

The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

WORDS AT WORK

A Report on Literacy Needs in the Workplace

**House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment,
Education and Training**

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee will inquire into and report on literacy needs with particular reference to:

- . the impact of low standards of literacy on productivity, safety, self-esteem and skills improvement in the workplace;
- . the extent and effectiveness of existing literacy programs; and
- . the need for long term support.

INTRODUCTION

International Literacy Year drew attention to the effects of inadequate literacy on personal competence, social cohesion and national performance. Literacy is a moving target, not a fixed one. With the increasing complexity of Australian society, especially in our huge, sprawling cities, people are increasingly dependent on communication and transport systems, and their supporting technology, in order to get to work, to shop, to carry out family and social obligations.

They must be literate in a technological urban context.

The traditional Unesco definition of literacy as the capacity to read and write a simple letter is not enough in the age of push-buttons, microelectronics, automation and complex packaging.

Literacy involves, as the National Consultative Council for International Literacy Year asserted, the integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing, critical thinking and numeracy and involves cultural knowledge as well. Australians once accepted the 'lifeboat model' of education - that pupils received a lifetime's supply of education at school and that basic competency was enough. Now we recognise that skills can decay and education needs renewal throughout life.

In its terms of reference, the Committee was directed to examine literacy needs in the workplace, rather than in society as a whole. Nevertheless, there are no clear boundaries between work and society so a degree of overlap became inevitable.

Studies suggested that more than 1,000,000 adults are functionally illiterate, and about 35 per cent of these are native English speakers.

With Australia facing unparalleled competition from trading neighbours with a strong commitment to improved educational standards, the problem of illiteracy is far too serious for a token response.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends that:

Recommendation 1

the Commonwealth Minister for Employment, Education and Training, working in conjunction with the relevant State Ministers and the Australian Education Council, develop an adult literacy strategy as a matter of urgency; (paragraph 5.48)

Recommendation 2

the Commonwealth and State Ministers responsible for English language and literacy programs provide sufficient resources to meet actual community needs; and

the Department of Employment, Education and Training and the Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs co-ordinate delivery of literacy and language services; (paragraph 5.26)

Recommendation 3

the Commonwealth Government, through the provision of special purpose funds, encourage State and Territory education authorities to train adult literacy providers as an urgent priority; (paragraph 5.45)

Recommendation 4

the Commonwealth Government encourage business and employer associations to promote the productivity, industrial relations and morale benefits of literacy programs in the workplace; (paragraph 5.8)

Recommendation 5

the Commonwealth Government fund community literacy programs on a three yearly basis; (paragraph 5.20)

Recommendation 6

the Minister for Employment, Education and Training and the Minister for Transport and Communications request the Federation of Australian Radio Broadcasters and the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations, through their members, to undertake a community service advertising campaign on the merits of literacy; and

such a campaign to use prominent and popular Australians; (paragraph 3.15)

Recommendation 7

the Commonwealth Government take a leading role in the use of plain English; and

the Auditor-General as a part of his efficiency audits undertake an examination of the extent to which plain English, in public documents, is used by government agencies; (paragraph 5.50)

Recommendation 8

the Commonwealth Minister for Industrial Relations ensure that the Australian Trade Union Training Authority provide literacy and numeracy training for people with low literacy skills participating in their courses; (paragraph 3.7)

Recommendation 9

the National Training Board in ratifying competency standards developed by industry ensure that appropriate literacy standards are included; (paragraph 5.28)

Recommendation 10

the Commonwealth Government ensure that employers are aware that workplace literacy programs fulfil the training obligations of the Training Guarantee levy; and

a proportion of the Training Guarantee levy funds collected through the Australian Taxation Office be directed to literacy programs in the workplace; (paragraph 5.37)

Recommendation 11

the Commonwealth Government make funds available for the Minister for Small Business and Customs to establish a pilot program which takes account of the special factors affecting small business and provides literacy programs for this workplace. (paragraph 5.14)

Recommendation 12

the Minister for Small Business and Customs examine the feasibility of providing English language courses for small business proprietors and managers of non-English speaking backgrounds to enable them to understand the requirements of Australian commercial law; (paragraph 5.17)

Recommendation 13

the Commonwealth Government review the eligibility requirements of existing English language and literacy programs to enable all migrants to participate irrespective of their participation in previous programs; (paragraph 4.24)

Recommendation 14

to enable applicants for citizenship to fulfil their obligations under the Australian Citizenship Act, the Minister for Immigration make adequate basic English courses available; (paragraph 4.22)

Recommendation 15

the Commonwealth Minister for Justice negotiate with State Ministers responsible for prisons recognition of the right of all prisoners to be literate and numerate and to establish literacy programs as a part of their basic education courses within all prisons; and

prisoners be assessed on entry to the prison system for literacy and numeracy needs; (paragraph 3.18)

Recommendation 16

the Department of Employment, Education and Training as a part of the Active Employment Strategy, for people entering or re-entering the workforce, focus on the literacy needs of participants by ensuring that there are sufficient literacy modules and courses available; (paragraph 3.9)

Recommendation 17

the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning develop as a priority, a strategy for the teaching of literacy to be used in Teacher Training Institutions;

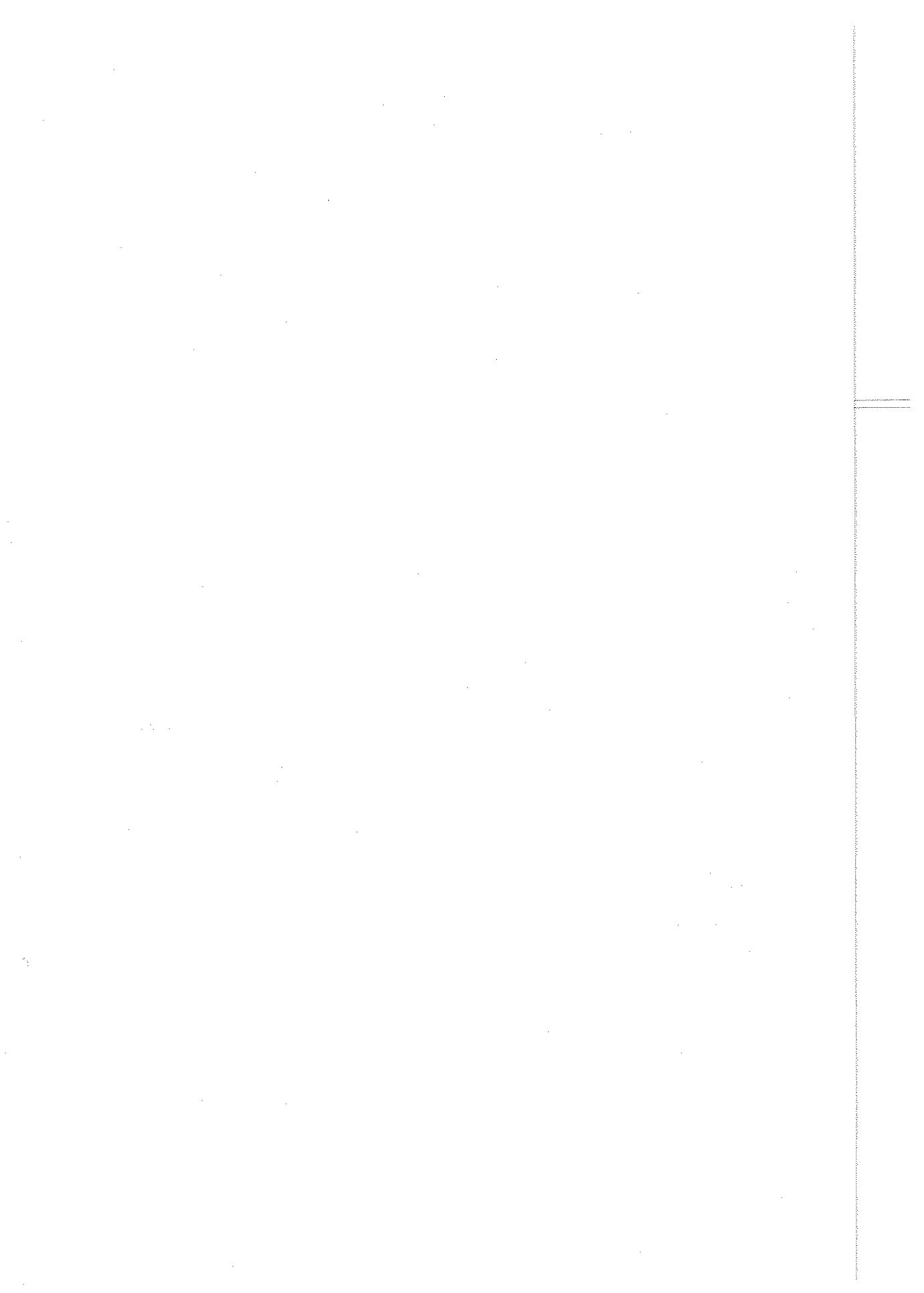
the Australian Education Council implement a national early intervention program involving the development of comprehensive diagnostic assessment procedures for literacy problems in the years P-3;

