Community Services & Health

Industry Skills Council

Foundation Skills Guide for

CHC Children's and Youth Services

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Overview

Background to Companion Volumes

In 2010 the National Quality Council accepted recommendations in the *VET Training Products for the 21st Century report.* Two of those recommendations were specifically to do with the design of training packages:

1. *Simplify and streamline the content of Training Packages by separating the performance standards in units of competence from guidance and supporting information for RTOs and*

2. *Restructure and streamline training package content by:*

- *Simplifying the endorsed components*
- *Expanding the non-endorsed components*
- *Eliminating unnecessary information and consolidating repetitive material.*

In November 2009, the National Skills Standards Council (NSSC) endorsed new *Standards for Training Packages* which set out new requirements in full. You can view a copy of the new Standards for Training Packages on the National Skills Standards Council website http://www.nssc.natese.gov.au/training_packages/standards_and_policies.

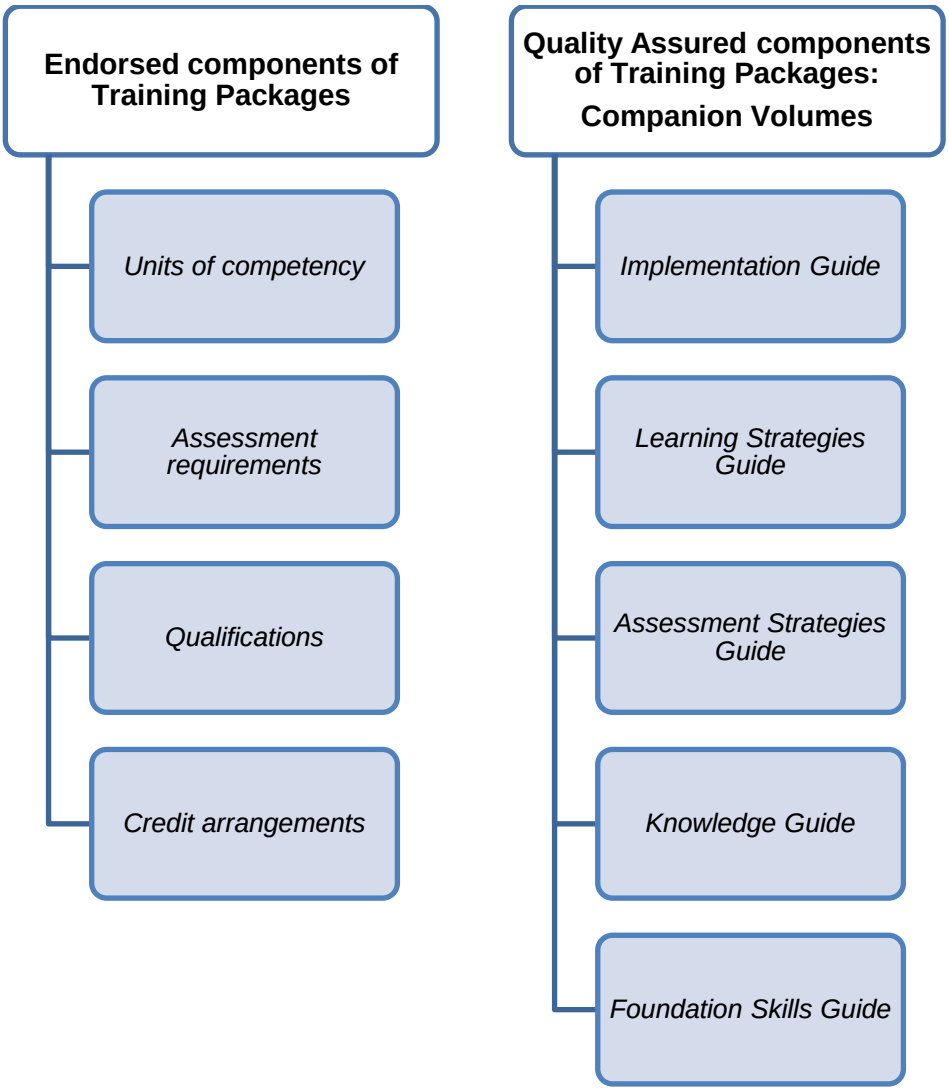
Endorsed and non-endorsed components

There are four endorsed components of Training Packages, all of which can be found on the national register www.training.gov.au.

In addition, the non-endorsed components have been expanded to include Companion Volumes, including the following:

- The ***Companion Volume Implementation Guide*** is a mandatory requirement and is available at www.cshisc.com.au. It contains overview information about the entire Training Package, including a list of all units, skills sets and qualifications in the training package. It also contains key implementation information for use by RTOs.

