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Demand-side factors in adult foundation learning programmes

A review of international literature

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Executive Summary

This paper reviews international literature that has examined the demand-side barriers to the provision and take-up of adult foundation learning programmes. It focuses on factors that affect the facilitation and provision by employers of such programmes as well as the demand amongst adult learners for foundation-level learning, together with government policies and initiatives designed to address these factors.

The paper begins with a brief overview of the current foundation learning contexts in the four countries reviewed: Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada. This overview shows that there has been a great deal of activity in this field in the past 10 – 15 years. Major and rapid change in the global economy in the 1980s accompanied by vast technological advances resulted in each government looking at policies, strategies and interventions to ensure their respective workforces would remain competitive. The perceived demands of the approaching 'knowledge economy' led to close examinations of education and training systems at all levels in all four countries. Leaders in the adult literacy field have noted a reduction of this government focus and commitment in recent years, especially in Australia.

The differing international approaches to engaging adults in foundation learning programmes that were reviewed reveal that while there are examples of successful awareness-raising campaigns in Canada and the United Kingdom, there is evidence in all four countries of huge numbers of adults with low basic skill levels who do not believe they need further learning, are not interested in attending a programme, or for a variety of personal, geographic or economic reasons are unable to participate.

The systems that are in place to identify, refer and track the progress of potential adult literacy, language and numeracy learners are generally inadequate. In all countries, a professional, well-resourced and coordinated adult basic education system is lacking.

There is recognition that there cannot be a "one size fits all" solution to the widespread need. There has been real success when programmes have been delivered in communities in a style, place and time that best meets the needs of that community.

Information technology both adds further demands to be met by adult literacy practitioners and policy makers and offers some exciting solutions. Computer confidence and competence is becoming an essential life and work skill and literacy programmes must meet this learning need. In return, the technology and its appeal to adults, offers the potential to reach learners in remote communities, people with disabilities, people turned off classroom models of learning, and those who are too embarrassed or busy to attend classes.

There is evidence of many different levels of innovation in governments' attempts to remove barriers to participation in adult foundation learning. On a major scale the UK's University for Learning, launched in 2000, is an extensive network of support services for adult learning: units of work delivered online or in a wide variety learning centres and workplaces, supported by a sophisticated advice and tracking system, are some of its features. On another scale, government funding in most countries has been available for small-scale community-based programmes and services that have been successful in reaching the most hard-to-reach groups.

Evaluations of labour market language, literacy and numeracy programmes in both Australia and the US have shown that policies that require unemployed people to seek and accept paid work above course completion and participation, are detrimental to learner literacy progress and gain.

Employers in the four countries report fairly similar barriers and concerns related to the provision of foundation learning programmes in the workplace. These include the time and expense involved, the fear that they will lose staff once they are trained, and lack of support from senior management. There are numerous examples however of government-supported or fully-funded workplace programmes that have been successful for both low-wage workers and employers. In Australia the integration of literacy and numeracy into Training Packages has had real appeal for employers, and in all countries all of those involved have strong preference for the programme curriculum to be based closely on workplace tasks.

There are few published examples of workplace programmes that have successfully, and in a sustained way, included the most marginalized groups such as people with disabilities, and some indigenous peoples. Programmes for women, too, are lacking.

Despite the benefits that the increased attention, funding and research have brought to the field of adult literacy and language , concern is now being expressed that literacy for the workplace has received a great deal of attention, to the detriment of literacy's much wider role in all areas of social well-being. A focus on literacy as social capital rather than purely human capital is being called for. Experts are urging that policies and strategies to ensure lifelong learning for all groups in society be developed. The four countries are at various stages of addressing this need.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to review the literature on international approaches and studies that have examined the demand-side barriers to the provision and take-up of foundation learning programmes. This includes factors which affect the provision and facilitation by employers of foundation learning programmes, and the demand amongst learners for such programmes. This review was undertaken on behalf of the Department of Labour as part of that department's contribution to the Ministry of Education's *Foundation Learning* work programme in 2004.

The review covers literature from Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada, from 1996 onwards. In New Zealand the term foundation learning for adults covers literacy and numeracy programmes as well as English as a Second Language (ESL) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programmes. In the other countries reviewed, this field is variously termed adult basic education (ABE), adult and community education (ACE) and basic skills.

The report discusses the findings of the review under the following section headings: an overview of current foundation learning policy contexts, engaging adults' participation in foundation learning programmes, government strategies to removing barriers to participation, government approaches to encouraging industry and employers to invest in employees' foundation learning, participation in workplace learning by under-represented groups, findings regarding the success or failure of government approaches to raising the demand amongst employers for the provision of foundation programmes and finishes with a conclusion.

The combination of sources searched for relevant literature (see Appendix I) resulted in a total of 70 articles, reports and conference papers being obtained. All literature that was reviewed is listed in the bibliography. Some of this is not specifically referenced in the report.

1. Overview of current foundation learning policy contexts

Australia

The field of adult literacy and language has received a great deal of policy and research attention in Australia in recent times. However, from having been world leaders in this field a decade ago, there is widespread belief in that country that Australia is 'losing ground' when comparing its recent progress with that of other countries such as the UK and the USA (Castleton & Mc Donald, 2002). This has been attributed at least in part to the lack of a national adult literacy policy. A National Position Paper on the Future Adult Literacy and Numeracy Needs of Australia (ACAL, 2001) concludes that there is a need for a new national policy on adult literacy that would provide a national framework for addressing the literacy and learning needs of the adult Australian population into the 21st century

In the late 1980s adult literacy issues in Australia achieved a shift in focus, from being marginalized and sidelined to being a mainstream component of policy, largely as a result of the major economic changes occurring at that time (Watson, Nicholson, & Sharplin, 2001). An increase in international competition and free trade exerted pressure for Australia to review their education and training system. Major economic changes such as privatization, deregulation, and changed employment patterns forced changes in workplaces and influenced the development of workplace learning as a tool for organisations to cope with the changes. According to Castleton and McDonald (2002), during this period there was a reframing of adult literacy away from its previous social purpose towards literacy as a key component of achieving national economic goals. This was based on the belief that greater productivity and improved employment outcomes could be achieved through upskilling a workforce that lacked essential basic skills.

Two key competing discourses have been identified in the field of adult literacy in Australia: functional-economic and social practice discourses (Watson, Nicholson, & Sharplin, 2001). They are seen as being in opposition and, along with globalization of the economy, have had a significant impact on literacy policy and resulted in a proliferation of policy initiatives in past 20 years. The functional-economic discourse, strongly associated with workplace learning and workplace literacy research, dominated policy development in the late 1980s and 1990s.

Two initiatives that have impacted significantly on how adult literacy provision has matured in Australia were the National Framework of Adult English Language Literacy and Numeracy Competence, 1993, and the National Reporting System, 1996. (ACAL, 2001). The National Framework provided competency descriptors for programmes, and the National Reporting System (NRS) provided a system for reporting on student achievements. The NRS is the primary reporting tool for federal government funded programmes such as Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) and the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Training (LLANT) programmes.

After the 'literacy decade' which ended in 1996 in Australia, national literacy policy and funding were wound back (McKenna & Fitzpatrick, 2004). In Australia at present, provision of adult literacy, numeracy and ESL education falls into four types:

- 'front-end' programmes which explicitly target language and literacy;
- vocational education and training (VET) programmes which provide certificate and diploma courses comprised of Training Packages that meet endorsed industry standards;
- workplace based training programmes, including the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) programme, in which literacy, language and numeracy can be either integrated into specific work-related training or offered as a parallel programme; and
- provision through labour-market programmes for people who are unemployed via the Language Literacy and Numeracy Training (LLANT) programme (Lo Bianco & Freebody, 2001).

USA

'Jump Start: The federal role in adult literacy', was released in the USA in 1989, and was one of the first major reports to focus attention on literacy as a major national issue. It revealed that there was an active, vocal adult literacy field across America, and since then this field has become increasingly united (National Literacy Summit, 2000). The importance of literacy skills within broader workforce and vocational skills development has been acknowledged, alongside literacy's key social role in citizenship, health and community development. The National Literacy Summit process, initiated in 1999, began a process aimed at achieving consensus across very broad stakeholder groups on the direction adult and family education and literacy must take in the 21st century.

In the United States, much of the programme delivery is State funded, and the importance of customizing and diversifying curricula and deliver methods to suit varying target groups is recognised. This has meant that literacy delivery can reach many groups in the community who are not served by mainstream adult education programmes (Castleton & Mc Donald, 2002). The two major settings for Adult Basic Education (ABE) and ESOL are family literacy and workplace literacy (National Literacy Summit, 2000). When funding for basic skills education increased rapidly in the United States, a dramatic increase in enrolment in adult literacy programmes occurred (Venezky & Wagner, 1996).

The US Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education has a National Reporting System for adult education programmes nationwide that focuses on quality outcomes for clients. The Equipped for the Future Framework Standards for Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning are a set of competency statements which reflect the basic skills necessary in work, community and family life. While many believe that such a nationally-recognised set of standards is essential to the field, others have expressed concern that the demands that it imposes, for example in assessment and measurement, do not sit well in many less formal learning situations (Suda, 2001).

