In Victoria, for example, the Adult Community and Further Education Board in 2005 funded 26 ACE providers to offer non-accredited courses, although not necessarily in language, literacy and numeracy (Stuart Varney [NCVER] 2006, pers. comm., 20 October). In this study, there were 39 responses from Victoria, so the response is clearly from beyond those funded providers. In another example, the Queensland Department of Education and Training in 2006 announced funding grants for non-accredited courses to 43 organisations (C Laidlaw 2006, pers. comm., 26 October), which clearly exceeds the 29 who responded to the survey from that state, indicating that the figure shown in table 1 is well under the actual number of providing agencies. On the other hand, in Western Australia the Read Write Now! and Home Tutor Scheme responses seem to represent the full extent of provision in that state, so the figure in table 1 is likely to be more accurate.

On balance, a reasonable conclusion is that there is a considerable number of other non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy providers who did not respond to the survey for various reasons, and therefore that the responses received are *indicative* of the extent of provision.

Along with the case study data, the questionnaire data provide a good understanding of the nature of the courses, the students and the issues the providers face. The responses indicate that there are four major groupings of providers of non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy courses: community providers, accredited training providers, English as a second language providers, and disability service providers. The community providers comprise organisations, often quite small, whose only role is to provide literacy and/or numeracy help (as in case studies one and two), adult and community education organisations, which include one or more of language, literacy and numeracy courses as part of their range of education programs for adults (as in case studies three, four and five), and organisations such as libraries, whose primary role is providing information and access to knowledge. This is the largest grouping of providers.

There may seem some irony in the fact that accredited training providers are prominent in a report on non-accredited educational provision. However, the reality is that these accredited training organisations provide non-accredited training alongside their accredited courses in order to cater for students usually dependent on government financial support, whose language, literacy and/or numeracy skills are not sufficient for them to take part in accredited courses. In such instances, the providers often use all or part of accredited courses as the curriculum, and map progress against the National Reporting System. However, the student does not receive an accredited qualification (although they may be awarded a statement of attainment). The significance of this group's

appearance in non-accredited provision is that it shows there is a proportion of those seeking employment who are not yet capable of undertaking accredited training, but who need very basic language, literacy and numeracy assistance before a pathway to further training and/or employment can be even contemplated.

The third largest group of respondents, English as a second language providers, includes organisations whose primary aim is to provide adult language, literacy and numeracy support to refugees and migrants. These support courses are often established by church and welfare organisations (as in case study six). They also include ethnically based organisations which provide support of various kinds to groups from particular countries. The long-established Home Tutor Scheme with volunteer tutors is well represented nationally. Amongst the survey responses was one from an organisation whose primary role was the provision of health services, but which also offered 'structured' English as a second language assistance to its clients, indicating the breadth of functions that such agencies regard as necessary to fulfil their roles.

It seems from the responses from the fourth group, disability service providers, that this group offers language, literacy and numeracy assistance to its clients because they believe other providers do not offer appropriate programs (as expressed in case study seven). Despite the support of National Disability Services (formerly ACROD—Australian Council for Rehabilitation of Disabled) in publicising the survey, disability support services appear under-represented, with the majority of those responding from Queensland. One possible reason for this is that they may not regard themselves as 'providers' in the way the term has been used in this study, because such organisations typically have a broader supporting and often employing role.

The other characteristics of the responding organisations emphasise the diversity of this sub-sector. Adult language, literacy and numeracy in Australia is provided in many different ways, by organisations ranging from commercially oriented registered training organisations, to state government-funded TAFE institutes and relatively small agencies completely dependent on volunteers. There was considerable use of volunteer tutors in most states and some organisations provided rigorous initial training and ongoing support and strongly encouraged and/or arranged professional development. On the other hand, some providers accepted volunteers with no particular qualifications, and professional development was loosely encouraged.