- Optional guides and resources to assist implementation in specific industry sectors. For the new CHC Children's and Youth Services qualifications this also includes:
    - A ***Learning Strategies Guide*** describes potential strategies for working with a diversity of learners in this sector and possible learning strategies.
    - A **Knowledge Strategies Guide** identifies knowledge requirements of the units of competency, a glossary of terms and provides information about potential resources as well as links to useful information.
    - An **Assessment Strategies Guide** provides guidance on implementation of the Assessment Requirements as well as general advice about assessment in this sector.
    - A **Foundation Skills Guide** provides guidance about identifying foundation skills and developing them in students in the context of the sector in which they work.



Feedback and contributions

In time, these Companion Volumes will provide an opportunity to showcase best practice from RTOs and provide a forum for sharing information and resources. If you have any ideas, resources, case studies or feedback to contribute to the Companion Volumes, please provide your feedback via the CS&HISC Continuous Improvement Feedback Register.

What are Foundation Skills?

Foundation skills are the underpinning communication skills required for participation in the workplace, the community and in adult education and training. There have been a range of terms used to describe these skills in the past.

Language, literacy and numeracy, or LLN, is the traditional way of referring to the ability to speak, listen, read and write in English, and to use mathematical concepts.

'Core skills' is the term used in the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF), which specifies five skills. These are learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy – more about core skills later in this companion volume.

'Foundation skills' is the term that Australian Government agencies have started to use to cover the ACSF's five core skills, plus the employability skills, or the Core Skills for Work framework. However this is not a definitive definition and it's worth noting that the Foundation Skills Training Package covers core skills plus digital literacy.

Don't get too concerned about the actual definition of foundation skills – think about the term loosely to cover the range of skills needed to communicate at work, at home and in the community.

Foundation skills in units of competency

All job tasks, and all units of competency include foundation skills – almost everything we do at work has something to do with learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy. It might be having a conversation with a client or a colleague, completing an observation record, working to a schedule or reading workplace health and safety information. Almost everything is underpinned by foundation skills.

There are particular foundation skills that apply to particular job tasks and they should always be addressed as part of a vocational training program. Trainers or employers shouldn't just assume that learners have those skills, because even if a learner has good reading skills, they may need support to develop the skills to be able to read particular documents, or support to complete a particular type of report.

Every effort has been made to ensure that foundation skills are explicit in the new units of competency, but trainers will still need to take a little time to analyse the units to identify what the foundation skills tasks are. This is because there are many different words used in the

performance criteria to describe the foundation skills tasks, as they relate to vocational tasks.

As an example, take a look at the unit *CHCECE003 Provide care for children*. The second element in this unit includes lots of performance criteria that include the words ‘promote’, ‘encourage’ and ‘discuss’...

2.1 Consistently implement movement and physical experiences as part of the program for all children
2.2 Participate with children in their physical activity
2.3 Promote physical activity through planned and spontaneous experiences appropriate for each child
2.4 Encourage each child’s level of participation in physical activities according to the child’s abilities and their level of comfort with activities
2.5 Encourage children have frequent opportunities to engage in outdoor play
2.6 Encourage children’s participation in physical activities
2.7 Discuss with children how their bodies work and the importance of physical activity to people’s health and well being

Promoting and **encouraging** children to participate in activities would usually require some oral communication (speaking and listening) skills, some body language

Discussing and explaining information to children is a particular skill – it’s different to discussing information to an adult. It requires suitable language, that’s appropriate to their age, and their needs; a language that the child can understand and access. It may require a demonstration of a key point or

It’s important to think about these types of words, often called ‘trigger words’ because they trigger readers to think about foundation skills.

Foundation skills in Assessment requirements

It's also important to look at the Assessment Requirements of the unit, along with the performance criteria. The performance evidence and knowledge evidence in the Assessment Requirements will usually include some foundation skills that must be assessed.

For example, in the unit we've been talking about, *CHCECE003 Provide care for children*, the performance evidence includes the following.

Performance evidence:	The candidate must show evidence of the ability to complete tasks outlined in elements and performance criteria of this unit, manage tasks and manage contingencies in the context of the job role. There must be evidence that the candidate has: • provided care and responded appropriately to at least three children. This includes: promoting physical activity and encouraging children to participate engaging children in discussions around physical health and wellbeing adapting the physical environment to ensure challenges for children ensuring the smooth transition of new arrivals supporting children through transition and change
	• performed the activities outlined in the performance criteria of this unit during a period of at least 120 hours of work in a regulated education and care service

The foundation skills highlighted reflect those in the performance criteria.

And the knowledge evidence can also include foundation skills.

Knowledge evidence:	The candidate must be able to demonstrate essential knowledge required to effectively do the task outlined in elements and performance criteria of this unit, manage the task and manage contingencies in the context of the work role. These include knowledge of: • how to access: - the National Quality Framework - the National Quality Standards - the relevant approved learning framework • and how to navigate through these documents to find areas relevant to this unit of competency • basic principles of child physical and emotional development • United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child • recommendations for physical activity for birth to 5 year olds and 5 to 12 year olds in the National Physical Activity Guidelines for Australians • impact of changes of routines and environments for children • sun safety • relevance of hand hygiene for minimising infectious diseases • code of ethics • routines and strategies to minimise distress at separation of parent and child • organisation standards, policies and procedures

Candidates need to be able to engage with documents for assessment – they may not be able to read every word, but they must understand the layout and intention, or the key information in the Standards and frameworks and also in organisation standards, policies and procedures.