Family literacy programmes have been operating in the United States since the early 1980s. They provide integrated educational services for families which includes adult education and parenting education delivered alongside early childhood education for participants' children. The Even Start Literacy

Program's purpose is to help break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and poor literacy by improving the educational opportunities of low-income families. The programme has four components: early childhood education, adult education, parent education and parent-and-child time which are combined into a unified, highly structured family literacy programme. (National Literacy Summit, 2000). The focus on family literacy has grown, with large funding increases over the past 10 years. These programmes appear to provide significant positive outcomes for many participants (Suda, 2001).

Canada

The Canadian federal government has acknowledged that Canada would only realize its full potential by investing aggressively in the skills and talents of its people and in 2002 reaffirmed the importance of literacy and lifelong learning as being a fundamental necessity to the social and economic well-being of both individuals and the nation. (Treasury Board of Canada, 2004).

The National Literacy Secretariat (NLS or the Secretariat) is part of the federal government Human Resources Development Canada. It serves as a focal point for sharing information and expertise on literacy issues and acts as a catalyst for literacy action, forging cooperative relationships with public and private sector partners and encouraging them to invest in literacy. The key activities of the Secretariat include partnership development and liaison, project development and consultation, grants and contributions administration, promotion of literacy, research, policy analysis and holding symposia, as well as, consultative meetings. The Secretariat's partnerships in the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) community, business, labour and professional organizations have proven to be extremely effective at encouraging support for literacy issues within many federal departments and agencies as they relate to issues of justice, corrections, and health for example (Treasury Board of Canada, 2004).

The Secretariat follows a partnership model in order to pursue strategic partnerships to fill identified gaps in learning environments that meet the needs of all Canadians. Key partners are literacy organizations, provincial and territorial government agencies and coalitions, as well as labour, business, and voluntary sector organisations which advocate social and economic opportunities for different elements of the population.

Provincial and territorial governments are key players and participate in many of the funding decisions based on an informal arrangement with NLS that their respective priorities be followed, while adhering to the terms and conditions of the National Literacy Programme. The role of the Secretariat is one of bargaining agent ensuring, where possible, an ongoing financial commitment to literacy on the part of the provinces and territories and support for national priorities, such as Aboriginal literacy initiatives.

The National Literacy Program (NLP) supports work which develops adult learning materials, improves access to literacy programs, increases public awareness of the importance of literacy, improves coordination and information sharing among the many partners on literacy and advances literacy research. The objectives of the NLP are: to increase literacy opportunities and take-up so people

improve their literacy skills; and to work towards making Canada's social, economic and political life more accessible to its people (NALD, 2004).

The NLP provides funding for literacy through two funding streams. Through its federal-provincial/ territorial stream, it supports projects which are directed to regional or local needs. And through its national funding stream, it supports projects in partnership with a variety of non- governmental and voluntary organizations, both literacy and non-literacy groups and business and labour organizations. Funds are allocated for the development of learning materials in a range of media for learners and tutors based on Canadian life, for holding workshops and conferences, for applied research programmes that seek ways to improve adult literacy, for funding of access and outreach programmes, for projects that contribute to the co-ordination and dissemination of new information, and projects that increase public awareness about literacy. However, the fact that almost all the funds have been allocated to project based work has created concern about long-term sustainability even for excellent programmes. (Shohet, 2001)

The United Kingdom

Tony Blair's 1996 Green Paper *The Learning Age* was an important foundation policy document that has underpinned ambitious reforms of the education system in the UK. It outlined a vision for a radical transformation of the education system which embraced and promoted the development of policies based on theories of lifelong learning and social capital.

Government aims were to: double help for basic literacy and numeracy skills for adults; widen participation in and access to learning; set and publish clear targets for achievement; work with business, employees and their trade unions; expand further and higher education; make it easier for companies and individuals to learn (Suda, 2001).

The most recent policy initiative on developing literacy and numeracy skills, *Skills for Life – the National Strategy for Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills* released in December 2000 was accompanied by a significant increase in funding to adult education and the setting of national targets for improving the adult literacy and numeracy skills of the population through the establishment of an infrastructure and a range of funded initiatives that will support a broad push to lifelong learning.

As in Australia, these education reforms were part of wider policy development aimed at ensuring that the UK kept pace with other competitive economies by developing a highly skilled workforce.

2. Engaging adults' participation in foundation learning programmes

- International studies show that only a small percentage of adults who need literacy help attend programmes

- All countries lack a high quality system for identifying need, making referrals, tracking learner progress and creating learning pathways between programmes

- The reasons most frequently noted by potential literacy learners for non-engagement are work demands, lack of interest, financial barriers, distance to travel, childcare, poor school experiences, inconvenient class times.

- Media campaigns to raise awareness and provide information have been successful

- Potentially, using computers and the internet offer new ways to attract both resistant and reluctant learners, and those living at a distance from classroom-based programmes

- Literacy programmes are not always delivered in a style, place and at times to suit learners

Reaching non-participants

There have been major research reports published in a number of countries over recent years that tackle the issue of non-participation in adult literacy programmes. The Canadian study, *Who wants to learn? Patterns of Participation in Canadian Literacy and Upgrading programmes* (Long, 2001) sought answers to the question why only a small fraction of the eligible adults needing literacy and numeracy support have ever enrolled in a programme. The study found that less than half of those who contact a literacy group actually enrol in a programme and of those who do enrol, thirty per cent drop out. Among reasons cited for non-enrolment were: not being called back by a programme contact, long waiting lists, inconvenient course times, wrong content or teaching structure. Reasons given for dropping out were job-related conflicts and family responsibilities especially childcare. The report writers went on to highlight a systemic problem in that programmes and groups offering literacy courses were plagued by lack of paid trained staff and dependence on volunteers. The regional variations of supply and funding models were thought to make it difficult to provide quality programmes and services. The report called for the development of longer term strategies, including a move away from the patchwork of assorted programmes and services toward a more comprehensive system of adult basic education.

Another study, *Why aren't they calling? Non-participation in Literacy and Upgrading Programmes: A National Study* (Long, 2002) aimed to find out about people who had never tried to upgrade their literacy skills. The study of 866 people who had no high school qualifications found that close to 60% of people interviewed had thought about taking an upgrading course or completing their high school diploma, but only 20% thought they would actually take a course in the next 5 years. Work-related reasons were more frequently cited as reasons for taking a programme, especially amongst younger people. Primary reasons for not attending a basic skills course are family responsibilities for women, but men cite work related reasons or lack of interest. Lack of interest was also a factor for the youngest and

oldest participants. The most highly ranked concerns about taking a course were similar among all groups and included: difficulties with money, conflict with time in paid employment and the distance to the nearest programme. These findings are echoed in a report produced in Ireland (NALA, 1998).

Those who said that they might take a programme showed strong interest in studying one-to-one with a tutor and small group sessions of 5-10 people. Classrooms in a local school, college or university were the preferred venues. All interviewees expressed a strong dislike for holding upgrading programmes in public settings. The researchers suggested that actions to overcome these issues were to provide ways to mitigate financial problems such as: the provision of income replacement and offsetting of expenses incurred in attending a programme, providing solutions to family responsibilities including the provision of childcare and eldercare and the potential for participation by families in the programme.

A recent Canadian report found that for adult participation in education, as in other countries:

> The general "law of inequality", which suggests that the higher the educational attainment, the more likely a person is to participate in adult education- holds up to scrutiny in all regions of Canada.
> (Statistics Canada, 2001, p.18).

The report also found that the higher the income, the more likely a person is to receive support for education and training from employers.

Sticht reports that studies of participation in adult education have repeatedly identified three major categories of barriers to participation in adult literacy education: situational, dispositional and institutional. Situational factors include such things as child-minding difficulties, work schedules, transport problems. Dispositional factors such as personality, attitude and beliefs about their abilities to learn, affect a large number of learners, while institutional barriers, or programme/policy-related aspects were reported by 43 percent of adults in one study (2001, p6). Inaccurate self-perception can be a barrier to participation in literacy programmes, with a recent study showing that only five percent of adult Americans believe their own literacy levels are insufficient to participate in everyday life (Sticht 2000, cited in Suda, 2001). This anomaly has been attributed to a number of social and cultural factors, one of which is the tendency of cultural minorities, whose literacy may be at the lowest levels, to live in their own communities fairly separate from mainstream society.

Dropout rates are high in all three nations, Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom. In the UK greater persistence was found in intensive programmes of shorter duration that are highly focused on jobs (Sticht, 2001).

One survey of job-seeker participants in language and literacy programmes showed significant differences between the participants in ESL programmes and participants in literacy programmes. Demand for, and motivation to attend amongst the literacy learners was much lower than for the ESL

learners (Lo Bianco & Freebody, 2001). The adult literacy learners did not believe that improving their reading and writing would help them get a job, and most had poor school experiences and many other personal barriers to participation.