The conclusion is that the present diversity is necessary to meet the variety of needs of the learners who seek assistance at this level. The term 'sub-sector' has been used throughout this report because it seems that this is an area of provision within both the ACE and VET sectors which needs to be better delineated. In the larger towns and cities, it seems that learners have a choice of providers and courses, and they choose the one that suits them best; they find these by various means, often by personal referral. In rural areas, the choice is not as large or is non-existent, but the need is still there. More than one-third of the providers surveyed used volunteer tutors (and sometimes volunteer coordinators), indicating utilisation of an often unacknowledged community resource. If the time of the volunteers were costed along with the impact of the learning outcomes, the contribution of non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy provision to the Australian economy would be considerable.

What sorts of learners utilise these programs and what are their motivations?

Because of the different ways organisations reported their statistics for the survey, it is not possible to arrive at an accurate figure for the number of students who were receiving help. However, a rough calculation is that there were around 4000 learners involved in non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy courses with the providers who responded. A majority of organisations said their students were in the 30–49 years age bracket; almost exactly half said a considerable number were aged 50–59 years; and over 40% had students in the 20–29 years cohort. More research is needed to determine why the 30–49 years age group is so strongly represented. These are the very active income-earning and child-rearing years, so it is assumed that there are some connections there. In addition, there was a strong representation of women in the programs surveyed. Several

coordinators suggested that men find it harder to seek assistance and that sometimes they are encouraged by a female partner or pressured by workplace changes or unemployment. The fact that there were considerable numbers of people aged in their 20s who were undertaking these courses suggests that, despite an increased focus on literacy and numeracy in schools in recent years, there will continue to be those for whom the learning was not relevant or appreciated at that time, as some of the interviewed students indicated.

It is not easy to differentiate between the factors that motivated learners to join non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy courses. Amongst the small number of learners interviewed in the community and English as a second language programs, there was a strong vocational theme. There was also some evidence that Centrelink referred some learners to non-accredited courses, either because nothing else was available, as in some rural areas, or it was clear to that agency's staff that their client was not capable of undertaking an accredited course without substantial help at a basic level of literacy and/or numeracy. On the other hand, as table 3 shows, the participating providers estimated that fewer than 25% of learners came for vocationally related reasons, with the strongest perceived motivation being a general desire to learn English for everyday living. The need for students to have control over their lives and the opportunity for social contact were also perceived across the range of providers as important motivations. However, some respondents said that it was too difficult to identify two main reasons.

There seemed to be a general perception among students and providers alike that non-accredited language literacy and numeracy learning was 'unpressured', that its role was to support learning, and that much of it was not formally assessed or subject to time constraints. This may not be so in those courses run by registered training organisations for learners on government support programs where progress is more closely monitored. In volunteer programs the learners interviewed seemed to like having their own personal tutor, with some referring to earlier unsuccessful experiences in school classrooms. The development of self-confidence was seen as an important outcome by providers and learners, and it seemed that this was facilitated by the 'learning environment', which was generally perceived as supportive and encouraging. It appeared to be the combination of individual attention (even in small group learning), lack of pressure, and in some cases a less formal approach to assessment, which was attractive to those learners who took advantage of non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy provision.

It also seemed from the interviews that there were peaks and troughs in demand—just as students dropped in and out of courses, so there were times in particular programs when not many adults sought assistance. It could also be, as one respondent suggested, that the government push for accreditation is beginning to encourage those with employment-related requirements to seek out accredited language, literacy and numeracy courses. However, as noted elsewhere, accredited courses may not be the answer for such students in the first instance. There is an issue here about the possibility that students may feel compelled to undertake accredited training even though it does not meet their needs. Better government recognition of the value of non-accredited learning is essential.

How are learning outcomes assessed and to what extent do learners achieve successful outcomes?