For some units, the assessment conditions also include some references to foundation skills.

Assessment conditions:	Skills must be demonstrated in a regulated education and care service. In addition, simulations and scenarios must be used

	where the full range of contexts and situations cannot be provided in the workplace or may occur only rarely. These are situations relating to emergency or unplanned procedures where assessment in these circumstances would be unsafe or is impractical. Simulated assessment environments must simulate the real life working environment where these skills and knowledge would be performed, with all the relevant equipment and resources of that working environment. Assessment must ensure use of: • National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care • the relevant approved learning framework under the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care. Assessors must satisfy the NVR/AQTF mandatory competency requirements for assessors.

To be able to use a document, the candidate will need to have some level of reading skills to identify key information, even if s/he cannot read it word for word.

Using trigger words

What has been highlighted in the previous examples is that there are 'trigger words' that can help trainers to locate where the foundation skills are in units and assessment requirements. These trigger words highlight the foundation skills that need to be addressed in a vocational training program. Developing these foundation skills should be an integral part of the vocational training program to ensure that learners develop the appropriate skills for their work.

The following list may assist trainers to locate foundation skills in units.

Trigger words				
Learning	***Reading***	***Writing***	***Oral communication***	***Numeracy***
organise *apply planning and organising skills* *clarify meaning or advice* *follow step by step instructions* *take follow up action* *identify and access information sources* *select from processes* *transfer skills and knowledge* *organise and make connections* *organise ideas* *select from a range of strategies* *build on prior knowledge and experience* *evaluate* *compare and contrast*	*apply legislative, and organisational procedures according to policies and procedures according to codes and labels* *analyse appropriate documentation* *check* *comply with* *follow written procedures* *identify* *interpret and monitor legislation* *obtain information from written instructions* *understand* *written reports*	*articulate* *chart* *complete reports* *document* *format* *identify* *inventory* *label* *maintain records* *monitor* *note* *outline* *record data* *report* *written reporting*	*assist* *access relevant information* *recognise and respond to ...* *encourage* *articulate* *respond* *clarify* *report* *conduct a meeting* *contribute* *deliver* *discuss* *explain* *feedback* *follow verbal instructions or procedures* *identify* *inform* *liaise* *make suggestions* *monitor* *negotiate* *refer to* *relate* *supervise* *team discussions*	*interpret plans according to signage* *adjust* *administer allowance* *analyse* *calculate* *collect data* *convert* *determine value* *directions* *estimate* *formula* *interpret charts and graphs* *levels* *measure* *perform* *proportion* *record* *size* *time*

The Australian Core Skills Framework

The ACSF is a national framework that provides a consistent, national approach to identifying the language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills required for work, for education and training, and for personal and community interaction. It provides a common language to be able to talk about LLN performance levels of individuals and also about the LLN requirements of jobs and of training programs. The framework covers five core skills, at five levels. The skills are:

- learning
- reading
- writing
- oral communication, and
- numeracy.

The levels are numbered from 1 to 5, where 1 is low level performance and 5 is high. There is also a Pre-level 1. Each of the skills and levels are described in detail in the ACSF. Understanding and engaging with the detail, even some of it, and using the language that it includes will help vocational trainers to better understand and describe the LLN skill levels of their learners, the LLN requirements of training programs, and the LLN skill requirements of job tasks and job roles.

The best way to learn about the ACSF is to attend a training program – refer to the Resources section at the end of this document for information.

Mapping units to the ACSF

Overview

CS&HISC has mapped many units of competency to the ACSF. The mapping involved an analysis of the foundation skills tasks included in units of competency, mapped against the ACSF. This mapping provides the ACSF levels of a competent learner, or someone who has completed the training for that job task, the levels are not meant to be entry levels, or to exclude people from a training program. The levels are to help provide trainers with information about what to aim for in a training program, and to work out what support a learner may need.

Qualification summaries

There are qualification summaries compiled for many qualifications from the Community Services Training Package. The qualification summary for the core units from the CHC30113 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care is included here as an example.

