

Consultation Paper

Background to the IBSA project

In April 2011 the National Quality Council (NQC) agreed to develop a Foundation Skills Training Package as part of a national, systemic approach to developing foundation skills units of competency, qualifications and skill sets. As agreed by the NQC, the Foundation Skills Training Package is to contain qualifications at AQF Certificate I and II level that can be integrated with existing vocationally oriented units to provide training relevant to each industry.

Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA) has been funded to develop the Foundation Skills Training Package and is consulting widely across Australia to ensure that the development process is informed by the needs of all stakeholders.

Consultation process

IBSA will use this paper as a basis for discussion at a series of public and targeted consultations during October 2011. Questions throughout the paper seek to gather stakeholders' views on key issues that will shape the structure and content of the Foundation Skills Training Package, and inform the way in which the Training Package will be implemented.

Written responses to this consultation paper are also being sought from interested individuals or organisations by 31st October 2011.

Draft recommendations for the development of Foundation Skills Training Package will be prepared based on the consultation process. These will be available on the IBSA website for review and comment during November 2011.

For further information about the Foundation Skills Training Package development project, contact:

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Purpose of the Foundation Skills Training Package

The primary purpose of the Foundation Skills Training Package is to enable nationally recognised foundation skills units of competency to be easily packaged into vocational qualifications and skill sets. The Foundation Skills Training Package will emphasise the integration and contextualisation of foundation skills for vocational purposes.

By enabling better integration of foundation skills into vocational training, the Foundation Skills Training Package should:

- reduce attrition from vocational programs
- enhance pathways and career development for existing workers
- overcome barriers that some learners experience in accessing vocational education and training pathways
- promote collaboration between specialist practitioners
- highlight the importance of foundation skills in vocational education and training.

Definition

In line with work at the national level to develop a National Foundation Skills Strategy, the Foundation Skills Training Package will adopt a definition of foundation skills as encompassing:

- the core skills described by the Australian Core Skills Framework – learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy
- employability skills.

Foundation Skills Training Package users

Although it is important to acknowledge that all Australian adults could benefit from improving their foundation skills, Training Packages are specifically designed for the VET sector to support the development of workforce skills. The users of the Foundation Skills Training Package will therefore be:

- *education and training providers* working with individuals and enterprises to build vocationally relevant skills
- *Industry Skills Councils* packaging qualifications and skill sets for their industries.

Foundation skills exist on a continuum and are not purely low level, pre-entry skills. The NQC has agreed that the Foundation Skills Training Package should include foundation skills units that can be integrated into vocational qualifications across all AQF levels.

Learners who may use the Foundation Skills Training Package include:

- apprentices, trainees and entry level workers who need to build specific reading, writing, oral communication or numeracy skills before or during their vocational training to support the successful completion of their vocational course.

- existing workers preparing to take on supervisory or team leader roles who need to build their skills in reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy for activities such as report writing, conducting meetings, undertaking relevant research, budgeting, time-keeping and managing a team
- existing workers who need to build their skills in the use of technology, especially the ability to learn using technology, due to technological changes in the workplace that have occurred since they achieved their vocational qualifications
- existing workers who need to build their reading, writing and oral communication skills in preparation for a management career pathway, especially those who have not participated in higher education
- learners who need to develop advanced maths skills to successfully achieve vocational qualifications or to access further education and training pathways
- people outside the workforce combining foundation skills development with vocational preparation as a pathway into the workforce or further education and training.

It should be noted that all of the above groups may include learners who are often identified as having foundation skills development needs, including people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Indigenous people, early school leavers and mature aged workers.

For discussion:

1. *Are there other learner groups or other reasons for learners to use the Foundation Skills Training Package?*

Foundation Skills Training Package content

The Foundation Skills Training Package will include qualifications at AQF levels 1 and 2 and foundation skills units of competency that can be packaged into vocational qualifications across all AQF levels. It is anticipated that the Foundation Skills Training Package content will focus primarily on the core skills described by the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF): learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy.

Units

It is proposed that the Foundation Skills Training Package will include units that can be contextualised according to the needs of the learner and the vocational context of the training program. These units will be narrowly defined so that they can be matched closely to learner need and vocational context. For example rather than one 'reading' unit at a particular ACSF level there may be a unit that focuses on 'reading workplace forms', another for 'reading documents for research purposes' and others addressing other types of text or purpose.