The National Literacy Summit (USA) participants criticized what they call "a lack of active attention to adult learners as whole people" (2000, p29). For many adult learners, barriers to participation arise because the available learning opportunities are poorly adapted to their learning needs or the situations in which they are living. Adult education is generally classroom-based and instructor-led but this is not the only appropriate way to teach adults. Much greater flexibility in terms of time, place, and circumstance needs to be built into delivery in order to ensure adults stay long enough to learn what they need to.

Overcoming stigma

The personal and social stigma attached to low levels of literacy and numeracy is widely acknowledged (Holland, 2002; Watson, Nicholson & Sharplin, 2001). Therefore it is important that any initiatives aimed at attracting learners from the groups who most need help acknowledge and address this. The literature contained very few examples of marketing or outreach activities that had been successful in reducing the stigma of seeking or needing foundation-level learning because of low literacy levels.

However, models of integrating literacy and numeracy support into mainstream programmes and classrooms have gained significant support (Watson et al, 2001). This may be because there is much less stigma attached to participation in mainstream programmes, and also because participants hope they can continue to hide their literacy difficulties.

Reaching non-participants

A review of strategies for recruitment of adult students used by Tennessee Adult Basic Education (ABE) programmes showed that the more effective recruitment strategies are word-of-mouth referrals; newspaper advertisements and articles; fliers; brochures; posters and radio messages; and outdoor signs and billboards. The author of this study, along with others, concludes that the best approach is a multiple strategy one that uses several techniques simultaneously (Kohring, 1999; Long, 2002).

Venezky and Wagner (1996) have considered what conditions might induce the many people who need literacy help but do not participate in programmes, to seek out such training. They believe that motivations are both personal and professional. When employment is scarce, individuals at all skill levels seem to be more willing to invest in further education than when employment is plentiful. This may be because discretionary time is more available when unemployment is high, but also because perceived returns on education increase under tight labour markets. The authors note the absence of a comprehensive understanding of how adults with low literacy skills perceive the potential returns on further literacy training. The high dropout rate indicates "a rather large mismatch between what adults expect from such programmes and either the efforts required to reach their goals or the content of many literacy programs" (Venezky & Wagner, 1996, p204).

A successful promotional media campaign for providing information to the public about adult literacy training was held in Canada. After success with a media campaign called "Read with your children", ABC Canada looked for ways to target adults with reading difficulties and initiated the LEARN campaign. This national, bi-lingual, multi-media advertising campaign included TV and radio messages, magazine and newspaper ads and every Yellow Pages directory in Canada had an easy to read full-page advertisement called the LEARN page that directs readers to a national toll-free number to call for advice on where to find a programme. The campaign was financially supported by voluntary media community donations. The evaluation of the LEARN campaign found that it has been very successful and that it is the most common way that learners found out about literacy organisations. Almost all learners who saw a LEARN advertisement said that it helped them to decide to call (Long, 1996).

Another suggestion, made for the Australian context, was the provision of a Literacy Help Hotline and Literacy Help webpage. This would be the front line of a well-publicised and centralized resource for people experiencing language, literacy and numeracy difficulties as well as for all the government agencies, adult education and community providers attempting to identify local referral points and appropriate resources for their clients (Quelch, 2000).

In the UK many of the government's new initiatives emphasise new technology and are focused on ensuring that information is made available to the public in order to improve access and participation. The National Grid for Learning provides on-line access to a range of learning provision, teaching and learning resources and links to education and training agencies throughout the UK. There is also an advice line service in the UK, provided in English and the languages of other ethnic minority groups (DFES, 2004).

The role of Information Communications Technology in adult literacy

Computer technology offers a great deal of promise for new and exciting ways to meet the needs of adults in our communities who need assistance to raise their literacy and numeracy levels. Traditionally, it has been difficult to get adults who need literacy assistance to participate and 'stick with' programmes designed to help them. Holland (2002) discusses seven main factors that can make it difficult for adults to enter into a literacy learning programme. Of these, four can potentially be mitigated by using a computer-assisted learning programme: learner shame and embarrassment over their inability to read and write to an acceptable adult level; concern about lack of privacy; negative self-evaluation of themselves as learners; and painful school experiences of learning to read and write, and lack of successful experiences since. Holland writes "technology offers promise for dealing with some of the issues of literacy education…in particular technology can be used to draw learners into programs, hold interest and adapt instruction" (p.3).

In her discussion about the use of computers in adult basic education, Cromley (2000) examines what is known about computer-assisted instruction in this sector, and the implications. She finds that computer use that involves some of the following characteristics seems to be most successful : critical thinking skills, customization and student interests, human interaction, student collaboration, using drill for memorization, accommodating disabilities, performing real-life tasks and performing complex tasks (p.2)

Like other experts in this area she recommends that education programmes on computer are used in context, not as a stand-alone tool, that tutors give learners real-life assignments, that the internet be used to expand learners' worlds, that learners work together, and that drill software be used sparingly (p.7). Good online literacy provision will foster social interaction amongst learners, will engage them in discussion and debate, and develop a sense of community between them (ARIS, 2001, p3). Social interaction and the availability of support are key needs of low literacy level learners.

In Australia two literacy practitioners examined the effect the use of information technology was having on learner motivation and persistence (Silva & Wallace, 2000). They concluded that the availability of computers on their programmes was helping them to attract and keep learners, that learners really enjoyed using them, and greatly expanded their areas of interest and ability to manage their own learning.

Other studies have shown however that a great deal of groundwork needs to be done before beginning adult literacy learners and their tutors can make effective use of new technology. Workplace Essential Skills, an adult education curriculum that introduces learners to the job search process and elements of workplace environments through a 24-unit multimedia curriculum, was developed by the LiteracyLink partnership comprising the Public Broadcasting System, the University of Pennsylvania's National Center on Adult Literacy and Kentucky Educational Television (Sabatini, 2001). In 2000-01, a national field test of this tool was conducted. This review showed that neither teachers nor students were fully prepared to use the Web as a learning tool and that while students expressed great interest in learning how to use computers and access the internet, they needed to first be comfortable computer users before they could deal comfortably with the programme content. The authors conclude "Efficient and sustained use of Web-based learning activities requires certain conditions that do not currently exist in most adult education centers: easy access to the internet, dependable technical support, teachers comfortable using the Internet in their instruction, and students ready to take advantage of it" (2001, p.63).

The fact that computers are used in most workplaces however adds further demands on literacy curriculums, programme resources and tutors. According to Hagston, "ICTs have given rise to a range of new literacies, and to function effectively in modern society, individuals must have control of a range of the new ICT related literacies" (2004, p.4)

Programme issues

Programme factors were also identified as important when motivating adults to participate in literacy programmes: the programme must be learner-centred meaning that the "value" and benefits of the programme must be clearly evident to the potential student. Concerns about programme length, level of difficulty not being correct, not being able to work at your own pace and the relevance of the programme content were listed by learners as major reasons not to participate in basic skills training (Long, 2001).

All adult education programmes should help their adult learners persist in their learning until they reach their goals. Comings, Parrella, & Soricone, (1999) have studied ways that education practitioners can

help adult learners persist in their studies, and developed policy advice concerning the structure of funding and accountability systems that will support learner persistence. They have identified four supports to persistence: management of the positive and negative forces that help and hinder persistence; self-efficacy (the feeling of being able to accomplish a particular task); the establishment of a goal by the student; progress toward reaching a goal. They believe a combination of the four supports may provide a more supportive environment to persistence. Further, these supports are more likely to be built in to programmes if persistence becomes a more important measure in programme accountability, and if funding agencies provide the assistance and training needed for programmes to include them. The most significant finding in their study was that immigrants, those over the age of 30 and parents of teen and grown children were more likely to persist than others. Two aspects of educational experience were also associated with persistence: adults who had been involved in previous basic skills education, self-study, or vocational skill training were more likely to persist than those who had not, and adults who had a specific goal for study were more likely to persist than those who did not (Comings, Parrella & Soricone, 1999).

The need for learner pathways and coordination of referrals

One major problem for those wishing to engage literacy learners identified in the research was a lack of awareness of programmes and support available for people with language and literacy needs, and lack of referral pathways, stair casing and liaison between education providers and agencies responsible for assisting unemployed people. Information about programmes and services is often not coordinated and adults seeking referral may not have the information they need to enroll in the programme best suited to their needs. For example Quelch (2000), in research to establish the extent of literacy deficits amongst participants in the state of Victoria's (Australia) Job Network, Job Search Training programmes found an absence of referral pathways between Job Network providers and specialist literacy programmes, with many Job Network providers unaware of support that was available for those with literacy deficits. Much closer links between programmes must be forged: literacy programmes must develop or link with "transitional educational" programmes, in order to ensure their learners' education continues.

Another difficulty noted in this research is the inadequacy of the tools to reveal literacy or basic education needs, provided to people such as Case Managers working with people who are unemployed. In Victoria, the screening tool used by Case Managers, the Job Seeker Classification Instrument, which amongst other things should identify those job seekers with literacy and numeracy needs, is inadequate for this task (Quelch, 2000). The author suggests that a revised Literacy Assessment checklist tool (appended to his research) would greatly benefit frontline staff whose role it is to accurately assess the level of job seekers' need. Such a tool should result in a much higher rate of assessment reliability and save job seekers many months waiting for literacy assistance.