CHC30113 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care												
Core units		Learning		Reading		Writing		Oral Comm		Numera		
CHCCS400	Work in a relevant legal and ethical framework	4.01	4.02	4.03	4.04	-	-	3.07	3.08	-	-	
CHCECE001	Develop cultural competence	3.01	3.02	3.03	3.04	-	-	3.07	3.08	-	-	
CHCECE002	Ensure the health and safety of children	3.01	3.02	3.03	3.04	2.05	2.06	3.07	3.08	2.09	-	
CHCECE003	Provide care for children	3.01	3.02	3.03	3.04	-	-	3.07	3.08	-	-	
CHCECE004	Promote and provide healthy food and drinks	3.01	3.02	2.03	2.04	-	-	3.07	3.08	2.09		
CHCECE005	Provide care for babies and toddlers	3.01	3.02	2.03	2.04	-	-	3.07	3.08	2.09	2.	
CHCECE007	Develop positive and respectful relationships with children	3.01	3.02	2.03	2.04	-	-	3.07	3.08	-	-	
CHCECE009	Use an approved learning framework to guide practice	3.01	3.02	3.03	3.04	-	-	3.07	3.08	-	-	
CHCECE010	Support the holistic development of children in early childhood	3.01	3.02	3.03	3.04	-	-	3.07	3.08	-	-	
CHCECE011	Provide experiences to support children's play and learning	3.01	3.02	2.03	2.04	-	-	3.07	3.08	-	-	-

A glance down the columns highlights the ACSF level or skill that a learner competent in these units would require for the job.

We've mapped to indicator level – mapping could just be to level (sometimes there is variation within

CHCECE013	Use information about children to inform practice	3.01	3.02	2.03	2.04	3.05	3.06	3.07	3.08	-	-	-
CHCPRT001	Identify and respond to children and young people at risk	4.01	4.02	4.03	4.04	3.05	3.06	3.07	3.08	-	-	-
HLTAID300	Apply first aid	4.01	4.02	3.03	3.04	3.05	3.06	3.07	3.08	2.09	-	-
HLTHIR404	Work effectively with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people	4.01	4.02	-	-	-	-	3.07	3.08	-	-	-
HLTSWP300	Participate in safe work practices	3.01	3.02	3.03	3.04	2.05	2.06	307	3.08	-	-	-

Summary of key foundation skills:

The key foundation skills included in the mandatory units for this qualification include:

- learning skills to work within position specifications and role responsibilities; identify, investigate and apply relevant learning frameworks in all work undertaken; reflect cultural safety and ethical practice in workplace practices and in relationships with children, families and colleagues; develop own cultural competence; use personal protective equipment; correctly operate first aid equipment; identify, assess and minimise hazards and risks to self and others; ensure health and safety of children's environment, including food and recognise emergency situations; identify injuries, illnesses and conditions and take immediate action, including addressing asthma and anaphylaxis and reporting any signs of abuse; protect the rights of children and respond to infringements on rights; and draw on prior knowledge to challenge children to learn and develop physical, emotional, social, communication and cognitive skills.

- reading skills to interpret key information in legislation, organisational policies and procedures; identify and interpret embedded information in key statutory and regulatory requirements and relevant learning frameworks; use routine workplace checklists and documentation; identify, gather and interpret all relevant information about a child's medication, food, toileting and sleeping requirements; infer nutritional information from food labels and healthy eating guidelines; and read children stories.

The summary for each ACSF skill highlights the tasks included across the core units.

- writing skills to plan, draft and produce familiar reports and documents according to organisational standards; document incidents, events and accidents using familiar workplace reporting forms, including all details of signs of illness and injury in children; accurately record indications of possible risk of harm to children in a non-judgemental way; and collect and discuss information on children and record observations and discussion outcomes.

- oral communication skills to seek clarification from supervisors and colleagues; support children and families in a range of familiar and some less familiar contexts; provide guidance, encouragement and positive feedback to children in their everyday learning and play; support and create environments conducive of cross-cultural communication and respect; identify, interpret and respond to children's body languages and changes in body language; role model desired behaviour using own body language and speech; offer immediate help to distressed children and family members; relate and explain information to children in a way that is culturally appropriate and safe; accurately convey observations and findings of child observations to staff and families; seek feedback; and report risks, hazards, emergencies, illnesses and injuries to appropriate personnel.

- numeracy skills to use first aid equipment and apply first aid, interpret information on food labels and in nutritional guidelines, including interpreting measurements in g, mg, L, mL, percentages, decimals; check use-by-dates on medication; prepare formula in accordance with required quantities; and identify and interpret children's recommended immunisation schedule.

For ACSF summaries of other qualifications from the Community Services Training Package, go to www.cshisc.com.au.

Determining a learner's ACSF levels

The ACSF can be used to determine the foundation skills levels of learners entering training, or at any time during training. Comparing a learners ACSF levels before training commences, can highlight whether learners have the ACSF skills to be able to cope with the training, or whether there needs to be support provided, or perhaps a bridging program to build foundation skills before the vocational training begins.

Determining an individual's skill levels requires an assessment, which could be either indicative or diagnostic.

Indicative ACSF assessment

Training providers usually carry out an interview of some sort before a person starts a training program. This usually includes a chat where the person is asked to complete some information about their background in writing. This interaction can provide a trainer or assessor with some indicative information about that person's LLN skill levels, particularly around Oral communication and Writing. Sometimes candidates are asked to complete an LLN assessment at this stage, as a way of determining whether they have the skills to be able to commence a particular training program.