Only around one-quarter of the providers used formal assessment tools, including the National Reporting Service matrix and portfolios of work. Among the rest, a combination of small assessment tasks and progress based on observations and student feedback, often verbal, seemed widespread. This informality means that, in many instances, assessment of student learning, particularly among those using volunteers one to one is not especially rigorous. On the other hand, the range of motivations identified in the survey and in the interviews suggests that a more rigorous approach to assessment may not be appropriate. And if, for example, the development of self-confidence is seen as a worthwhile outcome, how might that aspect be assessed? To what extent should student self-evaluation be considered a reliable means of assessment? Most programs had provision for regular reporting of progress to coordinators—from a brief entry in a journal to a

'mandatory' quarterly report. On occasions also there was a mix of assessment practices, as exemplified by the program where one-to-one tuition was conducted by volunteers and short courses were taught by paid trainers. In this case the short course statistics were reported through the National VET Provider Collection, but the extent of volunteer tutoring went unreported.

However, the extent of perceived improvement in both the students' language, literacy and numeracy skills and self-confidence (table 4) indicates the confidence of coordinators, teachers and tutors in their courses. This was also evident in the interviews—generally there seemed to be optimism and a passion about the value of the courses in developing skills and self-confidence. In fact, table 4 shows that providers in general believed that there was greater development of self-confidence than of language, literacy and numeracy skills. This personal development aspect was also continually mentioned in the interviews, across the three types of providers in the case studies: community, English as a second language and disability support.

The other issue that emerged in relation to assessment and outcomes was the need for time for students at these levels to develop their skills and self-confidence in an educational environment. Many of the adult learners reported unhappy and generally unsuccessful school experiences. As a consequence they now need time to overcome those experiences as well as deal with learning or re-learning to read and write at an appropriate level for everyday living. English as a second language learners also generally made slow progress, particularly if they were not very literate in their first language. There were those in disability support who also referred to the need for recognition of longer learning times for intellectually disabled adults.

In summary, learning outcomes are assessed in many ways, ranging from quite informal verbal feedback to formal testing using the National Reporting System. Given the range of possible outcomes and the diverse range of assessment approaches, no clear conclusion can be drawn in this study about the extent to which learners achieve successful outcomes. However, the providers strongly believed, a belief supplemented by the feedback from the learners interviewed, that considerable progress was being made at both the personal and skills levels.

To what extent are pathways from non-accredited educational activities to other education, training and work encouraged and in what ways?

The issues discussed above make the question of 'pathways' a complex one. It is quite clear that a linear model of 'seamless education' is not a reality for many learners in non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy. Students dropping in and out of courses is one of the major concerns of providers (table 7). Coordinators of community, English as a second language and disability support programs expressed a strong belief that many students were not interested in moving onto other training or to employment, but just wanted basic 'English for everyday living'.

Nevertheless, as table 5 shows, pathways are a part of the mix in non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy programs: around 60% of the organisations believed that a minimum of 10% and as many as 50% of their students continued to other training or employment. Only a very small number of organisations thought that none of their students went on to other training or employment. These figures must be tempered by the recognition that most organisations do not keep records in this area or systematically track students, and some 20% could not offer any estimate. Many providers seemed more concerned with meeting learners' current needs than necessarily preparing them for future education or employment. On the other hand, most of the learners interviewed saw themselves on pathways, mainly to employment, occasionally to other training, although it was also clear that some wanted just to learn to cope with immediate needs.

The nature of these pathways also varies. There were extensive links between some organisations and other education providers and employment agencies, and two-thirds of providers said they had some sort of partnership, whether loose or formal. However, around 40% of providers identified better links with other providers as something they would like (table 8), so there seems scope for better interrelationships.

How can agencies providing non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy assistance best be helped to maintain, expand and improve their service to learners and impact on the wider community?

While there were a number of possibilities that emerged in relation to the sorts of support that providers needed to maintain or enhance adult language, literacy and numeracy programs, three stood out: funding, recognition, and professional development.