the Australian Education Council implement a policy that provides ongoing literacy and remedial support for students from years 4-12 and so avoid the progress of students through school without satisfactory literacy skills; and

the Australian Education Council ensure that all State and Territory education authorities provide increased allocation of resources to enable the diagnosis of, and response to, children identified as "at risk" with literacy. These resources should include increased teacher aide assistance, in-service training for teachers and remedial teacher support; (paragraph 4.14)

Recommendation 18

the Minister for Employment, Education and Training establish through the Australian Education Council, the setting of a national goal that all students leaving school should be literate. (paragraph 4.35)



Chapter 1

BACKGROUND

The inquiry

1.1 On 23 May 1990 the Minister for Employment, Education and Training requested the Committee to inquire into Literacy Needs in the Workplace. On 31 May 1990 the Committee agreed to accept the inquiry with the following terms of reference:

- the impact of low standards of literacy on productivity, safety, self-esteem and skills improvement in the workplace;
- the extent and effectiveness of existing literacy programs; and
- the need for long term support.

The Committee appointed a Subcommittee chaired by Mrs Carolyn Jakobsen MP to conduct the inquiry.

Conduct of the inquiry

1.2 The inquiry was advertised in all States and Territories in major metropolitan and regional newspapers. Interested individuals, organisations and industries were invited to make submissions as were government departments, members of the House of Representatives and Senators. The Committee received over 100 submissions and a number of exhibits to the inquiry. A list of these is included at Appendix B and Appendix C.

1.3 Public hearings were held in various locations across Australia. Witnesses who were invited to give evidence before the Committee represented a range of views. They included individuals, representatives from State Governments, the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training, tertiary institutions, industry (employers and unions), education providers and community organisations. The schedule of public hearings and witnesses is included at Appendix D.

1.4 Inspections were also conducted during the course of the inquiry. The Committee visited workplace education centres in a number of locations and spoke to adult literacy and English language students, teachers involved in workplace basic education programs and industry representatives. Details of inspections are included at Appendix E.

Scope of the inquiry

1.5 International Literacy Year has focussed attention on the literacy deficiencies of a significant number of Australians.

1.6 The Committee reviewed information on the extent of the problem across various groups and workplaces. The needs of English speaking background and non-English speaking background workers and the types of programs required to assist them were investigated.

1.7 A common concern expressed in many submissions and by witnesses to the inquiry was that there is a need to identify the causes of low literacy as well as treating the symptoms. Although the terms of reference for the inquiry did not require the Committee to examine possible causes, considerable evidence was taken on this aspect of the issue. Whether the problem is one that is imported through immigration, is linked to an individual's background, is perpetuated by our school system or results from the demands of an increasingly technological workplace, were issues that were investigated during the inquiry.

1.8 The impact of inadequate literacy on the individual was examined, not only in terms of lost opportunity in the workplace and the effects on workplace safety but also in terms of its social and personal costs.

1.9 The economic costs of poor literacy and English language skills cannot be ignored. Evidence received from a number of workplaces established a clear link between the improvement in workers' literacy skills and an improvement in productivity.

1.10 The question of responsibility for workforce education was considered during the inquiry. Evidence was received from around Australia highlighting the unequal distribution of resources and development within the different States and Territories in providing for the literacy and English language needs of workers and those seeking to enter the workforce.

1.11 The Committee was concerned to see that social justice was being achieved and to ensure that access for those most in need of literacy programs was available.

1.12 The role of governments, educational providers, employers and unions in the development of policy and support frameworks for basic education in the workplace was examined.

Chapter 2

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

2.1 Changed international economic conditions have highlighted the need for structural adjustment in the economy particularly in the manufacturing and services sectors. It is essential for enterprises to be more involved in skilling their workforce. The current emphasis on award restructuring is in part, a recognition of the need to restructure skills and production methods. There is now general agreement that Australia needs a more flexible and highly skilled workforce capable of maximising its productivity producing quality goods and innovatively exploiting both new technologies and market opportunities.¹ In the drive to achieve these results it has become apparent that poor literacy, numeracy and English language skills of a significant number of adults and youth is an impediment to this occurring.

Working definition of literacy

2.2 The Committee recognises that there are Australians who do not possess the basic skills of reading and writing their own names and addresses. In our modern society even this ability can no longer be considered to be an adequate level of literacy. The ability to fill in forms and understand reading material specific to the workplace is essential but to define literacy in terms of vocational competencies alone is a short term approach to the problem which will not necessarily meet the long term needs of the individual or society.

2.3 In the first national survey of adult literacy, conducted in 1989, it was found that it was not possible to identify an upper or lower level by which a person's literacy standard could be defined. Different kinds of literacy are required of adults

¹ National Board of Employment, Education and Training, *Industry Training in Australia: The Need for Change*, Interim Report on consultations by the Employment and Skills Formation Council, AGPS, Canberra, May 1989, p.7.

and these will vary in complexity depending on the situation in which they find themselves.²

2.4 The definition of literacy adopted for this report is the official one presented by the National Consultative Council for International Literacy Year:

Literacy involves the integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing and critical thinking; it incorporates numeracy. It includes the cultural knowledge which enables a speaker, writer or reader to recognise and use language appropriate to different social situations.

For an advanced technological society such as Australia, our goal must be an active literacy which allows people to use language to enhance their capacity to think, create and question, which helps them to participate effectively in society.

2.5 This definition:

- . allow us to think in terms of degrees of literacy;
- . not focus on illiteracy as an individual problem; and
- . incorporates a cultural dimension; a factor of particular importance in a multicultural workforce.³

Research - the facts

2.6 A survey of the reading ability of adult Australians conducted in Sydney in 1977 found that of the representative sample of people interviewed 56 per cent from non-English speaking countries were functionally illiterate compared to approximately 4 per cent of people whose first language was English.⁴

² R. Wickert, *No Single Measure: A Survey of Australian Adult Literacy*, Department of Employment, Education and Training, Canberra, 1989, p.5.

³ Building Workers' Industrial Union of Australia Submission, Section 1.

⁴ Judith Goyen, 'Reading ability of Australian Adults' *Current Affairs Bulletin*, January 1985, p.22.

2.7 The 1989 national survey sampled 1500 people aged 18 and over, across Australian states and the ACT using three main dimensions that included items of varying degrees of difficulty. These dimensions consisted of:

- document literacy: identifying and using information from maps, telephone book (yellow pages), memos, timetables;
- prose literacy: interpreting prose read in books and newspaper articles; and
- quantitative literacy: interpreting the information contained in such items as a menu or flight schedule and applying numerical operations.⁵

2.8 This study indicates that between 10 per cent and 20 per cent of the adult population is functionally illiterate.⁶

2.9 Poor literacy skills have traditionally been associated with migrant workers whose first language is not English but the research has shown that a significant number of native English speakers experience difficulty (on various levels) with print material.