An indicative pre-assessment

'We get potential learners to fill out an information form and we have a bit of a chat about their background and their education. We can get a pretty good idea about their reading, writing and oral communication skills in that time. If someone struggles over the form, asks for a lot of help to understand it, or says 'I forgot my glasses so I need to take it home', those sort of things work as indicators that there might be an issues with foundation skills, and alert is that we should do a proper check of the candidate's foundation skills levels before he or she gets enrolled a vocational qualification.

We just want to be sure that enrolling them in a vocational qualification is the right thing to do. We don't want to enrol people who won't be able to cope and then they end up failing – that would be awful. So if we have doubts about someone's foundation skills levels, we refer them for a diagnostic ACSF assessment'.

Trien, RTO manager.

Often this initial contact provides enough detail for an assessor to be able to feel confident that the candidate has the LLN skills required to commence a training program. Sometimes it flags concern that the candidate may not have the skills and if this is the case, the assessor should refer the candidate for a more detailed, diagnostic ACSF assessment.

The Community Services and Health Skills Check is an example of an indicative pre-assessment. You can find the Skills Check on the CS&HISC website.

Diagnostic ACSF assessment

Diagnostic ACSF assessments are usually carried out by LLN practitioners with experience using the ACSF and making judgements against it. Diagnostic assessments could cover each of the five skills, or they may assess one or two skills in depth. There are ACSF assessment tools that are available for vocational trainers and assessors to use, but if trainers are not experienced in using the ACSF they should seek advice about their judgements from an experienced practitioner.

A diagnostic ACSF assessment

Michaela was very keen to enrol in the CHC30113 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care. She was very hesitant to fill in the information form at the RTO and what she did fill in had a few mistakes, so the RTO referred her for an ACSF diagnostic assessment.

Klynton, the ACSF assessor, put her at ease immediately, explaining that the assessment was really about working out how she could be best supported through her training. It wasn't a test. They chatted for a while about Michaela's interests and her educational background, and Klynton asked her to fill out a self-assessment to identify where she thought her skills were at. Klynton suspected she had quite low self-esteem and was very concerned that she couldn't complete the forms in the right way. He reassured her that it was ok, and that it was ok to ask for help if she felt like she needed it.

After identifying that Michaela really liked cooking, Klynton located a low level reading and writing task from his bank of 45 assessment tasks, that he thought she would be comfortable with. After she completed the task with a little support, she located another that included numeracy tasks based on a recipe. Then he chose a task that included a procedural text about manual handling – Klynton knew that the text would be quite unfamiliar, but he wanted to see if she had the skills to be able to access key information.

After Michaela had completed four tasks and had a lengthy chat, Klynton had collected enough information to be able to complete a profile of Michaela's core skills. He explained that he'd write up a summary and forward it to both Michaela and the RTO.

The short report concluded that in comparison to the ACSF qualification summary (of a learner competent in the CHC30113 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care) Michaela's performance identified a skills gap in writing and numeracy of one level. Klynton concluded that Michaela would be able to manage the training program, but she would need some assistance to build her writing and numeracy skills. His report suggested various strategies that the vocational trainer could use to help build the appropriate skills, as well as identifying some specific learning activities.

Who carries out ACSF assessments?

Ideally anyone who carries out assessments in the VET sector would have the *Assessor Skill Set*, as identified in Standard 15.4 of the *Standards for National VET Regulator Registered Training Organisations* (or Standard 1.4 of the *Australian Quality Training Framework*). There are no regulations or standards to identify who can carry out either indicative or diagnostic ACSF assessments. People with little or no knowledge of the ACSF could carry out an indicative assessment, with some guidance about how to make a candidate comfortable and about good practice in assessment.

To carry out a diagnostic ACSF assessment, the assessor would need to have considerable knowledge of the ACSF. Again there are no standards that determine how that knowledge is defined, but being competent in the units *TAELLN401A Address adult language, literacy and numeracy skills* (which introduces the concepts of working with the ACSF) and *TAELLN501B Support the development of adult language, literacy and numeracy skills* (which advances skills in working with the ACSF) would be a recommended minimum.

The foundation skills focussed qualifications recently added to the TAE10 Training and Education Training Package would also provide suitable skills and knowledge to conduct diagnostic ACSF assessments. Those qualifications are:

- TAE70110 Vocational Graduate Certificate in Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice

- TAE80110 Vocational Graduate Diploma of Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Leadership.

Anyone involved with work that involves judgements against the ACSF should be involved in validation sessions to ensure that their assessment of levels matches the benchmark. It's very easy for practitioners who work with the ACSF to become isolated and end up misjudging levels without realising. Accurate professional judgements are validated through agreement with experienced practitioners, and even experienced practitioners need to participate in validation to ensure consistent judgement of levels.