In the United States it is suggested that programmes such as those in community colleges which help bolster students' basic skills ought to recruit learners from local literacy programmes. Otherwise these programmes are the end of formal learning for many, way before they have the skills and knowledge to gain and maintain ongoing paid employment (National Literacy Summit, 2000).

3. Government strategies for removing barriers to participation

- Recent research recommends that elements of social capital, as well as purely literacy tuition, are required in programmes to enable learners to successfully engage with the full spectrum of adult activities, including employment

- Community-based programmes such as Adult Community Education (ACE) in Australia provide valuable pathways into vocational education and lifelong learning

- The strong ACE community links are an important factor in their success

- The University for Industry (UK) is an extensive new initiative designed to remove barriers to participation and increase accessibility to learning. It is a network of learning centres, usually in community settings, and internet-based learning programmes.

- The Adult & Community Learning Fund in the United Kingdom supports innovative ways to expand access to local community-based learning opportunities

- A range of pilot programmes in the UK, intended to extend outreach provision of basic skills and ESOL programmes, reached a great many new learners. Many challenges to successful delivery to the most hard-to-reach learners were identified and overcome

- The 'work first' requirements placed on some pre-employment literacy and language programmes worked against the achievement of positive learning outcomes in both Australia and the United States

- Family literacy programmes have proven very successful in the United States

Falk (2004a) studied the effects of policy change on the long-term unemployed, specifically those identified as being in need of literacy and numeracy help, and concluded that, to be successful welfare policy related to the unemployed must address both human and social capital elements. He maintains that there is not a simple causal relationship between a more highly skilled population and increased employment. Finding employment involves more than simply attending courses and gaining qualifications. For many who have attended literacy courses, believing that developing these skills will enhance their life chances, disillusionment sets in when they can still not win a worthwhile job. In addition to literacy and numeracy development, programmes must also raise learners' social capital by developing learners trust, confidence and social skills and supporting networks. The notion of 'social capital' is used to explain the need for literacy programmes to encompass far more than strictly literacy and numeracy instruction. The human capital model of literacy sees literacy as an entity rather than a process, and Falk believes literacy practitioners should refocus on the resources needed for learning in a wider sense. Finding a job is often reliant on knowing how to use networks of power and influence and once learners' trust has been established they can be shown how to make use of these networks.

A report written for the U S Department of Labor on demand-led strategies to support welfare-to-work clients contains several suggestions that are likely to also benefit low literacy workers (Freeman &

Taylor, 2002). In the United States there is widespread use of employment retention programmes to help welfare recipients make transitions to the workforce and move beyond poverty to family-supporting jobs. They are funded by the Department of Labor's Welfare-to-Work programme. Based on the fact that employer demand for certain types of workers drives the labor market, the workers who succeed in this market are those that can meet employers' demand. Therefore, those involved in workforce development initiatives must begin to see and treat employers as customers. While they are referring to work placement, job retention, and job-search programmes, this is also true of literacy programmes. Eventually, most literacy participants wish to join the paid workforce. The authors list six principles which characterize a 'Demand-led' workforce development approach: "dual customer" focus; new partnerships and working relationships between employment and training providers and local employers; stimulation of collective action by employers; coordination of the workforce development system with economic development priorities; emphasis on upgrading the skills of incumbent workers; and work-centered training and skill development (Freeman & Taylor, 2002, p31).

Australia: Adult Community Education

The adult community education (ACE) sector in Australia plays an important role in the delivery of adult literacy and numeracy and English as a Second Language (ESL) education. ACE is perceived as the main pathway into vocational education and training for people with limited literacy and numeracy. Four broad areas define the ACE style of delivery: a learner-centred approach, diverse programmes, a wide range of providers and ease of accessibility.

An exploratory study to measure the impact of adult and community education (ACE) on the Australian economy revealed this sector to be a significant national economic player (Birch, Kenyon, Koshy, Wills-Johnson, 2003). The ACE providers have strong links into their immediate communities, and play an important community development role. Many of the ACE providers surveyed were the only post-compulsory education providers in rural towns, and sometimes whole regions. Their programmes are especially of benefit to disadvantaged and special groups who might not otherwise participate in learning, or who have had negative educational experiences in the past. These groups include those who have been long-term unemployed, people with disabilities, migrants and elderly people. Many participants use adult and community education as a first step back into formal education: their informal, localized and tutor-led delivery styles are often less intimidating for people with little or no post-school education. The survey participants valued the availability, proximity and the experience of being at ease that these courses provided. The authors believe that the challenges facing the ACE sector are to develop more consistent reporting, and better measures that will help in further exploration of its social and economic benefits.

While there is evidence that community-based education can greatly assist in removing the barriers that limit demand for programmes by some groups, there is concern in Australia that recent government policies have in fact increased barriers to participation in basic skills education for the groups whose need is greatest. Castleton and McDonald (2002) interviewed key informants from all Australian States and Territories as a way of determining the current state of play in adult literacy and numeracy policy and practice within Australia. There was strong evidence in these interviews of competition between the

two discourses of literacy in training, and literacy as meeting wider community needs. Many believed that non-accredited programmes, and those delivered in non-formal environments had become marginalized, or disappeared completely in recent years and that dealing with the most basic literacy needs has perhaps been overlooked in the push to secure vocational outcomes. Other research has revealed widespread concern that the new programmes consolidated provision for those who already had well-established employment, and learning networks had limited capacity to service the needs of the poor, homeless and welfare dependent (ACAL, 2001).

United Kingdom: University for Industry (UFI)

A major initiative in the United Kingdom aimed at removing barriers to participation and increasing accessibility to learning, has been the establishment of the UFI (University for Industry) which was launched in 2000. UfI aims to improve individuals' employability and organisations' productivity and competitiveness by encouraging existing learners to develop their skills further, winning over new and excluded learners and transforming the accessibility of learning to everyday life and work (UFI, 2004)

Learndirect is the brand name of the UfI which delivers the primary service and co-ordinates the network of local, regional and national stakeholders including companies, voluntary agencies, the BBC and the National Health Service. (DFES, 2004). Currently there is a network of over 2000 *learndirect* centres across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland where learners can go to learn at a time and place to suit their needs. The centres are situated in everyday places ranging from colleges and community centres to sports centres and even a few pubs.

A network of UfI endorsed learning centres, usually situated in community settings, including fully equipped mobile buses to reach remote areas, offer learners an accessible and secure point of entry into learning and advice about learning across the UK. They provide local learning facilities especially PC work stations to learners who lack facilities at home or work, and provide other learner supports. Courses available through *learndirect* range from short programmes in reading, writing and numeracy to management courses for small business.

Learndirect uses the internet and world wide web technologies as the cornerstone for its activities, but there is also acknowledgement that many potential learners want face to face help, if only to get them started and work through manageable units of work. Some programmes are conducted on-line, while others are completed in one of the many learning hubs linked to the National Grid for Learning (Suda, 2001).

A strategic evaluation of UfI, (McMeeking et al, 2002) found that UfI and *learndirect* resulted in considerable benefits for individual learners and that new learners were being engaged by the service.

The evaluation found that according to recent surveys 72% of the adult population were aware of *learndirect* and 5% had made use of the service. Awareness was strongest among active learners, younger people, employed people and women. The adviceline was found to be helping existing learners find work-related courses. From the responses received, the conclusion was drawn that *learndirect* is

successfully having an impact in engaging some of the population not actively involved in learning. These learners were mainly motivated by personal interest as opposed to work based interest and wanted to learn IT skills. Case studies found that *learndirect* facilitated entry to learning especially for those with little learning experience. They showed that learners found appeal in the level of affordability, anonymity and accessibility provided. The case studies also demonstrated the need to provide learner support and there were strong connections between the provision of support and course completion. The volume of learners and the satisfaction among them suggested that *learndirect* is influencing the nature of learning by providing a range of bite-sized opportunities, previously not generally available and yet highly attractive especially to new learners.

Almost 75 % of learners felt more confident about learning something new and intended continuing with another course. As a result of engagement with *learndirect*, learners report that they not only gained technical skills, mostly IT related, but also softer benefits such as improved confidence and motivation, and improved personal and social skills. The learner survey indicated that in terms of employment outcomes, most people felt more confident about seeking or keeping their job as a result of their involvement.

Ufis own research shows that most managers responsible for training had heard of *learndirect* mainly through national TV advertising. The learning centres which focus on business reported growing awareness among the employer community.

Demand for *learndirect* in the workplace is strongest for ICT courses. Evidence from the case studies suggests that the free or low-cost delivery was thought to be a considerable aid to engagement with employers. It was found that involvement rises considerably with the size of the employer. In some cases employer demand for ICT training exceeded *learndirect* capacity to deliver.

United Kingdom: Adult and Community Learning Fund

Another UK initiative is the Adult and Community Learning Fund (ACLF), launched by the government in 1998, established to explore innovative ways to expand the provision of, and increase adults' access to, local community-based learning opportunities (DFES, 2004). The ACLF is managed by the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) and the National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE). The BSA and NIACE allocate the funds to community-based organisations through a bidding system. The fund aims to build the capacity of community-based organisations to provide learning opportunities, to support the development of partnerships to deliver learning at the local level and to share good practice.