2.10 Of particular concern is the numbers of people who had difficulty with prose literacy involving technology related issues. Table 2.1 shows a comparison of non-English speaking background and English speaking background people who were able to correctly complete tasks tested in the national survey. The tasks included items at the rudimentary, basic, intermediate, adept and advanced levels. Differences were apparent between the two groups, with a higher percentage of English speaking people getting items correct on all but one item. However literacy difficulties were experienced by a significant number of English speaking background people particularly on the more difficult prose items and on the tasks requiring the ability to apply numerical operations.

⁵ Wickert, pp.3-5.

⁶ Functional literacy enables a person to meet the normal written and oral communication requirements of society.

COMPARISON OF PERCENTAGES OF ENGLISH SPEAKING BACKGROUND (ESB) AND NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING BACKGROUND (NESB) PEOPLE ANSWERING ITEMS CORRECTLY

TABLE 2.1

	ESB sample	NESB sample	Difference
<u>Document Items</u>			
Bankcard - sign name	98	96	-2
Licence - circle expiry date	97	91	-6
Medicine label - instructions	55	52	-3
Deposit slip - enter date	99	98	-1
Map - locate intersection	97	93	-4
Yellow Pages - find tel.no	92	88	-4
Deposit slip - cheque entry	96	94	-2
Deposit slip - cash entry	88	74	-14
Pay slip - gross pay to date	85	71	-14
Yellow Pages - find heading	75	64	-11
Paint Chart - identify use	75	64	-11
Charge account - write cheque	72	50	-22
Job application form - past details	69	48	-21
Paint chart - identify product	62	53	-9
<u>Prose (Newspaper) Items</u>			
Swimmer - age	92	90	-2
Swimmer - food	84	79	-6
Technology - what Aus.did	55	35	-20
Technology - issues	32	26	-6
<u>Quantitative Items</u>			
Deposit slip - total	84	77	-7
Menu charge	71	60	-11
Record of financial transactions	66	47	-9
Flight schedule - from Sydney	59	59	0
Flight schedule - from Brisbane	55	45	-10
Menu - 10% surcharge	51	43	-8

(Source: Wickert 1989, p.30)

2.11 Canadian research indicates that between 10 and 15 per cent of the population may be affected by learning disability. There is no reason to suppose that a similar situation does not exist in Australia. A learning disability in an adult may not be as obvious as it is in a child. Often the blame is placed on poor school attendance, illness and family movement. The most common forms of learning disability in adults involve reading, spelling and handwriting difficulties.⁷

2.12 A Brisbane study involving 1929 remedial students in 72 state primary schools showed that approximately 25 per cent of parents of children in remedial programs had admitted or were suspected of having literacy difficulties. Within those families, the study claims, there appears to be a lack of a role model in reading and little encouragement for children to develop appropriate literacy skills. The study provided a strong connection between the influence of the parents on children learning to read.⁸

Extent of the problem

2.13 Workers with inadequate literacy, numeracy and language skills have been identified in a wide cross section of industries and workplaces. While the full extent of the problem is not known the available evidence demonstrates that it is an issue of serious concern.

2.14 An examination of language skills conducted by the Adult Migrant Education Service in an operating department of a BHP steel plant found that of the people from non-English speaking backgrounds tested, 90 per cent were experiencing difficulty with writing tasks and 67 per cent had reading difficulty. The audit also showed that 30 per cent of English speaking background people were experiencing reading and writing problems that could restrict their efficiency.⁹

⁷ Australian Federation of SPELD (AUSPELD) Submission, pp.2-3.

⁸ North Brisbane Adult Literacy Centre Incorporated, *Parents and Children - Is There a Literacy Link?* February 1990.

⁹ BHP Submission, p.3.

2.15 The National Food Industry Training Council, for instance, believes that 50 to 80 per cent of workers in food and beverage manufacturing, are functionally illiterate. Seventy per cent of workers at the State Transport Authority had difficulties in writing an accident report, taking a phone message or filling out a form for worker's compensation. In NSW State Rail it was found that 40 per cent of non-English speaking background workers could not speak English, 61 per cent had significant reading difficulty and 72 per cent had writing problems.¹⁰

2.16 During inspections conducted in Melbourne Committee members held talks with representatives of Holden's Engine Company. This company has a high proportion of employees from non-English speaking communities. A survey of the language abilities and needs of non-English speaking background employees found that 54 per cent of those interviewed did not have survival English and 84 per cent would have difficulty coping with the written requirements of re-training programs.

2.17 Comments were received from the Department of Defence on the literacy levels of personnel within the various defence areas. Although applicants for each of the Services are screened for literacy and numeracy skills it has been found that some remedial literacy action is needed for people in particular areas of Defence. For instance, staff at Army training schools have found that some of their trainees have required remedial training in spelling, writing grammatically and in comprehending written instructions. It has been found that 60 per cent of cadets have needed remedial assistance as an additional program to the main English Communication Program.¹¹

2.18 At Hobart Technical College records kept over the last twelve years have shown that between 25 and 35 per cent of TAFE trade students have inadequate technical reading comprehension skills to cope with manuals and course texts while

¹⁰ Social Change Media in association with the Trade Union Training Authority, *An Equal Chance, Literacy in Your Workplace*, A Union Brief, International Literacy Year Secretariat, Department of Employment, Education and Training, Canberra, 1990.

¹¹ Department of Defence Submission, p.2.

a further 25 per cent have limited ability to identify key points from technical articles and to organise this material for their own study.¹²

2.19 In 1990 Newport TAFE (Victoria) found that out of 288 apprentices tested 21 had literacy difficulties requiring a change in teaching strategies while 6 had deficiencies severe enough to require extra tuition on an individual basis. It was also found that out of 192 apprentices tested in numeracy, 81 had some difficulty with all or part of the requirements of their course. Steps have been taken at the College to provide the tuition needed to bring these students up to an acceptable standard. The College recommends that all entrants to training programs be required to meet specific standards, with testing being used to determine the entry level.¹³

2.20 There is sufficient evidence available to indicate the need for the provision of literacy programs within TAFE Colleges for those students who are experiencing difficulty with technical materials. There is also a need for bridging programs in literacy and numeracy where funding is not dependent on non-recurrent funds.

2.21 The national survey on adult literacy referred to previously did not include Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders. Data on the level of literacy skills of Aboriginal people is limited. However, it appears that a serious problem exists across all age groups.¹⁴ Given that surveys have indicated that many Aboriginal people have never attended school and that some children in remote areas have no access to education at all, the lack of literacy skills amongst this group of Australians is likely to be extensive.

2.22 At Canning Vale Prison (Western Australia) discussions were held with staff and prisoners about the dimensions of the literacy problem. Prisoners in Western

¹² Hobart Technical College Submission, p.5.

¹³ Newport College of TAFE Submission, pp.1-2.

¹⁴ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission comments, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Submission.

Australia with sentences longer than six months are screened for literacy at the beginning of their sentence. The information provided in Table 2.2 summarises the findings of the literacy screening covering the period from November 1989 to June 1990.

2.23 The information contained in this table supports other estimates received by the Committee and the general belief that a significant literacy problem exists among prisoners.

LITERACY SCREENING SUMMARY OF PRISONERS ENTERING WESTERN AUSTRALIAN PRISONS - NOVEMBER 1989 TO JUNE 1990

TABLE 2.2

Profile Distribution	Aboriginal	non-Aboriginal	Total
Proficient	13(17%)	88(37%)	101(32%)
Assistance Needed	44(59%)	141(59%)	185(59%)
Major Literacy Need	18(24%)	11(4%)	29(9%)
TOTAL	75	240	315

(Source:W.A. Corrective Services)

2.24 In New South Wales it is estimated that approximately 80 per cent of prisoners have literacy problems. Prison industries require workers to have the same skills as other industries. Prisoners need to be able to read instructions, warning signs and communicate in writing.¹⁵

2.25 Many reports have pointed to poor literacy skills impeding progress in award restructuring and the need for action to be taken to combat illiteracy. The full extent of the literacy problem in Australia is still emerging. However, it is already a matter of considerable consequence and concern and must be addressed.

