

Submission to the JSA Foundation Skills Study

Discussion Paper
April 2023

About the Energy Skills Australia

Established by industry for industry in 1995, Energy Skills Australia (ESA) has been representing the energy sector for 28 years as an independent, not for profit, bipartite company.

We support high quality training and workforce development activities by providing advice and expertise to industry and government.

Additionally, we oversee a suite of learning and assessment resources and accredited courses designed to provide quality and consistent outcomes for apprenticeship and post trade training.

Our membership and board are made up of various key industry bodies such as the National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA), Master Electricians Australia (MEA), the Electrical Trades Union of Australia (ETU) and the Australian Services Union (ASU). Our highly experienced board members provide ESA with the necessary direction, governance and oversight needed to ensure we are well placed to represent the views of industry.

ESA has established strong working relationships with key industry stakeholders, governments, the vocational education and training (VET) sector and regulatory authorities within Australia and internationally.

Critically, it is these relationships and deep connection to industry that allows us to support employers and workers as they grapple with the current workforce challenges across the growing clean economy.

ESA welcomes the opportunity to participate in the consultation process on the Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) Foundation Skills Study Discussion Paper to help JSA understand what is important for the design and implementation of the National Study of Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Skills.

Introduction – Foundation Skills Landscape

Question 1 – Do you agree with the proposed definition of literacy and numeracy?

Yes, Energy Skills Australia agrees with the proposed definitions for literacy and numeracy as defined in the discussion paper.

Question 2 – What definition would you propose for digital literacy?

Energy Skills Australia preference is for the first definition of digital literacy to be used.

However, if permissible, ESA feels merit in considering combining the two proposed digital literacy definitions referenced the discussion paper.

ESA proposes the below combined definition:

‘Digital literacy is the ability to use digital technologies—both hardware and software—safely and appropriately, while also using digital information to solve problems and handle security and safety challenges created by technology.

Digital Literacy is a core requirement to participate fully in learning, work and life and is a skill parallel to literacy and numeracy. Digital literacies required need to reflect application of skills and knowledge of using digital technology tools.

3. Do you currently use or are you aware of any digital literacy measures to inform policies and/or programs?

No.

Foundation Skills Landscape – Existing foundation skills data

4. How do you currently use (or have previously used) data on foundation skills, including PIAAC?

As an Industry Skills Council (ISC), formerly declared by the Commonwealth Government, the custodians of the suite of ElectroComms and EnergyUtilities Training packages until the end of 2015, namely:

UEE - Electrotechnology
UET – ESI Transmission, Distribution and Rail
UEP – ESI Generation
UEG – Gas

Energy Skills Australia uses and has used foundation skills data to inform many aspects of our industry intelligence, research and development activities.

Including but not limited to:

- advice to government in relation to the sectors under our coverage;
- to inform programs we have administered to address foundation skills issues such as Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL); and
- to contribute to Energy Skills Australia and Joint ISC publications. Such as our *Annual Environmental Scan* and the *No More Excuses Report – An industry response to the Language, Literacy and Numeracy challenge*.

Commonly used data sets used by Energy Skills Australia include, but not limited to:

- Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)
 - o Migrants, Education and Training Experience (2007)
 - o Adult Literacy and Lifeskills (2006)
- Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)
- National Research and Development Centre (NRDC) for Adult Literacy and numeracy (2007)
- National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER) – Integrated Literacy and Numeracy Support in VET (2010)

5. What data do you need to inform questions related to foundation skills policy and program development?

More complete, current and consistent data would be beneficial to help better understand the current situation, monitor progress over time to inform evidence driven responses and wise investment to address foundation skills issues in Australia.

Data needs to be collected nationally, across the whole society, all age groups and backgrounds and not restricted to geographical areas including:

- school aged
- school leavers
- workforce entrants
- current workforce participants
- those not in the workforce

It is worth noting that Foundation Skills challenges manifest differently depending on the industry and workplace, but some commonalities exist, including inadequately prepared workforce entrants, challenges of an aging workforce an increased digital literacy and compliance requirements. The responsibility of building and addressing foundation skills, needs to be a shared responsibility between industry and the education sectors.

6. What data sources and data assets do you hold/create/use in relation to foundation skills that have not been covered above?

Nil

7. What gap/s or challenges have you encountered with what is currently available

Remote communities, First Nations people and people not currently in the workforce.

Foundation Skills Study

8. Is there an alternative approach/option that you think would be suitable for the study?

No.

9. Are there online tools for measuring LLND that you think would be suitable to be adapted for the needs of the study?

Energy Skills Australia is not aware of any tools that would be suitable.

Although not directly related to the study design or feedback being sought in this discussion paper, Energy Skills Australia advocates for appropriate and industry specific aptitude testing prior to individuals commencing an apprenticeship. To provide the prospective apprentice an understanding of the entry level LLND required to enter an apprenticeship. Industry Skills Councils previously engaged in a Foundation Skills Network to respond to and develop LLND sector specific tools and resources to assist address LLND issues such as the Electrotechnology Readiness Assessment tool.

10. What frameworks do you use in describing foundation skills (such as the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF)?

Energy Skills Australia use the ASCF in describing and measuring foundations skills. Energy Skills Australia is of the opinion that these should continue to be the framework used to describe LLND in the national training system, through Training Packages.

11. What outputs would be most useful for you (such as reports, analytical articles, CURFs⁶, other microdata)?

Energy Skills Australia would find most useful, data outputs that is presented in reports and articles.

12. The proposed age range is persons aged 16 to 65 years. Does the proposed age range align with your needs?

Yes.

13. What level of statistical geographical output do you need? Why?

Energy Skills Australia feels that the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) is an appropriate classification to be applied to this study. As it is updated every 5 years, with the last released in 2021 so that standard relatively current.

14. Which groups would you like to see more extensive research into and why? For example, First Nations, recent migrants, mature age workers, Australians in rural or remote locations?

Energy Skills Australia would like to see all the above groups better researched. In addition, Energy Skills Australia would like to see school leavers included in the study.

We need to increase workforce participation across all these groups therefore as much information as possible would be beneficial to help understand their needs and implement programs to address any foundations skills issues or deficiencies to encourage and maximise participation and success.

Feasibility Study for First Nations people

15. Do you have any examples of existing data collection activities with First Nations people that may be applicable to assessing foundation skills in a culturally safe manner?

Nil.

16. How would you recommend JSA engage with First Nations people for the feasibility study?

Energy Skills Australia would like to see JSA engage fully with First National people in this feasibility study using best practice and culturally appropriate engagement strategies.

17. What are the key research questions you have for this part of the study?

Nil

For further information or inquiries, please contact:

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