An evaluation of the ACLF programmes (McMeeking et al, 2002) concluded that literacy schemes need to offer flexible learning programmes where possible, that special provision needs to be made for students who miss sessions so that they can catch up and that tuition in the local community combined with tuition in the home and or provision of transport may go some way to alleviate barriers in rural areas.

Since word of mouth and oral communication seem to be the most effective means of reaching non-participants, the report suggested that engaging current adult literacy participants in recruitment

strategies may be beneficial. First, they share similarities with others with literacy difficulties and second they are not perceived as having any agenda. They are likely credible sources of information. A lot of people interviewed showed a willingness to be involved in the recruitment of literacy students.

Furthermore the survey revealed that in general contacts, networking and building relationships in the local community are integral in reaching non-participants. The report recommended:

Co-ordination of the funding of literacy provision at the national level

Maintaining the non-formal approach and ethos to literacy tuition and resourcing it adequately and resisting the temptation to embed all literacy tuition into mainstream formal institutions. This finding is endorsed by other international experts (Taylor & Cameron, 2002)

Establishing a guidance service for adults with reading and writing difficulties – to track the progress and experience of referred clients

Conducting targeted literacy awareness campaigns which highlight basic skills development as enhancing employment prospects. Outreach workers could play an integral part in these campaigns, presenting positive images of the benefits of learning.

Literacy services need to be in a position to provide flexible learning programmes, crèche facilities, and travel to create the widest possible access to adults with reading and writing difficulties.

United Kingdom: Basic Skills and ESOL in local communities project

In the UK a range of pilot projects were established to extend outreach provision in local community settings. The pilots were to contribute to external institutions capacity to develop effective learning opportunities in outreach settings. A unique feature of the pilots was the opportunity to identify extra costs involved in outreach provision including funding for development costs, evaluation costs, premises, transport, materials, childcare or dependant care, any additional support such as a signer or translator, language support staff or bilingual support staff, costs of a residential component to the programme.

An evaluation of the pilots (Grief & Taylor, 2002) found numerous examples of good practice in basic skills and ESOL education in the community that are to be published in a Good Practice Guide. The findings showed that over 12,500 learners were recruited to the pilots and the great majority were new basic skills and ESOL learners. Also, that 50% of learners recruited indicated an intention to move on to further basic skills or ESOL training.

The evaluators concluded that:

Establishing new provision in community settings was expensive in time and energy and carries with it the risk of low take-up, particularly in the short term. Funding constraints and emphasis

on performance indicators such as retention work to discourage institutions from taking risks so consideration should be given to how incentives could be used to encourage institutions to take measured risks and explore imaginative opportunities for this work.

Many projects were impossible to sustain without additional funding to cover additional costs and this funding needs to be ongoing where it can be demonstrated that these measures can remove otherwise significant obstacles to participation in learning for priority target groups.

Working with local communities requires specific skills. Although linking basic skills to other learning proved successful in recruiting adults and young people who were new to learning, the evaluation raised concern that in some cases opportunities for effective basic skills teaching were being lost. The evaluators also questioned whether basic skills by stealth is an appropriate or effective approach and reported an urgent need for research into the delivery of basic skills linked to other learning and the development and dissemination of models of good practice.

Some of the projects that engaged learners from the most disaffected groups were cautious about introducing any form of initial assessment or formal recording of progress in literacy, numeracy or ESOL. Their aim was to change attitudes to learning through positive and enjoyable learning experiences and to enable adults and young people to identify their need for improved literacy in their own time through the activities presented. It was acknowledged that these courses require a longer period of time for trust to be established and barriers to learning overcome. However, it was recommended that courses in which the primary aim is to engage new learners and encourage progression to basic skills or ESOL programmes need to be included in the range of strategies that are eligible for funding.

Labour Market Programmes

The LANT (Literacy and Numeracy Training) programme, recently renamed Language, Literacy and Numeracy Training, is the main Australian labour market programme. It initially made training, including literacy, available for long-term unemployed but was later expanded to encompass a broader potential client base. Achieving positive outcomes for learners has been negatively affected by

- Few pathways to secure employment, or further education
- LANT programmes being part-time, short-term, often not easily accessed because of assessment and referral problems
- Inadequate funding of case managers located at Employment National centres or Jobs Network private and community-based agencies
- Ineffective processes for encouraging participation in literacy programmes
- The effects of "Mutual Obligation" – the expectations placed on people receiving unemployment benefits. (ACAL, 2001)

An evaluation of the LANT programme completed in March 2002 (Rahmani, Crosier & Pollack, 2002, cited in Rahmani & Crosier, 2002) showed that while there was some evidence that the programme had made improvements to the lives of participants, the extent to which their skill improvement was related to

subsequent employment outcomes could not be ascertained as only a small proportion of clients underwent final skill assessment. The researchers note the conflict inherent in the programme design, which meant that while it was designed to assist jobseekers who are disadvantaged in the labour market by their low levels of literacy to improve their basic skills, they were required *at the same time* to be actively searching for work, and to leave training as soon as they gained paid work. The authors suggest "that clients might benefit more from training by placing a greater emphasis on literacy and numeracy outcomes and by adopting a more flexible approach to programme delivery" (p.132). For example, the 12 months-long training period may have been a deterrent to some clients or have affected their motivation to complete, and restructuring courses into shorter duration/greater intensity and longer duration/less intensity, and matching client job search requirements to the intensity of the course, would be an improvement. The authors report that such recommendations have been incorporated into the new Language, Literacy and Numeracy Programme, LLNP, which began in January 2002.

A similar situation has occurred in the United States, with legislative change working to the detriment of literacy skill development for many who need it. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act 1996 A welfare reform plan, required work in exchange for time-limited assistance to welfare recipients. The provisions of this act have had a substantial negative impact upon adult education programs and their potential clients, as education for welfare recipients has been de-emphasised in favour of moving people immediately into work (National Literacy Summit, 2000).

United States: Family Literacy

A comprehensive review of findings from American family literacy programmes found that amongst the parents who had participated:

- a high percentage achieve high school equivalency after leaving
- a significant percentage obtain and retain employment
- participants continue to enroll in education and training programmes, and
- participants become more self-sufficient and reduce their dependence on welfare

(Suda, 2001). These, and similar findings in other studies, suggest that family literacy programmes are having a positive impact on the lives of those who participate.

4. Government approaches to encouraging industry and employers to invest in employees' foundation learning

- Employers report a list of barriers to providing foundation programmes for their employees. Governments are trialling new strategies to help overcome these barriers and encourage employers to provide language, literacy and numeracy training

- Integrating literacy and numeracy training into vocational training has proven successful for employers in Australia

- Government-funded programmes for low-wage workers in the United States, delivered by local community colleges, have found solutions to many employer and employee concerns

- To comprehensively address low-wage workers' literacy needs, an integrated lifelong learning strategy and adult basic education system is required

- Both employers and workers prefer a programme's curriculum to be closely focussed on the literacy and numeracy demands of the workplace

Despite a lot of publicity about the value of workplace education, many employers do not help their workers enhance their literacy skills. The Canadian report, *Strength from Within: Overcoming the Barriers to Workplace Literacy Development*, found that the most common barriers faced by employers ranked in order were: lack of time, lack of funding, irregular work schedules, difficulty evaluating impact and measuring ROI, worker resistance, high cost of trainers, top management not supportive, threat of poaching, inability to find the right trainer or advisor, unions not supportive or opposed (Campbell, 2003).

Governments in each of the four countries reviewed have put in place a range of strategies and funds to assist with the uptake and development of workplace literacy programmes.

Australia: Competency-based Training

In Australia the training reform agenda, including the introduction of competency-based training (CBT), flexible delivery and recognition of prior learning, has had a significant impact on literacy and numeracy provision. The incorporation of literacy and numeracy into industry-based competencies is perceived as an advancement for the provision of literacy and numeracy. The introduction of competency-based training is cited as one of the main reasons organisations have implemented Workplace English Language and Literacy training (Watson, Nicholson, Sharplin, 2001). One state representative interviewed by Castleton and McDonald (2002) in their survey of the current state of literacy policy and practice, noted that this integration made the literacy training more acceptable to employers, and helped raise awareness of need quite effectively.

However there is also criticism, and a shortage of evidence to support the assumption that C B T contributes to literacy and numeracy acquisition. Critics claim that this style of training reinforces a return to a functional definition rather that a social definition of literacy.

Australia: Marketing Strategy

The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA, 2000) has developed a national marketing strategy for vocational education and training that focuses on the needs and wants of clients. Extensive research was conducted on behalf of ANTA, into the attitudes, values and behaviours of Australian employers and individuals towards developing skills and engaging in lifelong learning. The aim of the strategies is to encourage people to learn and to maintain an involvement in learning throughout their lives. The marketing strategy, amongst other things, suggests what might be done to improve the fit between supply and demand of training and learning opportunities; gives key messages that may overcome barriers to learning and increase motivation; and provides a framework to assist all education and training stakeholders to effectively market skills and lifelong learning to enterprises and the community.