Funding was a consistent theme, with requests mainly for additional funds, for example, to pay coordinators, to pay for more coordinator hours, for resources and administration, and/or for longer funding cycles. The last is not of course confined to language, literacy and numeracy providers, but a regular plea from all agencies, educational and otherwise, that rely on short-term government funding and who therefore find it difficult to plan strategically. The range of funding sources (table 6) is another illustration of the diversity of the community language, literacy and numeracy sub-sector.

However, the funding issue is part of a broader, strongly expressed concern—lack of government recognition of the worth of non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy provision. Amongst providers, particularly those in the community, English as a second language, and disability support categories, there is a strong belief that outcomes other than or in addition to vocationally related ones should be given more recognition. They argued that the contribution of non-accredited courses to both personal development and social capital needs to be acknowledged.

In larger organisations, provision for professional development tends to be fairly well established, but in smaller ones, especially those utilising volunteers, the picture is patchy. Typically, there are not as many professional development opportunities in rural areas, and often teachers and tutors have to travel considerable distances to access them. Almost 20% of providers had no professional development provision. A small number of organisations using volunteers did not require prerequisite qualifications or for tutors to undertake a training course, but apparently still regarded the learning outcomes as satisfactory. On the other hand, in some cases the providers had developed their own training manuals in response to need.

Conclusions

An important question underlying this research is: Why is there a continuing need for non-accredited courses when there are so many accredited courses available where students can not only improve their language, literacy and numeracy abilities but also receive a nationally recognised qualification?

The answer lies both in the nature of the learners' needs and the nature of the assistance provided. What this research has shown is that not only are the students in the main not seeking certificates, but also many of them have had such bad school experiences and/or their current skills are so low, that they are not capable at the time of undertaking certificate-level training. Even in the accredited training agencies there are clients for whom rating against the National Reporting System is the most appropriate assessment. Also, of the reasons suggested by coordinators for students coming to the courses, more than 75% were not work-related. Communicating in everyday living, feeling part of society, having more control of their own lives were strong motivations. By way of example, one mature-age man came to a community literacy course because the supermarket had moved the sugar to a different location and he could no longer find it. For those with intellectual disabilities, accreditation is not a priority—what they want is a supported learning environment where they can improve their skills and achieve personal development outcomes.

It seems that, for adults, the development of language, literacy and numeracy skills goes hand in hand with the development of self-confidence, confirming Waterhouse and Virgona's (2005, p.29) conclusion that 'literacy issues are about identity as much as skills'. Similarly, in Victoria, the Adult Community and Further Education Board (2006, p.3) considers that non-accredited learning is not

only a pathway into accredited courses, but also a means of 'building confidence, resilience and self worth'. This suggests that the qualities of the teacher or tutor are as important as their ability to teach. The one-to-one relationship in much volunteer tutoring, in individual support in classes, and in small group work, may be significant, especially for people who for various reasons have been academically unsuccessful in larger classes at school. Further, those working in non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy provision appear to be people who are committed to helping people learn and develop. For example, amongst the volunteers, commitment to and 'giving back' to their communities are strong features of their involvement.

Another important factor identified in the research is the pace of learning. At basic levels of language, literacy and numeracy, students need *time* to develop their understandings and skills, as well as their self-confidence. Accredited courses typically follow a structured curriculum and have to operate within institutional constraints, conditions not generally appropriate for learners with inadequate language, literacy and numeracy skills. The study also shows that students enrolled in accredited courses sometimes need individual external support from non-accredited courses in order to get through. In other words, the non-accredited courses complement the accredited ones.

Non-accredited courses, particularly in community, English as a second language and disability support settings, provide an important alternative avenue for adults with a range of individual needs. For many of them at that stage 'pathways' are irrelevant—they are participating to meet their immediate goals and will deal with the next step if and when they are ready for it.

Implications

Given the apparent ongoing demand, in what ways can community providers better support the needs of learners, and in what ways can community providers better be supported, based on the findings of this research? There appear to be three main areas where support might be focused: recognition (including funding), professional development, and assessment.