¹⁵ NSW Corrective Services Division Submission, p.1.

Chapter 3

WHAT IS THE IMPACT?

The costs of inadequate literacy

3.1 It is not always possible to determine the cost of inadequate literacy skills in quantitative terms. However there is little doubt that such cost impacts appreciably on several levels. There is the personal cost to the individual where the lack of adequate literacy skills largely prevents those affected from functioning to their fullest potential; there is the cost to the community in terms of support needed to compensate, accommodate or educate the adult concerned; and there is the cost in terms of lost productivity and the negative resultant effect on the economy.

Impact on the individual

Sometimes you think of ending it all by killing yourself but you would have to leave a note so you go on in fear.¹⁶

3.2 The difficulties experienced by people who are unable to achieve their true potential because of poor literacy skills are often hard for more literate people to appreciate. Literacy skills are needed in every aspect of daily life. People who endure literacy deficiencies often live in fear that their problem will be discovered and used against them. Considerable emotional and mental energy is used in protecting their secret.¹⁷

¹⁶ Adult literacy student

¹⁷ Gribble and Grant Submission, Attachment p.257.

3.3 Employees who have sought help through TAFE have identified a number of areas where they encounter difficulties. Many display a lack of self-confidence and self-esteem which makes them hesitant to approach study at a formal institution¹⁸. Most of these workers believe that they lack the ability to do anything but jobs involving tasks with which they are familiar. Accordingly, they tend to stay in the one job, resisting any changes in their work routine.

3.4 In the experience of one witness, lack of literacy skills was a definite barrier to negotiating with others. Following his adult education program to improve his literacy skills he stated:

Five years ago I got into the trade union movement. I was elected as shop steward and safety and health representative ... I never knew there were so many rules and regulations ... The rank and file would come and ask me what the award conditions were, this, that and the other, and every five minutes I would be on the telephone to my particular union asking how to determine the award. It was clearly written down, but I could not understand it ... I caused a fair few industrial problems because I would have negotiations with particular employees or site managers, and my attitude was just to storm out and go home on strike. The climate today is that the industrial relations have completely changed. You sit down and talk about it.¹⁹

3.5 Staff of the Australian Trade Union Training Authority have observed inadequate literacy skills in people with whom they have contact. Many of these people hold honorary union positions which necessitate their involvement in workplace industrial relations.²⁰ While Authority staff have provided advice on available resources for people wishing to improve their literacy skills the Committee believes that the Trade Union Training Authority should accept more responsibility for improving the literacy and numeracy skills of workers.

¹⁸ Department of Employment and Training and TAFE - WA Government Submission.

¹⁹ Green Evidence, pp.59-60.

²⁰ Department of Industrial Relations Submission, p.10.

3.6 There is evidence to show that literacy deficiencies are a definite barrier to people participating in consultative processes. The Trade Union Training Authority has a major role to play in the training of people in these processes.

3.7 The Committee recommends that:

the Commonwealth Minister for Industrial Relations ensure that the Australian Trade Union Training Authority provide literacy and numeracy training for people with low literacy skills participating in their courses.

3.8 Although there is limited data available on literacy levels of the unemployed, that which is available shows a significant number have poor literacy skills. Lack of literacy and numeracy skills is a real barrier to the prospects of people attempting to re-enter the workforce and limit the opportunities for training or retraining which would assist in re-entry. The low self-esteem of those concerned, combined with poor job-search abilities in the context of a restricted job market, results in severe disadvantage and reinforces the poverty cycle.

3.9 The Committee recommends that:

the Department of Employment, Education and Training as a part of the Active Employment Strategy, for people entering or re-entering the workforce, focus on the literacy needs of participants by ensuring that there are sufficient literacy modules and courses available.

3.10 There is evidence to indicate that many job applicants with low levels of literacy and numeracy are prevented from obtaining positions for which they possess adequate skills. This is because applicants are screened through a testing process and employers use a variety of tests such as past education and qualifications, clerical and typing trials, interviews, and specific literacy and numeracy assessments. The tests rarely objectively measure the applicant's literacy ability against specific

work criteria.²¹

3.11 In 1991 Australia the labour market no longer offers the same opportunities for unskilled work as it once did for those people who are illiterate. Jobs for people with poor literacy and numeracy skills are diminishing in number, however the Committee believes that there should be a recognition by employers that literacy ability should match the requirements of the job.

3.12 The Committee endorses the Australian Council for Adult Literacy recommendation that employers, unions and education providers work together to clearly identify the requirements of the job to guarantee objective and relevant assessment of skills.²²

3.13 Changes in the demands of the workplace may further contribute to the concern felt by many of those affected by poor literacy and numeracy skills. In one submission it was observed that a literacy student who had been in his job for many years found that his skills were no longer adequate. As a result of the pressure he is now under to improve his skills he is receiving medical attention for severe depression.²³ Although a direct link between literacy and self-esteem was not easy to quantify, examples were cited where people had avoided change, promotions, undervalued their contribution to the industry and were reluctant to participate in any training where demands for reading and writing could occur.²⁴

3.14 Another of the barriers to people admitting that they have a problem and consequently seeking help is the misconception that the person must be "dumb" if he or she cannot read or write. Unfortunately many people who have low levels of literacy have such low self-esteem that they tend to believe this themselves. The Committee believes that continued effort to break down the myths surrounding

²¹ P.Long, *Literacy for Productivity*, A Report for the Australian Council for Adult Literacy, Network Australia, 1989, p.71.

²² Australian Council for Adult Literacy Submission, Recommendation 19.

²³ Queensland Council for Adult Literacy Submission, p.4.

²⁴ Goulburn Valley Community College Submission, pp.2-3.

illiteracy is needed at national, state and local levels, as it is obvious that such people possess a variety of important skills and practical expertise which are valuable to their employers, the community, the economy and themselves.

3.15 Promotional activities must continue past International Literacy Year. Accordingly the Committee recommends that:

the Minister for Employment, Education and Training and the Minister for Transport and Communications request the Federation of Australian Radio Broadcasters and the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations, through their members, to undertake a community service advertising campaign on the merits of literacy; and

such a campaign to use prominent and popular Australians.

3.16 There is sufficient evidence, from within Australia and overseas, to establish a link between illiteracy, poor education and people in gaol. A disproportionate number of prisoners have literacy problems. Those with literacy problems have a high rate of re-offending. Literacy should be a basic right; prisoners who are illiterate at the beginning of a prison term must be provided with every opportunity to become literate before leaving prison.²⁵

3.17 Low literacy skills involve high costs to the community and to the individual. The Committee believes that an improvement in literacy skills has a positive flow-on to rehabilitation and employment prospects for prisoners on completion of their term. As prisoners cannot access programs provided for the community it is essential that they are given the opportunity to improve their literacy and numeracy skills while in prison. Adult literacy educators in the United States however, have questioned the value of mandatory prison programs. They point out that effective learning is reduced if there is no motivation and if the person involved does not feel

²⁵ Eileen Byrne, *Unlocking Minds: From Retribution to Rehabilitation*, A Review of Prisoner Education in Queensland, Department of Education, University of Queensland, 1990, pp.20-21.

it is relevant.²⁶ Literacy and numeracy programs in prisons must be provided. These programs must be relevant to the needs of prisoners and provide the incentives needed for inmates to participate.

3.18 The Committee recommends that:

the Commonwealth Minister for Justice negotiate with State Ministers responsible for prisons recognition of the right of all prisoners to be literate and numerate and to establish literacy programs as a part of their basic education courses within all prisons; and

prisoners be assessed on entry to the prison system for literacy and numeracy needs.