At this stage there are no rules or standards identified for validation of work around the ACSF, but without validation, a practitioner's levels could move away from the benchmark and be of no use in a diagnostic process.

Strategies to support the development of foundation skills

Some learners will present to start training with foundation skill levels that are more than one ACSF level lower than what's required of a competent learner. Whether they can be supported to develop skills across more than one level will really depend on which skill or skills need to be developed, on the length of the training program, the size of the group and the skills of the trainer. Sometimes it would be more appropriate to refer the learner to a preparatory program where s/he could develop some underpinning skills that could lead on to a vocational training program.

Often pre-assessments will identify small gaps in foundation skills that can be addressed in a vocational program.

What vocational trainers can do

There are a range of strategies that trainers can use to encourage the development of foundation skills appropriate for the job task including the following.

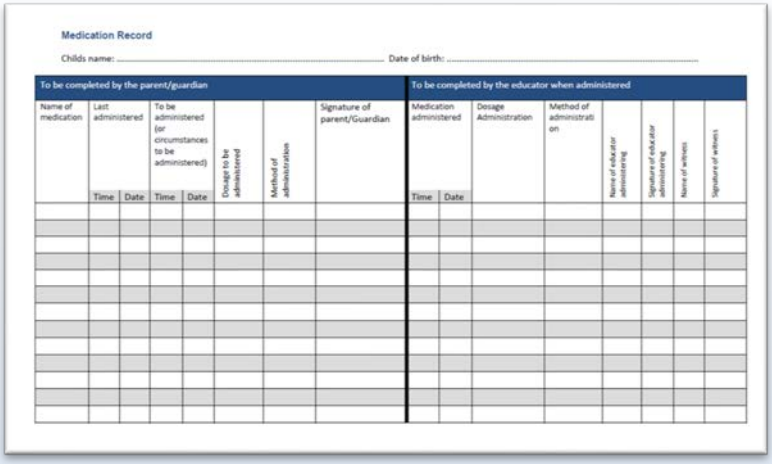
Scaffold foundation skills

Many workplace tasks involve lots of steps and experienced workers carry out the tasks without really paying attention to the steps involved. Breaking tasks down into steps that build up to the completion of a task is often used and it can work well for developing foundation skills.

For example, when you read text that is organised into a table, you would usually read the headings across the top and then the headings on the left at the side. This process helps you to work out what the information in the grid is all about. If you are familiar with the form, you would use these sorts of strategies automatically. But if learners are seeing a workplace form for the first time, make sure that you explain to learners the purpose and how it works.

Workplace forms

'This medication record form comes from the ACECQA website – it's a very useful form to use in our Childcare Service, but it does need some explaining!'



Medication Record

Childs name: ..... Date of birth: .....

To be completed by the parent/guardian								To be completed by the educator when administered						
Name of medication	Last administered		To be administered (or circumstances to be administered)		Dosage to be administered	Method of administration	Signature of parent/Guardian	Medication administered		Dosage Administration	Method of administration	Name of educator administering	Signature of educator administering	Name of witness	Signature of witness
	Time	Date	Time	Date				Time	Date						

'Educators who use the form need to understand that it's divided into two parts – one part is filled out by the parent (which is really the instruction) and the other is filled out by the educator, and is a record that the parent's instruction has been followed.

'It's important to know what the headings mean as you go across the form – in a training context, you would step learners through the set-up of the form and explaining that entries to the form run across the page under each heading. The entry made by the educator after the medication has been administered, also needs to be witnessed – that's also a concept that may require some explanation.

'We talk all our people through it and get them to have a practise... we don't want mistakes where medication is concerned!'

Bronwyn, Long Day Care Centre Manager

Use model texts

No matter what the form is about, having opportunities to practise filling it out is important. Providing some model texts or samples of completed forms for learners to use as a reference, will also assist the learner. These completed forms can provide a bank of terms and phrases that the learner can draw on.

Personal word lists

Personal word lists or references can also be very helpful for learners, and again, they could be kept in a personal reference file. The focus of the word list will depend on what skills the learner needs to develop – it could be a list of correctly spelled words, a vocational word list with a photo of what the word means in a particular context, or typical phrases to fill out commonly used workplace forms.

Skimming and scanning

Workplace documents are often quite complex and it's useful to have strategies to help learners access such documents. Skimming and scanning is one option.

When introducing a new document, give learners a couple of minutes and then ask what they think the purpose of the document is. Who would the target audience be? You can pick up a lot from just reading the titles of the document and the first paragraph.

Skimming and scanning

'I work with a group of learners training to be Early Childhood Educators. It's very important that they understand the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, called Belonging, Being and Becoming. The concepts in the framework underpin almost everything that they will do as part of their work.

'I start with a session where I talk about the document, and then I get learners to take a look at it for themselves. I get them to have a good look at the cover and the contents page. The main headings in the contents page give an overview of what the document is about and how it's organised. The sub-headings indicate what the detail in the document is about.