Foundation skills units will be available at a variety of ACSF levels addressing the skills of learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy from ACSF level 1 to level 4 or 5. The explicit or underpinning requirements of vocational units and qualifications will be used to guide the development of foundation skills units at appropriate ACSF levels.

Foundation skills units will not be aligned to an AQF level, nor will they contain an identifiable AQF level in the unit code, allowing them to be packaged into vocational qualifications across all AQF levels.

Foundation skills units may be grouped together into skill sets that support the development of higher level skills for specific vocational purposes, such as mathematical skills and knowledge for engineering and related fields. Skill sets that combine higher ACSF level foundation skills may also be useful to support pathways into higher education by providing learners with the necessary learning, reading, writing, oral communication and/or maths skills.

For discussion:

2. *Is the proposed content appropriate for learner needs? Should there be more emphasis on the employability skills, or vocational preparation, component of foundation skills?*
3. *Should the Foundation Skills Training Package include 'high level' skill sets that provide pathways for career development, further training and/or higher education?*

Qualifications

Given that the emphasis of the Foundation Skills Training Package is on supporting the achievement of vocational qualifications, only a limited number of stand-alone foundation skills qualifications will be developed. The qualifications must be capable of contextualisation for a range of industries and learner cohorts.

A Certificate I and a Certificate II in Foundation Skills will be developed within the Foundation Skills Training Package. A proposed structure for these qualifications is outlined below.

Certificate I in Foundation Skills				
Core: 1 unit	<i>Learning</i> unit – aligned to ACSF level 1-2			
Flexible core: 8 units	Select eight units with at least one unit from each of the following groups:			
	<i>Reading</i> List to include units for reading different types of texts or for different purposes at ACSF levels 1 and 2	<i>Writing</i> List to include units for writing different types of texts or for different purposes at ACSF levels 1 and 2	<i>Oral Communication</i> List to include units for speaking and listening for different purposes at ACSF levels 1 and 2	<i>Numeracy</i> List to include numeracy units addressing different types of numerical skill at levels 1 and 2
Electives: 3 units	Select three units, at least one of which MUST be from the vocational stream: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • additional reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy units from the groups above or from elsewhere in the Foundation Skills Training Package • digital/ICT literacy units • additional learning unit/s incorporating vocational preparation and planning for individual learning and pathways • <i>Vocational stream</i> – comprising selected vocational units from other Training Packages 			

Certificate II in Foundation Skills				
Core: 1 unit	<i>Learning</i> unit – aligned to ACSF level 2-3			
Flexible core: 8 units	Select eight units with at least one unit from each of the following groups:			
	<i>Reading</i> List to include units for reading different types of texts or for different purposes at ACSF levels 2 and 3	<i>Writing</i> List to include units for writing different types of texts or for different purposes at ACSF levels 2 and 3	<i>Oral Communication</i> List to include units for speaking and listening for different purposes at ACSF levels 2 and 3	<i>Numeracy</i> List to include numeracy units addressing different types of numerical skill at levels 2 and 3
Electives: 3 units	Select three units, at least one of which MUST be from the vocational stream: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • additional reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy units from the groups above or from elsewhere in the Foundation Skills Training Package • additional learning unit/s incorporating vocational preparation and planning for individual learning and pathways • digital/ICT literacy units • <i>Vocational Stream</i> – comprising selected vocational units from other Training Packages 			

For discussion:

4. *Should more, or less, vocational content be required? Should the qualifications allow electives to be imported from accredited courses?*
5. *Are the titles of these qualifications appropriate? Should an attempt be made to differentiate foundation skills qualifications (through the use of bracketed titles) according to which elective groups are selected?*
6. *Are the proposed ACSF levels for the core units appropriate for the potential users of these qualifications?*

Using the Foundation Skills Training Package

The Foundation Skills Training Package is intended to serve the needs of learners across all industries. Through the development of industry Training Packages, Industry Skills Councils have already developed approaches to the identification and inclusion of foundation skills in line with the needs of their industries. The aim of the Foundation Skills Training Package will be to work in combination with industry Training Packages to support a variety of approaches to the development of foundation skills, not to enforce any particular approach. Flexibility will therefore be an important feature in the design of the Foundation Skills Training Package.

