1. Why the Framework was Designed

The ABE Accreditation Framework has been designed to support program provision which may occur in a wide variety of places including community based providers, TAFE colleges and their campuses in custodial settings, workplaces and Koori communities. It has been designed to:

- provide sequential learning arrangements for students in whatever contexts they are studying;
- articulate ABE provision for students into employment, adult, community and further education, vocational education and training;
- facilitate personal and community development needs;
- provide a common language for practitioners to use to report on student progress referenced against agreed adult benchmarks.

2. The Framework

The Adult Basic Education Accreditation Framework is not a single course or core curriculum but a structure within which current adult literacy and basic education provision and future developments can be placed. It will not prescribe a set curriculum but rather a set of competencies for students at a number of levels. Hence it provides a framework within which appropriate curriculum can be used or developed to suit the particular needs of adult students. The Framework is flexible and allows for the continuation of current good practice.

The three major content areas of the Framework are Language/Literacy, Maths and Locally Determined Subjects. Language and Literacy have been merged to accommodate the basic education needs of both native English speakers and bilingual adults who speak English.

The category of Local Determined Subjects is currently the least developed component of the Framework. Examples of subjects or courses which may be locally needed and developed for particular contexts at a basic education level include: Occupational Health and Safety; Koori Art; Local History; Introduction to Textiles; Science or Technology. The aim of incorporating these subjects into the framework is to increase options for a range of student needs.
3. What the Framework Provides

The Framework has the potential to encourage a more coordinated and strategic approach to the development and delivery of high quality adult literacy and basic education curriculum.

For adult students, the Framework makes assessment criteria and procedures more explicit, even though assessment methods may still be informal, by providing statements of generic basic education competence. By demonstrating competence in any of these areas, students will have the option of receiving credits and eventually a certificate, in recognition of their competence referenced to adult benchmarks. While some adults clearly want incentives and rewards for achievements of success, others who do not want to participate for reasons of certification need not be affected by these processes taking place around them.

In relation to the needs of students, workers, practitioners, administrators and other stakeholders, the Framework has been developed to serve both accreditation purposes (including assessment and reporting) and curriculum planning and delivery functions. The Framework also provides direction for professional development, and an orientation for curriculum development at local, regional and State levels. It lends itself to providing a system-wide reporting framework that will eventually be meaningful to a far greater range of audiences than current practices provide.

The rich profile data drawn by teachers and tutors from the observation of students’ competencies will enable credit to be given for students’ achievements in various parts of the curriculum or to provide recognition of prior knowledge/skills. The Draft Adult Reading and Writing Statements of Competence (Volumes 1 and 2) are based on the contention that there are four main literacies in which competence is required for an adult to use and apply flexible and transferable skills. It is possible that a student in a workplace basic education program might have poor personal writing skills but be able to read the technical instructions associated with a particular work manual and therefore get the necessary credit for these competencies. Proficiency in one type of literacy (e.g. in instructional/procedural writing) does not necessarily indicate a similar proficiency with, for example, personal writing.
The draft ABE competency statements are an expansive educational resource providing indicators of performance. Teachers and tutors will now have a set of descriptors which can inform the development of curricula and serve as guidelines to classroom practice and as a rich source for professional development. Given the comprehensiveness and the explicitness regarding the criteria used to assess competence in language and maths, these competency statements link assessment and curriculum as well as providing an operational framework which assists practitioners to make judgements about student placements and referrals.

These competencies, or descriptors, have been written for teachers and tutors and are to be embedded in curriculum. It is not intended that they be used independently as a checklist to be placed outside curriculum. Eventually this rich profile data will be encapsulated in a description which is meaningful to bureaucrats, administrators and employers who are outside the day to day delivery of adult basic education. Hence, the Framework may be able to satisfy a number of needs and purposes while always maintaining quality provision as pre-eminent.

4. Where the Framework Sit in Relation to Post-Secondary Education, Employment, Personal and Community Development Objectives

All sectors of education recognise the need to integrate and promote a range of pathways to assist movement between areas of post-secondary education and employment. Personal and community development are important outcomes from any education or training.

By locating the Adult Basic Education Accreditation Framework within the context of adult community and further education (ACFE) as well as higher education and vocational education and training, a clearer picture of potential student pathways emerges.

5. Present and Future Contexts

Historically, student assessment in adult literacy and basic education programs in
Victoria has been informal and not tied to any system wide approach. Assessment was often based on teacher/tutor intuition about adult students' strengths and weaknesses. The primary purpose of this type of assessment was to provide feedback for planning lessons and positive reinforcement for the student.

There are now additional factors which mean that the outcomes of the learning and teaching process are relevant in a broader range of contexts and to a number of audiences. In workplace contexts, supervisors, employers and unionists have an interest in the learning progress of a worker or the changes which occur in workplaces to which literacy tuition may have contributed. Community groups often want to know whether their programs are meeting the local needs and providing opportunities for people to develop personal skills and to participate in, and contribute more to, the development of their communities. College administrators need to be satisfied that they are doing their utmost to increase the participation of social justice and equity target groups as well as achieving their further education and vocational education and training charters. Participation and articulation are thus major goals for all providers.

Other Government departments such as the Office of Employment of the Ministry of Employment, Post-Secondary Education and Training and the Department of Employment, Education and Training have a priority for the education and training of unemployed people. Consequently, ABE providers are being asked to account in different ways for the funds they receive, both in terms of describing student outcomes and assessing progress, and by reporting in a way that is meaningful to each system.

Funding bodies are interested in the general monitoring of program standards and the evaluation of effectiveness as much as the efficiency with which providers conduct programs with scarce and valuable resources. Issues such as appropriateness of student placement and the suitability of curriculum in addressing needs are now of interest to other institutional audiences. Similarly, these audiences are also interested in literacy and language skills and the attainment of recognised qualifications, standards or credit transfer into other education or training programs.

Other states and territories are interested in the development of this ABE Accreditation Framework. A simplified version of the adult reading and writing competencies has informed the development of the Interim Literacy Course Matrix (ILCM) for the DEET funded Australian Language and Literacy Program. This matrix was developed as an interim measure so that individuals can be assessed and placed in the course most appropriate for them to attain the competencies they need. It was seen as an alternative to testing and ranking students on an arbitrary scale, divorced from any program context. The ILCM has been adopted through agreement with the Commonwealth and states/territories for 1992.

More recently, the Australian Committee for Training Curriculum has funded a joint OSTB/DFF submission to adapt the Victorian ABE Accreditation Framework to the national context.
Contacts for Further Information

Contact the Adult Basic Education Officer in your region (see below), Sonnie Hopkins in the OSTB on (03) 628 3061 or Sharon Coates of the Division of Further Education on (03) 628 3104.

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