Impact on the workplace

3.19 Examples provided to the Committee relating to the costs and impact of low literacy in the workplace included:

- . worker safety (such as inability to heed warning signs or handle dangerous chemicals);
- . inability to follow written directions;
- . possible damage to equipment where the employee cannot read the operating instructions;
- . additional time required to give instructions and provide clarification;
- . comprehension gaps;
- . communication difficulties requiring additional use of supervisory time;
- . difficulty in working as a part of a team;

²⁶ R.Hartley, *The Social Costs of Inadequate Literacy*, A Report for the International Literacy Year, AGPS, Canberra, 1989, p.41.

- . wasted training provision for those who are unable to comprehend technical materials and resultant cost of remedial programs;
- . lost opportunities for promotion;
- . less potential for understanding information relating to innovations and technology;
- . costly mistakes if employees misunderstand instructions; and
- . inability to access further training.

3.20 In some situations where employees have been promoted to supervisory positions based on prior knowledge, a lack of communication skills has created difficulties in negotiations with subordinates and management. Workers who have refused promotion due to poor literacy skills represent a considerable underutilisation of experience and expertise. For workers who have a grievance a requirement may be to report the complaint in writing. Under these circumstances, for those with inadequate writing skills no action would be taken no matter how legitimate the complaint.²⁷ Poor writing skills will prevent these people from participating in employee suggestion programs and formalised safety programs.

3.21 Telecom believes that poor supervisory practice could possibly be linked to low literacy skills. Where an employee has had a history of inadequate performance on the job or unacceptable behaviour there may be no supporting evidence on file. Performance reports may have been ticked as satisfactory only because the supervisor has lacked the ability to write the comprehensive comments needed if an unsatisfactory performance is recorded.²⁸

3.22 *Workers with low literacy skills who are injured during the course of their employment face specific problems. To be rehabilitated an injured worker needs to be able to meet certain requirements of the Work Care procedure. These requirements usually involve reading, comprehending and responding to*

²⁷ Bandiana Logistic Group Submission, p.2.

²⁸ Telecom Submission, p.2.

instructions. The illiterate person is thus doubly handicapped by injury and by lack of literacy skills.²⁹

Impact on productivity

This country can't afford to have one million adults unable to perform fairly basic tasks ... it's a question of economic common sense.³⁰

3.23 No studies in Australia have yet provided an accurate assessment of the cost to the country incurred as a result of poor English language skills and inadequate literacy. It has been estimated that a lack of English language skills alone could be costing Australia at least \$3.2 billion a year in extra communication time needed in the workplace. It was noted that this is a conservative estimate and that the figure would be considerably higher if it took into account the costs of industrial safety, poor product quality, limited job mobility and flexibility, and high turnover of staff.³¹ It has been claimed that considering the numbers of people involved (over one million) this figure could be closer to \$6.5 billion in lost production time.³²

3.24 Calculations by the Australian Bureau of Statistics using data from the Labour Costs Survey found that workers' compensation costs exceeded \$3 billion in 1986-87 and 1987-88. If a person is unable to read or comprehend warning signs or health and safety instructions in the workplace he or she faces a much greater risk of injury or death than someone who has adequate literacy skills for the job.³³

3.25 Low levels of literacy directly influence productivity in several ways. The production cycle is increased because employees have difficulty in understanding written instructions. They are unable to complete production reports or

²⁹ Vickers Submission, p.2.

³⁰ His Excellency Bill Hayden, Governor General of Australia, February, 1990

³¹ S.Singh, 'The Hidden Costs of Illiteracy', *Business Review Weekly*, June 1989.

³² Australian Council for Adult Literacy Submission, p.6.

³³ Department of Industrial Relations Submission, p.2.

communicate in writing with supervisors, managers and other employees. Orders may be delayed and product quality may be affected through defects due to misunderstanding written instructions. Increases in time on the production cycle add an indirect cost to the product which decreases the country's competitiveness.³⁴

3.26 As well as the significant number of people from non-English speaking backgrounds who are unemployed many may be underemployed. If skills acquired overseas are not recognised in Australia, or cannot be used because workers are not sufficiently fluent in written and spoken English, there is a considerable waste of human resources. This results in a substantial loss to both the community and individual enterprises.³⁵ People with poor English language skills and with unrecognised qualifications tend to be employed in areas which are unskilled or semi skilled. In many cases employers are not aware of the skills that their overseas born employees possess.

3.27 The importance placed on skills in Australia's immigration policy means that an increased percentage of migrants have work experience and skills of strong potential value to the Australian economy. However, without essential English language skills migrants are unable to enter the labour market at the relevant level. At present it is estimated that less than one third of those who do not have adequate English language ability have access to any form of language training, with most non-English speaking background people who do gain access to courses graduating below the needed proficiency level for survival English.³⁶

³⁴ English in the Workplace Program of the Adult Migrant Education Service (AMES) of WA Submission, p.2.

³⁵ Training Cost Review Committee, *Training Costs of Award Restructuring*, Volume 1, AGPS, Canberra 1990, p.31.

³⁶ Working Party on Post Secondary English Training, Report to the Minister for Employment, Education and Training and the Minister for Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs, Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs, November 1990, pp.4-5.

3.28 The Committee fully supports the statement made in the report of the Training Costs Review Committee on the importance of using the skills of non-English speaking background people. The report states:

Neither the community nor individual enterprises can afford this waste of human resources.³⁷

3.29 The Committee believes that the skills of overseas born employees must be more effectively utilised.

3.30 The provision of survival level English is vital upon arrival in Australia but it is not adequate to meet the long term needs of non-English speaking background people to access careers for which they may be otherwise well qualified. It is essential that these residents be provided with clear directions regarding the training they will need to achieve their vocational goals.

3.31 The Committee welcomes the initiatives that have been taken by the Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs in the implementation of the Adult Migrant Education Program National Plan (1990-1992). This plan will attempt to increase the access to programs for new arrivals as well as encouraging the further development of English language opportunities for longer term residents.

Impact on award restructuring

3.32 In the 1988 National Wage Case the Federal Industrial Relations Commission determined that wage increases would be dependent upon unions formally agreeing to take part in a review of industrial awards. This review was to be guided by the Structural Efficiency Principle. Salary increases were linked with the acquisition

³⁷ Training Costs Review Committee, p.31.

of higher levels of skills. This was to provide for skill based career paths.³⁸ The process will relate wages and career paths more closely to education and training with all workers having access and opportunity to gain the skills required and resultant advances in wages and career advancement. The current progress of the award restructuring process is more advanced in some industries than others. There is evidence to suggest that there are factors that seem to be impeding the restructuring process; poor literacy, numeracy and language skills being counted amongst these.

3.33 In the hospitality industry literacy was not considered an issue in attempting to implement training through award restructuring. Many workers have no formal training having worked their way up, for example, from a kitchen hand to cook. Training requirements, established under award restructuring are aimed at providing a new career structure and formally recognised qualifications. In establishing the restructure it has become apparent that poor literacy is a major barrier to training. Despite the realisation that low literacy levels will present an obstacle to restructuring within the hospitality industry literacy training has not yet been afforded a high priority.³⁹

3.34 For those people with inadequate literacy and language skills who are currently employed the need to improve basic skills is essential if they are to benefit from, or even participate in, further training. Training proposals resulting from the restructuring of industry have not yet acknowledged literacy and other basic skills in their skills audits for particular jobs. A great deal of the existing training provided to workers does not take into account the fact that many of those participating may lack the skills to fully benefit from the training. It is commonly assumed that vocational training will carry with it the necessary learning and skills levels needed to perform in those jobs.⁴⁰

³⁸ *ibid.*, p.19.

³⁹ Informal discussions with Senator Nick Sherry - former State Secretary and Federal Councillor to the Federated Liquor and Allied Trades Union of Australia, Tasmanian Branch.

⁴⁰ O'Connor Submission, p.2.

3.35 An examination of two industries where the planning for award restructuring is relatively well advanced, (the metal industry and the clothing and footwear industry) found the main focus was on production or technical skills. Literacy and language training have remained secondary to vocational training.⁴¹ For workers to develop the broad based skills required as a part of award restructuring it will be essential for continued training to occur. However, without the necessary underlying literacy, numeracy and communication skills many people will be unable to be a part of these developments.