The researchers have looked at the perceptions, needs and wants of both main sectors of vocational education and training – employers and learners. They identified three employer segments – *High valuer, Here and now*, and *Not interested* and eight general community segments, the *Might give it away* group being the most challenging to target.

The strategy includes detailed plans to engage the three employer segments, designed to produce a positive shift in their level of engagement as well as strategies to target the *Might give it away* learner group (described as people who, while engaged in learning, are contemplating dropping out or giving up).

USA: Workforce Investment Act

The goal of the United States' Workforce Investment Act (WIA) 1998 is to ensure the US remains competitive in the global economy by providing workers with the reading, writing, computing, problem solving and communication skills they need to succeed in the workforce, and to provide businesses with highly skilled workers. It brought changes to the approach taken to workforce development, by allowing state and local entities to use federal funds for training employed workers, rather than solely assisting unemployed people (General Accounting Office, 2003) States are required by WIA to develop comprehensive and collaborative five-year plans for adult education and family literacy services (National Literacy Summit, 2000). The funds provide services to adults, youth and dislocated workers and are allocated to states according to a formula.

A study of training programmes for employed workers carried out by the U.S. General Accounting Office (2003) found that WIA and other federal funds were the most common source of funds used to support such training. This training was focused on addressing specific business needs and emphasized certain workplace skills and basic skills. Most of the programmes were delivered by community or technical colleges. In targeting training to low-wage workers, programmes were addressing several challenges

that hindered individuals' and employers' participation in further training. These challenges include limited English and literacy skills, childcare and transportation needs, scheduling conflicts and financial constraints. In some states, low-wage workers were assisted with transportation and childcare, enabling them to participate in training (P25) Scheduling conflicts and financial constraints were addressed by on-site, paid or flexible training methods and in other cases distance learning and teleconferencing courses were initiated. One workforce board in West Virginia provided a $50.00 incentive to the employee for perfect attendance during the first 6 weeks of work.

In addition to finding ways to attract and retain low-wage workers to these programmes, officials also needed to identify ways to gain employer support for such training.

One key concern of employers was that better trained employees would find jobs elsewhere (General Accounting Office, 2003). This perception was addressed by forming partnerships with employers and educators and offering training that corresponded to specific career paths within a company, which meant higher-skilled workers could gain better paying positions in the same company. In Oregon, trainees were encouraged to stay with their current employer by signing a statement of intent regarding training – by signing they agreed to remain with the employer for a specific amount of time in return for training.

Others employers were hesitant to participate in low-wage worker training because of paperwork requirements or the time and expertise they believed were involved in applying for state training grants. In response to this concern, application paperwork was reduced and workforce officials worked with union reps and training providers to co-write training grant proposals. It was considered that the involvement of the union was a key factor in the training initiative's success as it helped to bridge the gap between worker and employer needs.

USA: Building the adult basic education sector

The role of adult education in sustaining economic growth and expanding opportunity in Massachusetts was explored by Comings, Sum and Uvin (2000). Broadly, the authors believe answers to the challenge of building workers' basic skills lie in promoting lifelong learning, particularly for workers with weak basic skills who have not had access to professional development and training. They write "The solution we advocate – a serious, integrated adult education and training system – presents the best opportunity for sustaining our state's economic prosperity and making certain the prosperity is broadly shared" (Comings, Sum & Uvin, 2000, p.ix). The process of building an adult basic education system in Massachusetts has begun, with funding increased substantially for each of six years. The authors maintain that great benefits have come from this investment. Despite the efforts however, only a tiny fraction of the workers (less than 6%) who need to upgrade their basic skills receives instruction and there are still thousands on Adult Basic Education waiting lists, despite the increases in funding. The greatest demand is for ESOL classes

The authors of this report offer several solutions to the challenge of meeting the literacy needs of these workers. Solutions include expanding weekend classes, tracking students' outcomes in the labour market after they leave programmes, expanding developmental education through community college-employer partnerships, creating tax incentives for the private sector, and providing more job training for workers with the most limited skills. They believe that increasing the intensity of literacy provision would meet the needs of some learners, and would be a good recruiting tool. Research shows that providers should aim to keep students in class for 150 hours per year (Comings, Sum, Uvin, 2000) but also that too many students leave ABE classes too soon. Comings (2003, cited in Torgerson et al 2004) summarized the US evidence on the length of instructional time needed for learners to make educationally significant progress. He found that at least 100 hours of instruction is needed for learners to make progress equivalent to one grade level, but the average learner stays in provision for fewer than 70 hours in a year. For many students, fewer overall hours, offered more intensively would be more effective than more hours spread over a longer duration. Classes should also be made more convenient for learners, and many of the Massachusetts workers indicated that Saturday would be a convenient day for them to attend.

USA: Research into companies that provide workplace programmes

Levenson (2001) conducted research into companies' rationales for funding and supporting workplace basic skills programmes. Programmes at eight organisations, both Fortune 500 and smaller companies in the United States, were included. Work-site based literacy programmes were preferred over off-site programmes for the following reasons: they make programmes more accessible and convenient for workers, and their work context provides strong motivation to learners as they see how the learning can immediately impact their job performance.

Some of the reasons that have been stated for companies not paying for their workers basic skills development are that such skills are easily transferable to jobs at other companies, and thus will encourage high staff turnover (Levenson, 2001). In fact, providing workplace education can have positive impact on staffing retention as it can boost workers' loyalty to the company and by boosting productivity and reducing error rates can make some poor-performing workers more likely to retain their jobs.

The demand for the curriculum to be tightly work-focused seemed to come from both company managers and workers. Managers want the programme to make an immediate difference to workers' performance, while workers too may demand a narrow focus or refuse to attend (Levenson, 2001). One programme in the evaluation study offered a broader GED programme, but dropped it because of lack of employee interest. The employees preferred the curriculum that was more tightly focused on learning the tasks needed to do their jobs well.

United Kingdom initiatives

In the United Kingdom, the Basic Skills Brokerage Scheme initiated by the Basic Skills Agency is an initiative intended to be the first step in getting a course up and running in the workplace. Its aim is to bring together employers and providers by training existing employer advisers to act as basic skills brokers to engage new workplaces in workplace literacy programmes.

The Union Learning Fund is administered by the Learning Skills Council, and its aim is to promote trade union activity that is innovative and supports the government's objective of achieving a learning society. A key factor in the development of these projects is the role of the union learning representatives who are trained for and play a crucial role in the process of attracting employees to basic skills programmes (Basic Skills Agency, 2004).

A more recent government-funded initiative in the UK is Employer Training Pilots. All pilot schemes offer free basic skills and National Vocational Qualifications Level 2 courses to low-skilled employees. Businesses that participate receive compensation for releasing their employees during work hours to attend courses, with three different levels of compensation currently being piloted depending on the size of the firm. An evaluation report is due in March 2005.

The Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit (ABSSU) as a part of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has been responsible for driving forward the implementation of the national Skills for Life strategy as well as for ensuring that efforts to improve literacy, language and numeracy skills at national and local level are consistent and well co-ordinated. It has launched a promotion strategy to encourage employers to develop literacy and numeracy skills in their workplaces. This includes the recent establishment of employer champions as well as the development of the Employer Toolkit which contains advice, guidance and resources aimed primarily at human resource managers who are interested in basic skills training for their staff.

Canada: Essential Skills and Workplace Literacy Initiative

In the early 1990's literacy researchers in Canada identified nine Essential Skills which are used in virtually every occupation in Canada, in different forms and at different levels of complexity: reading text, document use, numeracy, writing, oral communication, working with others, continuous learning, thinking skills, computer use. Further work created occupational profiles for nearly 200 different occupations. Each of these occupational profiles shows how each of the nine Essential Skills is used in a specific occupation and at what complexity levels (Government of Canada, 2004).

The Essential Skills and Workplace Literacy Initiative builds on the research work conducted so far. The Initiative was launched in 2003 and involves Human Resources Partnerships and the National Literacy Secretariat. The goal is to enhance the skill levels of Canadians who are entering-or are already in-the workforce. The Initiative addresses this by seeking to increase awareness and understanding of Essential Skills, supporting the development of tools and applications, building on existing research, and working with other Government of Canada programs.

The ES&WL Initiative comprises four areas of activity:

Outreach: helps build a national understanding of the importance of Essential Skills in the workforce. Fact sheets, promotional items, a brochure, and a resource guide have recently been produced to raise awareness of Essential Skills.

Synergy: builds partnerships within Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and other government departments and agencies to support the integration of Essential Skills into other areas of programming. Current external partners include Citizenship and Immigration Canada and Correctional Service Canada.

Research: provides the foundation for the development of Essential Skills resources. Essential Skills occupational profiles and the collection of Authentic Workplace Materials explain how people use Essential Skills in various occupations.

Applications: supports the development of tools to help Canadians enhance their skill levels.