Recognition

In an education and training world where so much emphasis is placed on certification, a case for continuing provision of non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy learning opportunities is problematic, given that the numbers involved are relatively small and statistics are not systematically reported. However, the reality is that, nationally, there are thousands of adults in non-accredited courses, because this sort of learning suits them best at their particular stage of life. To try to force them initially into accredited courses will not help them achieve appropriate personal development and learning outcomes. It may also turn deter them from learning and hence further education or employment. As this study has shown, there are many providers of non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy training who believe that government recognition of the value of this type of training is vital both for the individual as well as in terms of the broader impact that such learning may have on the community and on the economy further down the track (Clemans, Hartley & Macrae 2003; Balatti et al. 2006). Such recognition should not just lump language, literacy and numeracy into general adult and community education, making it 'user pays', but regard it as the basis for individuals to acquire the skills and confidence to interact with and make a positive contribution to the wider society—'so I could read the paper and … look for jobs and stuff like that and understand what it's all about', as one student said.

Government recognition should also include an understanding that the pace of learning will be slower. Someone who has not learned to read and write properly in say ten years of schooling is not going to develop such abilities in a term or semester. For a number of these students, 'their lives are in disarray', as one urban coordinator said, so their tuition may be irregular. In English as a second language programs, migrants and refugees settling into a new country also often have ongoing concerns that distract them from their studies, so they too need time to learn the language. Students with intellectual disabilities have their own learning constraints. Lack of learning continuity in adult

language, literacy and numeracy courses is a challenge for policy-makers, administrators and teachers used to more linear patterns of educational progression.

However, if recognition of non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy provision means improved funding, this then becomes a two-way street: governments rightly expect some accountability. From a national point of view it would be ideal if all non-accredited community adult language, literacy and numeracy courses provided a common-format annual report of numbers and outcomes, as inadequate reporting appears to result in inadequate recognition. Some state government-funded non-accredited course statistics are already collected as part of the National VET Provider Collection (for example, Victoria and Queensland), so there is a precedent for such reporting. In both of these states, this funding allows a proportion for operational activities, which can include the reporting function. This seems a sensible model for all non-accredited reporting. It is acknowledged, however, that it may be difficult to get organisations which are not publicly funded to report training activity, especially if they see it as an imposition.

The quality of non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy provision for adults is the other key to increasing recognition of the role of this sub-sector. Nationally this needs to be demonstrated in a consistent way through the support given to teachers and tutors, and by defensible assessment practices. Many structures associated with professional development are already in place, but in some instances a more considered approach may help bring about greater government recognition.

Professional development

The issue of professional development in language, literacy and numeracy in Australia is the subject of recent research (Mackay et al. 2006; Roy, Goldberg & Osmond 2006), so it will be discussed only briefly here. Earlier in this report it was noted that some 40% of providers made definite provision for it, and around 20% apparently made no provision for it. However, as Mackay et al. (2006, p.32) observed, 'the importance of appropriate training and professional development for the education and training workforce is difficult to overestimate'.

In the first instance, if the quality of the student–teacher relationship is a key factor in the growth of self-confidence, and the latter runs parallel to the development of language, literacy and numeracy skills, the first step is to choose teachers and tutors who have the qualities that will enhance the development of self-confidence. The second is to support those teachers and tutors to be as effective as possible in the teaching or tutoring role. This means providing a solid initial grounding and ongoing professional development. Of course, in some programs this is an unattainable ideal—coordinators are grateful for the volunteers they have and rely on the compassion and commitment of these people to ensure sustainability of the program.

There is also an issue here about the extent to which volunteers can be expected to participate in professional development, as distinct from being encouraged to. As a principle, it can be argued that volunteers should not be expected to undertake initial training or professional development. Nevertheless, many of the providers surveyed did not use a structured curriculum because they catered for individual needs, imposing a heavy burden on the teachers and tutors. One way to support them would be to make the specific curricula already in partial use (including accredited ones) more widely available as a potential resource for coordinators, teachers and tutors—to be adapted or adopted. In addition, although devising content in response to student needs may be educationally valid and individually desirable, to an external eye it may seem ad hoc, as well as time-consuming. An emphasis on initial training and the provision of strong professional development support can be a way of demonstrating a responsible and professional approach, while not taking away the autonomy and responsibility of the tutor and teacher.