'Then I ask learners to 'skim' through the document to see how it's laid out – to have a quick look through to see how the document is structured. I encourage them to look at the visuals, look at the headings and connections between parts.

'This document includes definitions of terms in coloured blocks, and each part of the document is colour-coded to match the diagram of the framework.

'Principles are pink. Practice is yellow. Learning outcomes are green. Understanding how the document is set up can help learners to access the information.

'Once learners understand the structure, I give them some activities that get them to develop their skimming and scanning skills. For example, ask them to read the first sentence in every paragraph of a section, and give a summary of what the section is about. Or find the information about something specific, so that they have to quickly scan through the document for specific words to locate information that they can read in detail.

Helen, Child Care Centre Manager

Using a highlighter

Getting learners to highlight words as they read is also a good strategy. It's a simple way to get connected to a text and start to understand the meaning.

Other strategies

Further strategies for developing foundation skills are presented here as case study examples, to highlight different approaches that can work in different contexts. Not every strategy will work for every trainer or learner, but the examples are presented as ideas for trainers to use.

Jean, a manager at an Aged Care facility says, 'We use buddies to work with people don't quite have the foundation skills needed to carry out their job. When we realise what's happening, we don't make a big deal about it, but reinforce that everyone needs to develop their foundation skills at some stage in their working life. Managers included! Then we ask an appropriate person to buddy up with the worker to be there to help fill out forms or read particular documents. We've done a little bit of training with the buddies on how to support a worker with low level skills, and they are generally really supportive and helpful, and it helps us to get our work done!

'Often what happens is that the worker with the low level skills decides that they'd like to do some sort of formal training in developing foundation skills, and we have an RTO that we work with who can assist.'

Keep connected to a network

Supporting learners to develop foundation skills can be tough going. Keeping in touch with other trainers who deal with similar issues can be really helpful to share ideas and

experiences, and also to know that you're not alone. Put some time into investigating the networks available to you – they may be formal or informal, within or across RTOs.

Using the Foundation Skills Training Package

The recently released Foundation Skills Training Package includes:

- a bank of foundation skills units that are designed to be used in conjunction with vocational qualifications at all Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) levels to support the achievement of vocational competency, and
- three preparatory qualifications at AQF levels I and II to support vocational pathways. The bank of units is aligned to the five ACSF skills (Learning, Reading, Writing, Oral Communication and Numeracy) as well as Digital Literacy. The units support the development of foundation skills for work and can be imported into a vocational qualification to include the development of specific skills for a job, for example, there are Writing units at each of the levels from pre-level 1 through to level 5 to help develop skills at appropriate levels.

Foundation skills are often an integral part of a vocational task, and sometimes learners need to develop foundation skills so they can carry out vocational tasks effectively. It could be that a learner needs to develop skills to read tables, charts, diagrams and graphic information for their work as an Early Childhood Educator. You could import unit/s that cover those skills into a qualification and contextualise the training to suit a particular workplace, utilising table, charts and diagrams from that workplace. That way, the learners will complete qualifications that are targeted to their needs, and the needs of the job role and the workplace.

Units from the Foundation Skills Training Package could also be used to target skills gaps identified through pre-training assessments. For example, if a candidate's pre-training ACSF assessment shows a gap in Writing skills at ACSF level 3, then targeted units from the Foundation Skills Training Package could be chosen as the focus of the gap training, so that a person could learn how to write routine and formal workplace texts.

Where a large gap exists between the ACSF levels of a competent learner and the levels performed in a pre-training assessment, the preparatory qualifications from the Foundation Skills Training Package may be appropriate. They are:

- The Certificate I in Access to vocational pathways, or the

- The Certificate I in Vocational preparation and pathways, or the
- Certificate II in Preparation for work and vocational pathways.

Each of these preparatory qualifications can be contextualised for a particular work context to ensure that the learner builds the specific foundation skills for the job role. Vocational units could be imported into these foundation skills qualifications.

There really is a mix and match between vocational qualifications and Foundation Skills qualifications, to suit the needs of learners.

What industry can do

Workplaces can also assist workers with low level foundation skills to do their jobs effectively.

Use clear documents

Think about the documents that are used in your workplace – are they straight-forward and easy to understand? Could they be improved to be easier to understand and use? Mistakes often happen on forms that are difficult to understand and making them easier to access can assist workers to fill them out correctly. This can save time and money in a workplace, because it cuts out the need for rework.

It's surprising how often workplace documents just get used and reused and no-one takes the time to think about how they could be improved. Often simple improvements can assist workers to be more efficient.

Do the documents in your workplace use Plain English? Plain English focuses on a message and communicates the message simply and clearly. It is not about 'dumbing down' documents, or being overly simplistic – even complex documents can be written in a way that is clear, straight-forward and uncluttered.