5. Participation in workplace learning by under-represented groups

- There is some consensus around the most effective models and approaches to workplace literacy and numeracy provision

- Australia has a national strategy to assist people with disabilities to access and complete vocational education and training

- There has been a high level of engagement and participation in vocational education and training amongst Aboriginal people in Australia

- The limited data available shows much lower participation levels by women in workplace programmes. A variety of reasons have been given for this situation

Watson, Nicholson and Sharplin's (2001) review of research has identified consistent and clear findings regarding effective approaches to literacy and numeracy provision in the vocational education and training sector. The following models and approaches have been shown to be successful

- integrated approach
- team teaching and contextualized learning – a literacy specialist working alongside a vocational specialist
- customized resources
- matched with the demands of job-related skills
- flexible delivery, including the use of information technology
  Technology has been shown to be useful in overcoming some of the resistance of workers to language and literacy programs, specifically by helping to overcome worker apathy, resistance to classroom set-ups, and apprehension about exposure (Wilson, 1996, cited in Watson et al, 2001)
- reliance on print-based resources avoided
- early identification of existing literacy and numeracy difficulties
- understanding of cultural issues impacting on appropriate provision- it is essential that the training reflects an understanding of the specific environmental, family, cultural and vocational contexts of students

One major barrier to worker participation in workplace basic skills training is the perceived risk of exposing limited skills. Disclosure of serious difficulties is dependent on trust and rapport between learner and trainer, but this level of trust takes time and the right environment to establish. Disclosure is considered less likely in the workplace as it may result in the loss of opportunity for promotion, ridicule, and loss of respect from colleagues (Watson et al, 2001).

People with Disabilities

There is data available around the extent of participation of people with disabilities in vocational education and training in Australia, although not specifically literacy and language programmes. People with disabilities are significantly under-represented in VET programmes, and data shows it is not improving. In addition, VET learners with a disability are more likely to withdraw before completion and to have lower rates of module completion (Barnett, 2004). According to Barnett, most of the policy and programme initiatives aimed at making VET more equity-friendly are national in focus. The Australians Working Together (2002-2005) initiative is providing an additional $24 million over four years through ANTA to the states and territories to assist people with a disability to access and complete a VET programme. This funding is supporting a range of disability-related initiatives.   The work of Disability Liaison Officers, who are funded by the Dept of Education, Science and Training, has been identified as critically important. They work with individuals and their families, improve networks between schools, registered training organisations and disability support agencies, and ensure co-ordinated service delivery through working closely with the appropriate service providers (Barnett, 2004).

Indigenous People

Boughton and Durnan (2004) say that the vocational education and training system, alone among the major sectors of the Australian education system, has solved the problem of access in relation to indigenous people in that country. Indigenous people participate in programmes at significantly higher rates that other Australians. The VET system is being re-shaped by the number of Indigenous people and their organisations who participate, not just as students, but as teachers, managers, industry representatives, provider organisations and participants on advisory groups (p11). The authors label this 'the Aboriginalising of VET' and record that over the past five years there have been significant system-level changes in the sector. The document *Partners in a learning culture : Australia's national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strategy for vocational education and training 2000 – 2004* is a five-year national VET strategy for Indigenous people adopted by the Australian National Training Authority Board in 2000, along with an implementation document; state and territory training authorities have developed their own Indigenous VET strategies; Indigenous advisory bodies have been established nationally and in most states/territories to oversee policy and programme development ; VET system agencies have established formal relationships with many other government and other agencies for whom Indigenous development is a core concern. The authors state however, that it is debatable whether greater equity in terms of outcomes have resulted from these changes as there is no research linking better outcomes to systemic changes.

Flexible Delivery

One key training reform – flexible delivery - has been central in addressing access to VET for disadvantaged groups – people living in remote areas, Aboriginal people, people with disabilities and with literacy needs. Both advantages and disadvantages have been noted in the use of flexible delivery strategies for literacy and language learners. While such delivery can help reach learners who are otherwise overlooked, traditional print-based self-paced learning materials can be inappropriate for

learners with low literacy skills, and those who are not confident to seek help and explanation (Watson et al, 2001)

With the knowledge that is now available about effective teaching and support needs of low literacy learners, the authors believe relevant and accessible flexible delivery packages could be developed.

Participation of women

Further strategies and initiatives are needed to ensure full participation of women in workplace programmes. Male dominated industries have received a disproportionate amount of English language and literacy funding in Australia (MacDonald, 1993, cited Watson et al, 2001). However even when offered, training was frequently not accepted by women. The following factors have been identified as influencing women to choose not to participate in workplace training: long hours in factories; little opportunity to interact with English speakers; cultural and social expectations of child-rearing and home duties; lack of opportunity to access training during paid work time for the self-employed and others in paid employment, possibly due to a lack of commitment by employers; no time to participate in the community; no knowledge of availability of classes; subservience to male attitudes; cost of lost production and restrictive work organisation; peer resentment (Watson et al, 2001).

A study carried out in Australia examined perceptions related to the nonparticipation in workplace literacy courses of some women with low literacy levels. The results showed that common reasons for nonparticipation were the time and day of the course, cultural background, and heavy outside commitments. Other factors were identified that might have had a strong effect on workers' decisions, including resistance to change, suspicion of the motives of management, power plays, and the effects of workplace discourse (Milton, 1999).

6. Findings regarding the success or failure of government approaches to raising the demand amongst employers for the provision of foundation programmes

- While the integration of language, literacy and numeracy competencies into national Training Packages has appealed to Australian employers there is concern that this method of addressing learners' literacy needs is too narrow

- The Workplace English Language and Literacy programme has been shown to be making a valuable contribution in some Australian workplaces

- The management structure of demonstration Workplace Literacy Programs in the United States, which consisted of an Employee Involvement Team and an Executive, contributed significantly to its success

- A government-funded structure to provide support for staff training and curriculum development, as well as the involvement of unions, was shown to be important in the United States

- The Essential Skills & Workplace Literacy Initiative in Canada aims to enhance the skill levels of Canadians entering or already in the workforce and involves several government departments and programmes

Australia: Training Packages

The integration of language, literacy and numeracy competencies in national Training Packages has been ANTA policy since 1995, and this training package approach has been described as an integrated or 'built in' one as opposed to separate provision of literacy and numeracy in classes or one-to-one tutoring (Millar & Falk, 2002). There has been extensive industry involvement in the development of the Training Packages.

Training packages are integrated nationally endorsed competency standards, assessment guidelines and Australian Qualifications Framework qualifications for a specific industry, industry sector or enterprise. They include the required language, literacy and numeracy skills. Where these skills are central to workplace performance, they appear as discrete units of competency, covering the sorts of reading, writing, speaking, listening and numeracy required to competently perform the workplace task.   Where these skills are part of a task, but not central to workplace performance, they may be included in any unit of competency (ANTA, 2002).

A review of language, literacy and numeracy in Training Packages, conducted by the Australian National Training Authority (2003) concluded:

> The built in approach has had a degree of success in that it positions literacy across all AQF qualifications and describes the skills required for workplace competence. This removes LL&N from the equity-only

domain and links the provision of LL&N delivery and support to the issue of quality delivery and assessment for all learners (p9).

However, while this approach (integration) is considered to have been successful, and the quality has been improved over time, research into national literacy, language and numeracy provision found that although there were cases of innovative delivery and assessment, the 'built in' approach was 'not as yet being reflected in practice with any degree of generality' (ANTA, 2003, p6). In practice integrating literacy and numeracy into vocational training does not provide a complete answer as insufficient attention has been shown to be given to literacy and numeracy elements (Falk, 2002 cited in Kilpatrick & Millar, 2004)   There is also evidence that entry pathways into training for people with low levels of literacy and numeracy are limited.

Recently, researchers explored the extent to which the multiliteracy, rather than simply workplace literacy, needs of learners in the workplace were met by current workplace training models. Using a case study approach and Freebody and Luke's four resources roles of the literate person as evaluative framework, it was revealed that, while the workplace training model employed resulted in workers bridging the literacy and numeracy gaps that were related directly to specific workplace tasks (for example, calculating averages), their broader literacy and numeracy needs were not being addressed. The authors conclude

> Delivery of integrated literacy and numeracy in Training Packages is geared to the needs of industry and workplaces. Measured against the holistic goal of addressing the needs of the worker as a 'literate person' the objectives of those who teach literacy and numeracy in an assessment setting are necessarily limited to gap training for the immediate context.
> (Millar & Falk, 2002, p104).

Other criticisms of the 'built-in' not 'bolted-on' model of literacy provision point out that, because of changing work patterns including temporary and casual work, fewer and fewer workers have access to the Training Package structure (Falk & Guenther, 2002). While the delivery concept was sound, increasingly those who most need this type of training are being denied access to it.

Australia: Workplace English Language and Literacy

The Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) programme of Australia is funded to provide training for at risk workers in workplaces affected by restructuring and technological and industrial change (Falk & Guenther, 2002). Findings of a study investigating its role in the workplace showed that it is regarded as being of great importance in supporting provision for literacy and numeracy in training practice. Specifically, the programme has enabled access, improved communication and created a constructive awareness of communication skills in training. In addition, it has promoted a training culture which leads to wider and more effective training in the workplace (Millar, 2001). The researcher found that enterprises, Industry Training Boards and Registered Training Organisations overwhelmingly believe that the programme is meeting its objectives and that it has made a highly significant contribution to the field of workplace English language and literacy training.