3.36 Many union delegates with inadequate literacy skills have difficulty in understanding the language used in industrial legislation, reports and awards. With increased emphasis on workplace negotiations and consultative mechanisms those representing other workers must be in possession of adequate literacy skills if they are to play their part in decisions affecting the workforce. In other words, the quality of workplace industrial relations may be jeopardised if union representatives do not possess adequate skills to cope with the requirements of the position.⁴²

3.37 Under award restructuring there is the distinct possibility that some workers will be further disadvantaged. According to a workplace education consultant:

There is no inherent social justice mechanism contained in award restructuring which will redress historical segregation, devaluation and failure to acknowledge some skills.⁴³

3.38 The Department of Industrial Relations has informed the Committee that:

...by gearing training to only those employees with the ability to improve their skill level (ie those with the existing qualifications or the basic literacy skills of reading and writing) award restructuring runs the real risk of widening the gap between the skilled and the unskilled.⁴⁴

⁴¹ H.Gribble and J.Bottomley, (unpublished), 'Some Implications of Award Restructuring Proposals for Adult Literacy and Basic Education Provision', 1989, pp.6-7.

⁴² Department of Industrial Relations Submission, pp.10-11.

⁴³ P.O'Connor, *Skills at Work*, A Guide to Provision of Workplace Basic Education, New South Wales Adult Literacy Council, 1990, p.17.

⁴⁴ Department of Industrial Relations Submission, p.10.

3.39 With the introduction of proficiency based training and education under award restructuring, the knowledge and skills required of employees is being specified. As a part of this process the literacy and English language skills required for all levels of training should be identified. The inclusion of literacy, numeracy and language skills as a legitimate training need, along with other skills required under award restructuring, will provide one means of ensuring that people with inadequate skills are not further disadvantaged.

Impact on society

3.40 The ability of an individual to function as a member of society is often severely restricted as a result of low literacy skills. People with inadequate literacy and English language skills are denied equal access to economic resources. Because they are less informed their ability to participate in decision making is markedly reduced in all areas of their lives. For instance, people who cannot read are severely restricted in terms of their rights as citizens. They are unable to act as informed consumers and suffer a greater chance of being cheated in their financial dealings. They are unable to understand legal documents, bank statements, fill in forms for entitlements or complete job applications.

3.41 Social costs may relate to family relationships, health, consumer rights, poverty, unemployment and citizenship. As well as these costs low literacy also has implications for society as a whole.⁴⁵

3.42 Within families, the lack of skill may lead to dependence upon other family members. Where the literate partner in the family handles all of the tasks associated with written communication devastating effects result if the non-literate partner is left alone.

⁴⁵ Hartley, p.7.

3.43 Information provided by the Department of Social Security emphasises the difficulties faced by department clients with literacy problems. Staff have found that some groups such as ex-prisoners, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people and migrants are over-represented in this area. They often find dealings with the Department bewildering. Much time must therefore be spent by social security staff in explaining the contents of letters to clients. Lack of literacy and English language skills may lead to people not responding to Department of Social Security correspondence and consequently having their income support payments suspended or cancelled.⁴⁶

3.44 Inadequate literacy cannot be viewed as a problem that is only found in people with English as a second language. Of the people identified by Social Security as having literacy problems, non-English speaking background people made up 64 per cent and approximately 35 per cent had English as their first language.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Department of Social Security Submission, p.5.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.9.

Chapter 4

WHAT IS THE CAUSE?

4.1 People with literacy difficulties fall into several categories. The evidence presented to the Committee would suggest that there are three main contributing factors to illiteracy in Australia. These include schooling, sociological influences and immigration. It appears that deterioration of literacy and numeracy skills through lack of use is also a contributing factor.

Schooling

An adult with literacy problems has first been a child with literacy problems.⁴⁸

4.2 A number of submissions and evidence from public hearings stressed the need to urgently look at the methods of reading instruction in the early years of schooling. It was argued that to continually try to remedy the situation in high school, tertiary institutions and in adult education courses is not addressing the cause of the problem - the first years of school. It is claimed that success in dealing with the literacy problem will only be achieved if changes are made in primary school and that to simply provide funds at the adult level will "lock us into ongoing and increasing expenditure as the system continues to turn out illiterate children."⁴⁹

4.3 There has been considerable research on the importance of early development of literacy skills. Difficulties in early literacy achievement may lead to low self-esteem and repeated failure which then impacts on all areas of that person's life in

⁴⁸ Harrison Submission, p.1.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, pp.2-3.

future education and employment opportunities. One State Education Minister said:

We know from the vast body of available research that unless children learn the basics of reading and writing, listening and using spoken language by the end of year 3, they can be disadvantaged for the rest of their lives.⁵⁰

4.4 The view was expressed by a witness that the prevalent method of reading instruction, referred to by various names such as the holistic/whole language or ELIC (Early Literacy Inservice Course) approach fails to teach necessary phonic skills during the early years of schooling. This witness referred to over 400 studies that indicate that the teaching of phonic skills is essential for the development of literacy skills in young children. The current whole language method relies on prediction or whole word guessing and reguessing. Children must be taught the underlying skills so that they can work out new words rather than using guesswork.⁵¹

4.5 Information was received relating to research in which it is claimed that holistic word guessing techniques were beyond the visual processing capacity of as many as one seven year old child in three.⁵² Both whole language and phonics approaches to teaching reading are appropriate to many children, but for those who lack the capacity for whole word guessing identification at an early stage is essential. Testing procedures can identify if students do not possess the processing capacity to cope with the whole word approach to reading.⁵³

4.6 Claims that the language experience method of teaching reading can be blamed for a significant number of the literacy difficulties being experienced by

⁵⁰ Kirner in K.J.Rowe, Paper presented at the 1989 annual conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education, University of Adelaide, South Australia, 28 November to 2 December 1989, p.1.

⁵¹ Nugent Evidence, pp.364-369.

⁵² Harrison Submission, pp.2-3.

⁵³ Harrison Evidence, p.447-448.

many students, are disputed by the Primary English Teaching Association. According to the Association, forty credible long-term surveys show no deterioration in performance and the recently applied NSW Basic Testing Program produced no evidence of declining standards. In defence of the language experience approach to reading acquisition it is claimed that children need to be immersed in language, spoken to from their earliest days and listened to so that they come to an understanding of the principles of communication, that their vocabulary may be extended and sentence structure developed. Language must have meaning, it must be seen as a tool of critical thinking. It was stated that:

The curious assertion is frequently made that language is learned, and must be taught sound by sound, letter by letter, rule by rule. This ignores the observable fact that language is learned and developed in use. Words like "television" and "McDonald's" are seen, read and used effectively by very young children, long before they are aware of sounds, letters and rules.⁵⁴

4.7 Debate regarding the most successful methods for the all important development of early literacy skills will continue to be an issue of contention amongst educators convinced of the success of various approaches to reading instruction. The Committee concluded that some children will respond better to particular methods of teaching. The problem will continue if measures are not taken to identify those children at risk and make specific provision to address their needs.

4.8 The Committee believes that the adoption of options proposed in the discussion paper on an Australian literacy and language policy on the monitoring of children's literacy skills, parental involvement in literacy development, reading recovery programs and literacy training for all teachers will benefit children in the development of literacy competence.⁵⁵

4.9 During the inquiry a number of submissions were received regarding the perceived poor literacy skills of trainee and beginning teachers. It was argued that

⁵⁴ Primary English Teaching Association Submission, pp. 2-3.