In rural areas, teachers and tutors sometimes feel isolated, but organising regular professional development is often difficult, and volunteers in particular are often reluctant to travel to a distant location for this purpose. Even volunteer tutors in cities can feel some isolation when teaching one

to one if they do not have a central teaching base, such as a community centre or library. A web-based facility may help counter the sense of isolation, particularly if it was developed as an interactive medium. Although Mackay et al. (2006, p.26) reported that only six out of 142 language, literacy and numeracy teachers, trainers and tutors chose online delivery as their preferred mode for professional development, five of those six were tutors. A recent report, *Review of support options for volunteer adult literacy tutors* (Roy et al. 2006) explores this issue in some detail and makes a number of recommendations, including a national resourced support service.

The issue of professional development might also be related to the need expressed by quite a number of providers for improved links with other providers. In some instances, as in rural areas, there are no other local providers, and there may be competition among providers for students, particularly between TAFE institutes and private registered training organisations. While this is understandable in a market-driven education system, it does not mean that the teachers in both sorts of agencies should not have access to the same professional development opportunities. Again an interactive website appears to hold promise for such purposes.

Monitoring progress

Given the diversity of the students and the types of non-accredited community courses discussed in this report, assessment is a thorny issue. Only some 25% of providers had formal assessment, which included those providers offering employment-related language, literacy and numeracy assessed using the National Reporting Service. However, with the range of learner motivations and outcomes, it is doubtful whether a 'one size fits all' framework, such as the National Reporting System, could be applied nationally. Nevertheless, some student assessment did seem to be a little haphazard, as did tutor reporting to coordinators. While some long-term students (and tutors) may be comfortable with their weekly meetings (when told that his lack of application to his work over a considerable period would mean the end of one-to-one tutoring, one student said 'But what will I do on Wednesdays now?'), the whole purpose of any form of language, literacy and numeracy assistance is for students to make 'progress', however that is measured.

Again, it is recognised that it is unfair to expect coordinators and volunteers to jump through too many accountability hoops, but there does seem a need for a review of assessment practices, particularly in those programs where assessment is a little loose or relatively unmonitored. In fact 'assessment' may be too strong a term—what seems necessary in some programs is a more careful approach to *monitoring progress*. Coordinators, teachers and tutors need to be made aware of the range of tools available for such purposes, so that they can select those that are most appropriate for their particular purposes. The concept of the 'A-frame' (an ACE framework for non-accredited learning), developed by the Victorian Adult Community and Further Education Board (2006), is based on a similar principle of 'appropriate for the purpose', although it is not designed as an outcomes assessment tool. Given that the outcomes of non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy courses apparently include growth in self-confidence as well as in literacy and numeracy skills, the development of a broad-ranging portfolio of assessment tools to suit the circumstances of the learners should be explored.

In closing

What this study has found is that there is a strong demand for community non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy courses in Australia from thousands of adults who do not need or want accredited courses. It has also shown that such programs are concerned with more than reading and writing—they are also vehicles for individuals to develop self-confidence—making them feel as if they can make a contribution to the society in which they live, in whatever form is appropriate for them. Such findings support suggestions that literacy should be recognised as a social practice (for example, Lonsdale & McCurry 2004), and that improving language, literacy and numeracy benefits not only the individual, but the entire community.

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Support document details

Additional information relating to this research is available in *Community adult language, literacy and numeracy provision in Australia: Diverse approaches and outcomes—Support document*. It can be accessed from NCVER's website <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/1796.html>. The document contains:

✧ Literature review

✧ Survey results

✧ Case studies

✧ Questionnaire

✧ Frequency tables from national survey

✧ Case study materials