To make effective use of the Foundation Skills Training Package users will need advice and guidance on:

- contextualising foundation skills programs for different learner cohorts
- integrating foundation skills units into vocational programs
- implementing holistic approaches to delivery and assessment in vocational contexts

- accessing the specialist skills required for delivery and assessment
- developing collaborative approaches for working with specialist practitioners
- diagnosing learner needs at the beginning of the learning program so that the appropriate selection of foundation skills units can be made.

In the streamlined training package format, there is an opportunity to include advice for training package users in the companion volume/s. The Foundation Skills Training Package will make use of companion volumes to guide users on implementation of the package.

For discussion:

7. *What type of advice, guidance or supporting resources would be helpful to users of the Foundation Skills Training Package?*

Implementation issues

A number of implementation issues have been identified which may impact on the effectiveness of the Foundation Skills Training Package and therefore need to be considered during the development process. In most cases the Foundation Skills Training Package cannot directly solve these issues, but possible solutions and recommendations may be identified through the scoping and development process.

Packaging of vocational qualifications

The way in which foundation skills units are used to support vocational qualifications will be governed largely by the packaging rules and advice contained within each vocational qualification. The 'one sixth' rule around importing units should allow space for the importation of foundation skills units into many vocational qualifications. However, some qualifications, particularly those at lower levels and trade qualifications, are currently exempt from the requirement and could have difficulty accommodating imported foundation skills electives. In some cases ISCs may make adjustments to, or provide guidance in, vocational qualifications to better enable the importation of foundation skills units.

There is concern from some industry stakeholders that when foundation skills units are imported into vocational qualifications as electives this will occur at the expense of valued vocational and technical content. That is, learners who need to use their elective options to access supporting foundation skills unit/s will not have the opportunity to complete as many vocationally relevant electives as other learners. To overcome this situation, it has been proposed that packaging rules for vocational qualifications could allow the inclusion of 'up to x foundation skills units of competency based on individual needs' in addition to the core and elective units of the vocational qualification.

For discussion:

8. *What are the barriers to importing foundation skills units into vocational program? Are there mechanisms for delivering foundation skills units alongside vocational programs? What impact would the proposed packaging rule have on funding and delivery approaches?*

Delivery by foundation skills specialists

The NQC has stated that ‘foundation skills can only be delivered by trainers and assessors who have vocational competencies in teaching language, literacy, numeracy and other foundation skills’. This requirement highlights a number of complications around the implementation of the Foundation Skills Training Package:

- There is not a consensus view on the qualification requirements of LLN or foundation skills practitioners. The LLN practitioner field is extraordinarily diverse and practitioners would differ in their ability to train and assess in the widely varied units that will be included in the Foundation Skills Training Package.
- Integrating foundation skills into vocational programs will require collaboration between vocational practitioners and foundation skills practitioners – for many practitioners and RTOs this will be a new and demanding experience.
- Access to suitably qualified foundation skills practitioners will be problematic: in regional areas, in the workplace, in small and specialist RTOs, and in large RTOs where structures are not in place to enable collaboration between different departments.

For discussion:

9. If foundation skills units and qualifications are to be contextualised for vocational requirements, who should deliver them? What approaches to integrated delivery, or collaboration between vocational and foundation skills practitioners would support the implementation of the Foundation Skills Training Package?

Pre-training assessment of foundation skills needs

For the Foundation Skills Training Package to be used effectively, learners’ foundation skills needs should be identified prior to commencing training so that appropriate foundation skills units can be selected. In the Certificate I and II qualifications in Foundation Skills the core unit on ‘learning’ could provide an opportunity for RTOs to work with learners to consider their skill development needs and guide their selection of units within the qualification.

It has been proposed that approaches for considering learners’ foundation skills needs should also be included in planning for all vocational programs.

For discussion:

10. How can learners’ foundation skills needs be identified prior to the commencement of training? Are there systems that can be put in place to ensure that learners in vocational programs have access to foundation skills support if required?