⁵⁵ J.Dawkins, *The Language of Australia*, Discussion Paper on an Australian Literacy and Language Policy, Volume 1, Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1990, p.36.

if teachers do not possess adequate literacy skills themselves they will be unable to develop the required skills in their students. A lecturer in educational psychology advised the Committee that while the standard of literacy of entrants to teacher training courses would probably be above average, there appears to have been a deterioration in the quality of skills of many trainee teachers.⁵⁶

4.10 It was claimed that literacy training has not been a high priority within teacher training programs. Despite International Literacy Year there appears to be nothing to suggest that this is changing. Many of those identified as having literacy problems in our society are the product of a system that is now 20 or 30 years old. It is not yet known if current theories and methodologies of literacy development are directly related to problems in adult literacy. What is known, it is claimed, is that there has been inadequate consideration of literacy and its theories and methods of development in the preparation of teachers in Australia.⁵⁷

4.11 The lower achievements of some minority groups indicate that some of the approaches to literacy instruction may be contributing to inequality of outcomes. While each child has, in theory, equal access to success in school based reading and writing instruction, the facts would indicate that the form and context of instruction may advantage some children and work against those whose early experience with print and oral language does not agree with classroom expectations.⁵⁸ Many children, especially those from deprived language backgrounds, require intensive input in their early years to ensure that they have the opportunity to develop appropriate skills in literacy and numeracy.

4.12 Some monitoring of basic skills does take place, in varying degrees, in most States and Territories. New South Wales and the Northern Territory already monitor students annually in certain grades in literacy and numeracy. Proposals for

⁵⁶ Chandler Evidence, p.121.

⁵⁷ Bartlett Evidence, p.353.

⁵⁸ A.Luke, 'The non-neutrality of literacy instruction: a critical introduction', *Journal of Reading*, Volume II, No 2, June 1988, p.82.

the regular monitoring of aspects of literacy and numeracy in other states and the Australian Capital Territory are currently being planned or investigated.

4.13 The Committee believes that early intervention programs aimed at identifying reading difficulties during the first years of school are essential. Early intervention programs (for example, reading recovery) are currently operating in several states. Children at risk of reading failure are identified at the end of their first year at school and given intensive individual instruction for a set period of time.

4.14 The Committee recommends that:

the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning develop as a priority, a strategy for the teaching of literacy to be used in Teacher Training Institutions;

the Australian Education Council implement a national early intervention program involving the development of comprehensive diagnostic assessment procedures for literacy problems in the years P-3;

the Australian Education Council implement a policy that provides ongoing literacy and remedial support for students from years 4-12 and so avoid the progress of students through school without satisfactory literacy skills; and

the Australian Education Council ensure that all State and Territory education authorities provide increased allocation of resources to enable the diagnosis of, and response to, children identified as "at risk" with literacy. These resources should include increased teacher aide assistance, in-service training for teachers and remedial teacher support.

4.15 During inspections held in Perth the Committee spoke to workers at Fremantle Hospital who had participated in a basic education pilot program in 1989. The reasons they gave for their low levels of literacy included not enough teacher

time, dislike of school, avoidance of writing because it was too hard, prolonged absence from school and large classes.

4.16 Often students have been unaware of the requirements of the workplace and the skills that should be developed at school to equip them for various jobs. One comment received by the Committee reinforces this:

I thought it was all bullshit when I was at school but now I wish I'd worked at it.⁵⁹

4.17 Many students do not appear to hold literacy or academic achievement in high esteem. Accordingly, there is a need to promote the advantages of literacy through positive and popular role models. There is constant publicity about sport, TV and pop stars but very rarely is there favourable publicity about academic achievements. Children who achieve educationally are often more likely to meet with derision from peers than approval. Community attitudes need to change and people need to be seen to be rewarded for their academic skills.⁶⁰

4.18 The Committee believes that suitable methods of instruction in literacy skills and highly literate teachers are vital to the attainment of adequate literacy skills at all levels.

Immigration

4.19 There is a clear distinction that needs to be made between deficiencies in literacy and in English language ability. Many people from non-English speaking origins require English language training but are literate, in varying degrees, in their own language. Some non-English speaking background people are not literate in their first language and also have low English language skills. According to the

⁵⁹ Latrobe Valley Workplace Basic Education Project Submission, p.2.

⁶⁰ BHP Submission, p.8.

Islamic Council, English language and literacy problems for these people fall into two categories. For some there was a lack of access to school in the country of origin as well as a lack of access to English language classes upon arrival in Australia and a lack of English language classes beyond minimal levels for people with professional qualifications.⁶¹

4.20 Many new arrivals from non-English speaking origins defer their participation in the Adult Migrant English Program for the following reasons:

- . lack of knowledge of the critical role of English in successful settlement;
- . the priority given to gaining employment;
- . lack of adequate childcare facilities;
- . inappropriate arrangements for geographically isolated non-English speaking backgrounds people; and
- . lack of motivation.⁶²

4.21 The Committee notes that the Australian Citizenship Act requires applicants for citizenship to have a basic knowledge of English and an adequate knowledge of the responsibilities and privilege of citizenship. For this to occur adequate English language courses must be made available.

4.22 The Committee recommends that:

to enable applicants for citizenship to fulfil their obligations under the Australian Citizenship Act, the Minister for Immigration make adequate basic English courses available.

4.23 Many non-English speaking migrants who defer English language training due to the priority of gaining employment may become locked into low paying

⁶¹ Islamic Council Submission, p.2.

⁶² Working Party on Post Secondary English Language Training, pp.17-18.

unskilled jobs. The main barrier to escaping from this cycle is a lack of English language proficiency.⁶³ Under the Adult Migrant Education Program National Plan a budget reserve has been allocated for migrants who have not attended initial settlement programs. Longer term residents who have had access to the program who require further literacy and language training will be the responsibility of labour market training programs and English as a second language programs through TAFE or other institutions.⁶⁴

4.24 As previous participants in the program may have graduated below the needed proficiency level the Committee recommends that:

the Commonwealth Government review the eligibility requirements of existing English language and literacy programs to enable all migrants to participate irrespective of their participation in previous programs.

4.25 The Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council representatives have estimated that approximately 40 per cent of their students are long-term non-English speaking background residents, some of them having been in Australia for up to 30 years. Many of these people arrived in the early post war intakes of migrants. They generally have quite adequate spoken English skills but their levels of literacy are very low.⁶⁵

4.26 Large numbers of people from non-English speaking origins do not have sufficient English language skills to participate to their fullest potential in the workplace. What needs to be realised however, is that the education and training that many of them already possess has saved the country considerable amounts of money.⁶⁶

⁶³ *ibid.*, p.31.

⁶⁴ Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs, *Adult Migrant National Program, National Plan - 1990-1991*, Canberra, p.6.

⁶⁵ Francis, Ennis Evidence, p.55.

⁶⁶ Matheson Evidence, p.542.

Sociological factors

4.27 A former adult literacy student told the Committee why he felt some people experience literacy problems:

It gets down to the school but it gets down also to the attitude of the person involved, that child, and the upbringing of that particular person and the environment they are brought up in. If you are brought up in a nice environment then people seem to learn a little bit easier than people who are brought up in a hostile environment ... Your concentration is not on that present day and you lose complete interest in the whole lot of it.⁶⁷

4.28 In case studies of twenty literacy students it was found that most had indicated personal failure before literacy became a problem issue at school. In tackling these literacy problems these earlier needs must be worked through prior to the achievement of literacy.⁶⁸

4.29 The national survey found that 23 per cent of the sample identified such factors as health problems, socio-economic problems, absence from school and negative attitude to school as childhood influences affecting their schooling and literacy.⁶⁹

4.30 If children have very poor health, or severe emotional distress which limit their powers of concentration then it would not matter how effective or successful the school system was. Issues like these are bound to affect their learning at crucial stages.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Green Evidence, p.58.

⁶⁸ A.Grant, *Opportunity to do Brilliantly*, AGPS, Canberra, 1987, p.12.

⁶⁹ Wickert, p.42.

⁷⁰ Gribble Evidence, pp.399-400.