Documents written in Plain English are developed from the reader's point of view. Look over your workplace forms and think about whether they are written with the reader in mind.

Do the documents:

- Put the reader first?
- Have clear headings?

- Divide text into small chunks?
- Prioritise information?
- Use words that are easy to understand?
- Use short sentences and paragraphs?
- Avoid jargon?
- Use examples, diagrams and graphics where helpful?

Take some time to think about whether the documents in your workplace could be made clearer, or easier to understand.

Use clear instructions

It's also useful to think about the words that you use when talking to staff. Do the words you use really communicate clear messages? It is very common in workplaces to hear people use words in a 'roundabout way'. For example, people use phrases like 'she'll be right', or 'given up the ghost', or 'get the work squared away'. Some people grew up with euphemisms and colloquialisms like this and understand the real meaning behind them, but many people are just simply confused by them.

Check out the skills of your trainers

When employing trainers to carry out training at your workplace, make sure you ask about the trainers skills in dealing with workers who have low level foundation skills. As an employer, you have a right to know. Ask what strategies trainers would use to develop the foundation skills. If the training incorporates reading frameworks or policies, or completing documents, make sure the training incorporates documents specific to your workplace. Employers invest in training so that people can carry out work effectively– make sure that the trainer you employ has the right skills to do that.

Trainers might have formal qualifications from the higher education sector to support adults to build appropriate foundation skills, or they may have units or competency or qualifications from the TAE10 Training and Education Training Package, such as:

- The unit TAELLN401A Address adult language, literacy and numeracy skills (which introduces the concepts of working with the ACSF)
- TAELLN501B Support the development of adult language, literacy and numeracy skills (which advances skills in working with the ACSF)

The LLN focussed qualifications recently added to the TAE10 Training and Education Training Package would also provide suitable skills and knowledge to carry out specialist LLN support for learners. The qualifications are:

- TAE70110 Vocational Graduate Certificate in Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice
- TAE80110 Vocational Graduate Diploma of Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Leadership.

Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA) is currently developing a skill set for trainers to address foundation skills in vocational practice. For further information, go to www.ibsa.org.au

Employers could also ask for referees to talk about how particular trainers deal with supporting workers to develop foundation skills during training. Ultimately, employers should feel confident in their choice of trainer to carry out quality training for their workers.

Encourage a culture of helping out

Everyone at some time in their working life will need to develop foundation skills for their job. Taking on a new work role often means taking on new tasks. For example, working with different people or organisations can require workers to learn a new way of communicating. Working with new technologies or software can require learning about new menus, new screen tools and products.

It's not just people with low level foundation skills that need to develop new skills – everyone does at some time.

Encouraging a culture where workers feel that 'we're all in this together' can help to overcome the stigma of having low level skills and reinforce that it's ok to ask for help.

Funding to support the development of skills

Workplace English Language and Literacy

The main aim of the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Program is to assist organisations to train workers in English language, literacy and numeracy skills. This funding is available on a competitive grants basis to organisations for English language and literacy training linked to job-related workplace training and is designed to help workers meet their current and future employment and training needs.

For further information, contact the CS&HISC WELL Broker.

Resources

CS&HISC Foundation Skills videos

A series of six videos, designed to provide information to trainers, assessors and employers about foundation skills. Go to: http://vimeo.com/cshisc

Australian Core Skills Framework

Copies of the ACSF are available from the Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education website at www.innovation.gov.au. Search for ACSF and locate 'Downloads'. Bound copies presented in a folder are also available – email the Department at the email address listed.

ACSF Professional development workshops

Professional development workshops on the ACSF are now available for LLN specialists and mainstream vocational education and training practitioners. Face-to-face workshops will be conducted in all capital cities and a number of larger regional centres across Australia. Online ACSF training will also be available for remote participants. More information is available at www.innovation.gov.au and search for 'ACSF workshops'.

WELL Skills Check

The WELL Skills Check suite of resources aims to support the development of workplace English language, literacy and numeracy skills. This kit has been designed for use by a wide range of workplaces, with particular relevance to the Community Services and Health Industry. It includes a tool to help workplaces quickly and easily assess the levels of their employees' core skills against the ACSF. The kit includes:

- a user guide
- skills checks for each of the core skills
- instructions and answers and each of the skills checks
- spikey profiler.

Go to: www.cshisc.com.au/learn/resources/training-resources/well-skills-check.

ACSF assessment tasks

Precision Consultancy has developed a bank of ACSF assessment tasks that can be used across several industry areas. Go to: www.precisionconsultancy.com.au/acs_framework and scroll down to see a table with tasks to download.

Taking the lead

A website developed by Service Skills Australia offers advice and information about developing foundation skills. It includes:

- online PD for trainers and assessors
- case studies showing how employers and employees benefit from training that supports and develops foundation skills
- tips and advice on how to improve foundation skills
- a searchable resource directory of foundation skills resources
- news and events on foundation skills training services and funding opportunities.