An earlier national research study found that significant and quantifiable gains in productivity, efficiency and economic competitiveness could be linked directly to workplace English language, literacy and numeracy training. The study found very large cost savings to companies from investment in such programmes (Pearson et al, 1996, cited in Lo Bianco & Freebody, 2001).

USA: National Workplace Literacy Program

Global 2000 was one of 45 projects funded by the U.S. Department of Education under the National Workplace Literacy Program. This fund had been established to fund demonstration projects that could serve as models.

The evaluation of the project shows a key feature of its success was its management structure. It consisted of an Employee Involvement Team and an Executive Board (Continuing Education Institute, 1998, p10). Each company selected between five and eleven employees of whom at least two were production workers, to serve on the Employee Involvement Team. A company liaison, usually a training manager or human resource manager was also a member of the team. This team's tasks included making decisions regarding the literacy needs of the company's workforce, which of these needs to address first, and how best to do so. The team then recruited the learners, assisted in curriculum development to make certain that it was pertinent to the company and worksite, monitored progress and helped evaluate impact.

An Executive Board was also established, principally to bring the workplace literacy programme to the attention of top management. The board members were very high-level appointees, for example a Professor from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Quarterly meetings were held in the various companies in rotation. The board focused primarily on three activities: evaluation, publicizing the programme, and political action to promote workplace literacy programmes. Members were interviewed for newspaper and business articles and lobbied politically at high levels.

The Global 2000 model was intended to convince businesses that investments made in educating workers have as much impact on efficiency and profitability as capital investments (Continuing Education Institute, 1998). The group set three main goals: to improve the productivity of the workplace in order to improve the product quality of partner worksites; employee participants to advance in their jobs, improve job performance and retain their jobs; demonstrate a model of a successful workplace literacy project in the manufacturing industry through the formation of an integrated partnership including an education provider and a workplace advisory team. The Employee Involvement Team of each of the partner companies then determined their own company-specific goals. Within each company there were product-specific goals as well.

Each partner company had two classes meeting twice a week for two hours at a time. The curriculum covered a wide range of topics and issues, but primarily pronunciation strategies, adapting workplace

materials, expanding the use of English into the workplace and the use of computers to augment instruction.

Evaluations showed this was a highly effective programme. The keys to success are believed to have stemmed from the strong management involvement and support, the inclusive, multilevel structure of the Employee Involvement Teams, and the opportunity for feedback which these structures afforded. The customization of the learning programme to fit the particular conditions of each partner company was another key feature. The strategy of targeting one or two departments at a time was considered a strength because, with the whole department being brought into the programme at once, participants got strong support from their supervisors and co-workers. The fact that students could only participate for 15 weeks, because of the large demand, was felt by all to be a weakness (Continuing Education Institute, 1998).

Askov (2000) evaluated three 3-year projects of the National Workplace Literacy Program (NWLP) funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The main lessons learned were the importance of a state structure to provide support for staff training, curriculum development, and programme institutionalization, as well as the importance of involving labour unions. Two of the three projects were continued in their respective statewide businesses and industries at the conclusion of the grant, while the project delivered by a community college did not. The author believes that a more robust, statewide structure to provide support to such programmes may have provided sufficient validation for the community college to have continued such provision.

Labour unions were heavily involved in one of the statewide projects and this involvement was important to its success. In this project peer advisors, who were workers who recruited coworkers to the programme, developed promotional materials and occasionally assisted with instruction, were used. Askov found: "Where the peer advisors were fully engaged in the project, there seemed to be greater 'buy-in' not only on the part of the workers but also the management". (2000, p106). Real cultural changes were noted in some work organisations where workers served with management as equals on workplace literacy advisory boards. The programmes that used the functional context approach to instruction, where the literacy skills are taken directly from job tasks, were the strongest in terms of both company and learner support. Programmes that were offered during work hours had the greatest participation. Learners tended to be less involved with drop-in centres offering individualized instruction in their own time (Askov, 2000).

Workplace Initiatives in the UK

Since 1996 in the UK, the government has put in place a range of initiatives to encourage the uptake of workplace basic skills programmes. A recent research report by the National Research and Development Centre titled *The benefits to employers of raising workforce basic skills: a literature review*, suggests that individuals benefit significantly from improving their levels of literacy and numeracy. However the evidence on the benefits to employers is sparse and an important conclusion of the review is that there

is a real dearth of studies on the effects of basic skills training and a need for high quality research in the area.

The review found that there was very limited evidence on the costs to employers of poor basic skills and what little information is available is out of date and has been criticised on methodological grounds. However, there is evidence that those employers who have sponsored basic skills training have found the experience positive and that there is no evidence to suggest that they have found it burdensome or an unnecessary expense (Ananiadou et al, 2003).

7. Conclusion

The vast amount of activity in the area of foundation learning policy and delivery that has occurred internationally in the past ten to fifteen years must be understood in the context of major global economic and political change. As Lo Bianco and Freebody (2001) note, the provision of adult literacy and language education in Australia, as in other western countries, is both complex and market driven, especially when compared with other education sectors. In Australia, Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom trends such as the rapid spread of technology, and the implications of a 'knowledge economy' led governments to look closely at the education and skill levels of their respective workforces, and the changes that would need to occur in order for them to stay internationally competitive in the new era.

A briefing paper from Canada : *Literacy and the Canadian workforce* (Folinsbee, 2001) provides a synopsis of the major trends and issues with respect to the issue of literacy and the Canadian workforce and includes recommendations for government policy makers. It represents the views of many key commentators in the four nations reviewed for this study. The report characterised the current workforce development policy as placing an overemphasis on literacy as an economic and labour force development issue. Describing this view as too limited, the report called for a balanced public policy that addressed the social and citizenship aspects of literacy development in addition to the economic aspects. A more comprehensive literacy strategy would acknowledge multiple literacies, multiple needs of people and multiple solutions. An emphasis on literacy as an individual problem was criticised and the report recommended that other issues such as race, gender and geographical regional interests should be addressed. The report called for an assets based approach that builds on what people already know and does not stereotypically label them as people with low literacy skills.

The contributors to the report called for the federal government to play a key role in facilitating and financing flexible adult learning strategy and system, responsive to different demographics and diverse realities that allowed people to move from literacy development to further education and training and credentials at work. Inclusive partnerships at federal, regional and local level should drive the strategy.

The report articulated a vision for literacy that included a balanced focus on the whole person in their roles as citizens and as members of families, communities, the workforce and unions and that literacy is for all Canadians. Programmes should be voluntary, empowering, confidential, flexible, effective and available. Literacy needs to be positioned as a right rather than a problem to keep it on the public agenda (Folinsbee, 2001).

Suda also calls for more attention to be paid to developing programmes and pedagogies that "acknowledge difference, diversity and multiple approaches to learning" (2001, p11).
There is increasing realisation that life long learning does not happen just in formal settings, and thus there is a need for new pedagogies, innovative programmes and multiple approaches to learning. The

failure of existing delivery systems to attract and meet the needs of so many learners has led to calls for a major rethink of how, where, when and by whom language and literacy tuition for adults is delivered.

Commentators in all countries are urging that literacy be seen as much more than a factor in the competitiveness of the labour market. Literacy impacts on the well-being of each society in a very broad sense, including health, education, justice and social cohesion and because of this must be addressed at the highest levels of policy, and across all government sectors. Some governments, the UK in particular, are now recognising the need to encourage and make opportunities available for life-long learning.

> The concept of life long learning as defined by the OECD (1996) is to create a society of individuals who are motivated to continue learning throughout their lives – both formally and informally.
> (Falk & Guenther, 2002, p.51).

People without the capacity to engage in this life long learning including those with low literacy skills, risk becoming marginalised from both the labour force and many other aspects of mainstream society. Countries like the USA and the UK are moving towards a more cohesive whole-of-government approach to meeting their citizens' literacy and basic education needs.

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Appendix

Three primary search strategies were used to identify relevant literature. A research librarian carried out key word searches on a range of education and business databases, including ERIC, Ingenta, Dialog, the British Education Index and Australian Education Index.

Key word searches were conducted using search engines such as Google and Vivisimo

Thorough searches were conducted of the websites of the key adult literacy agencies in each of the four countries:
> ABC Canada
> ACAL (Australian Council for Adult Literacy)
> ALNARC (Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium)
> Basic Skills Agency UK
> NCVER (National Centre for Vocational Education Research) Australia
> ANTA (Australian National Training Authority)
> CRLRA (Centre for Research and Learning of Regional Australia)
> NIACE (National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education) UK
> NCSALL (National Centre for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy) USA
> NIFL (National Institute for Literacy) USA
> Literacy Link Pennsylvania State University
> NRDC (National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy) UK
> NALA (National Adult Literacy Agency) Ireland
> NALD (National Adult Literacy Database) Canada
> UFI (University for Industry) UK

As many of these agencies are closely tied to at least one major university in their respective countries, the websites contain links to a very wide range of research papers, government policy documents, evaluation studies, reports of work-in-progress, conference papers and academic critiques.

In addition to the searches we made direct contact with each of the agencies. We are grateful for the advice, reports and direction provided by those who responded to these requests.