4.31 One of the reasons for the inadequate literacy capability of students entering teacher training programs was that the parents of approximately 50 per cent of the students (in one institution) were children of migrants of the 1950's and 1960's who had received little or no formal language tuition. Many of the students experienced relatively impoverished language backgrounds and this lack of language experience has not been redressed in the schooling of those presenting to train as teachers.⁷¹

4.32 *According to one witness there will always be factors outside of school influencing educational outcomes:*

... ACER studies, for instance, for looking at the literacy achievements of 14 year olds would show that about 10 to 20 per cent of 14 year olds could not be said to be making adequate literacy progress ... while we might want to talk about not having the situation occur in the future, I am not sure whether it is in anyone's power to prevent disadvantage occurring to people during their childhood years. I think it is very important to focus on what happens during childhood more than on what happens during schooling, because the factors are to do with trauma in children's lives.⁷²

4.33 The Committee cannot accept a philosophy which assumes that it is inevitable that hundreds of thousands of people will never become effective members of Australian society. The previous Committee, in its report *The Restless Years*, found that ultimately the education system and schools must accept responsibility for the educational outcomes of students.⁷³

4.34 While the success of the school system is now generally measured in terms of retention and completion rates, the number of students who proceed to further education and find employment, a more fundamental measure is the literacy level of school leavers. All students have the right to expect to be literate when they leave school. The success of the school system must be measured against the

⁷¹ Chandler Submission, p.3.

⁷² Simpson Evidence, p.37.

⁷³ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *The Restless Years*, AGPS, 1989, p.30.

numbers of people who can proceed direct to employment, training and higher education without requiring further basic literacy training.

4.35 The Committee recommends that:

the Minister for Employment, Education and Training establish through the Australian Education Council, the setting of a national goal that all students leaving school should be literate.

Lack of use

4.36 Evidence has shown that people can have adequate literacy skills at school and in their immediate post-school situation, but over an interval of 20 years during which time they have had few demands made of them, those skills actually deteriorate as a consequence of lack of use.⁷⁴

4.37 Many people from non-English speaking backgrounds have actually been "deskilled" by non-recognition of their skills and by being placed in work that does not require them to use those skills that they may possess.⁷⁵

School literacy and workplace literacy

4.38 The idea that education should enable a person to cope with the varied demands of the workplace was questioned in evidence received by the Committee. Employers are demanding literate and numerate people but for schools to produce workers who are equipped for all of the diverse number and type of workplaces is very difficult. Schools are responsible for educating the whole person as opposed to training somebody to perform a job.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Francis Evidence, pp.56-57.

⁷⁵ Lloga Evidence, p.423.

⁷⁶ Searle Evidence, pp.306-307.

4.39 In America studies have demonstrated that literacy demands in the workplace have changed so greatly that whatever literacy skills are acquired in school will have to be added to, and complemented in later life.

4.40 In a study examining and comparing the literacy demands placed on students and workers it was found that technical workers faced more difficult job related literacy demands than did students in technical schools. It was also concluded that *work demands require reading of a much greater variety than that demanded by the school*. The study also found that there were significant differences in the literacy demands made on high school students compared to middle level workers. Readers at school read to learn and tend to use re-reading as their main learning strategy whereas workers were found to read to learn, do and assess. Workers also used problem solving skills and were able to relate new ideas to old. Workers were found to read more difficult material than students.⁷⁷

Demands on literacy in the workplace

4.41 Some workers who may have had adequate literacy skills at the completion of their formal schooling now find that they have difficulty in keeping up with the *knowledge requirements of the job*. The reliance on previous education is no longer sufficient to cope adequately with the demands of the workplace. Today we can expect to be confronted with a much greater volume of knowledge than in past times. American companies have predicted that "occupational half-life", or the time in which the knowledge required for work becomes outdated, has been reduced from fourteen to five years. In Australia a 1989 study found that workers could expect 50 per cent of their current workforce tasks to be redundant in three to five years.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ L.Mickulecky, 'Job Literacy: The relationship between school preparation and workplace actuality', *Australian Journal of Reading*, Volume II, No 2, June 1981.

⁷⁸ *Social Change Media*.

4.42 The changing nature of the workplace has resulted in a greater call being made on the literacy skills of workers. People do not have the skills to cope with such changes. Where a person working on a production line may have only had one job to do for many years that individual may now be required to be a member of a production group. As a part of a team process greater communication is needed. More instructions in writing may also be a part of the new team approach.⁷⁹ Knowing how to do your job is not always enough - more and more people are having to read instructions and write short reports in order to fulfil the expectations of their employers.

⁷⁹ Searle Evidence, p.305.



Chapter 5

HOW DO WE FIX IT?

5.1 The Committee received information on the role of the Commonwealth Government and the State and Territory Governments in the provision of English language and literacy programs. A summary of these programs is included at Appendix F.

5.2 It is evident from the information received by the Committee that a number of workplaces have become involved in literacy programs for English speaking people but this undertaking appears to still be in its infancy with the development of programs being very uneven. Workplace basic education courses are more commonly held in workplaces that have 500 or more employees.⁸⁰ Where workplace programs are in operation the commitment of both workers and management to the improvement of skills is generally high. There is considerable variation in programs from workplace to workplace.

5.3 It is estimated that approximately 28 000 people attend adult literacy classes each year. A further 60 000 take part in the Adult Migrant English Program. These programs together reach only 5 per cent of those believed to have functional difficulties in the English language.⁸¹

5.4 By far the most extensive programs examined by the Committee were those operated by the Ford Motor Company and Holden's Engine Company in Melbourne. Ford has been conducting training programs for more than 9 years and Holden for more than 16 years. At Ford the classes are held on an after hours basis, the company pays for one hour of the time and one hour is of the employee's time. The

⁸⁰ Gribble and Bottomley, p.1.

⁸¹ Office of Multicultural Affairs Submission, p.5.

course is structured over a 20 week period of 4 hours per week (2 x 2 hours). There has been a great commitment on the part of employees, many of whom have gone into courses at Broadmeadows TAFE after attending a basic education program in the workplace. Ford has recognised the need to operate more efficiently and is spending an amount equivalent to 6 per cent of their wages bill on training. It is believed that literacy training will be more valuable if it is linked to the job in the workplace as a part of the total training package in line with award restructuring proposals.

5.5 In 1990 Holden committed an amount equivalent to 5.7 per cent of its payroll to training, despite the depressed economic climate. Classes are usually of 90 hours duration (3 hours each week) all of which is in work time. Motivation is high and some students will elect to go to classes out of work hours for which the company will pay. The cost to the company of releasing workers is approximately \$2000 per week. The 90 hour course is generally considered to be not long enough by management and employees. Holden has also established an individual learning centre which students may use in their own time.

5.6 The Committee was impressed with the attitude and achievements of the management of EZ Industries in Tasmania which had conducted a number of workplace literacy programs with the assistance of the Tasmanian Adult Education team. The cost of releasing employees to undertake the courses was estimated at approximately \$7.50 per hour which the management thought was reasonable, given the overall benefits which accrue to the company in the short and longer term. The Committee talked to workers who had participated in the courses and was advised that self-esteem had improved markedly and that many of the people were now actively involved in award restructuring and workplace democracy. These workers had previously taken no part in such discussions but were now making a valuable and constructive contribution utilising their skills and expertise. Morale in the company had also improved as workers were encouraged by the management's support for the education program and saw it as an investment in them by the company which gave them confidence in their own worth and ability.

5.7 It is clear from these examples and others not examined by the Committee that where employees have been able to undertake literacy and English language programs there has been an improvement in several areas. These include:

- . increased self-esteem of participants;
- . improved industrial relations resulting in enhanced communication between management and staff;
- . workers are able to comprehend safety warnings; and
- . increased communication between the different non-English speaking background groups.

There is also evidence that firms that have undertaken workplace education programs have increased productivity. For example a personnel manager estimated that for a cost of \$8 000 the savings were \$50 000 per year as a result of staff use of computers in stock control.⁸²

5.8 It is essential that all employers are aware of the benefits of increased literacy skills to their businesses as well as to their employees. Accordingly the Committee recommends that:

the Commonwealth Government encourage business and employer associations to promote the productivity, industrial relations and morale benefits of literacy programs in the workplace.

5.9 It is apparent that the provision of English language training in the workplace has several advantages over TAFE centres or other externally provided programs. By conducting programs in the workplace the content of the course is likely to be related to the workplace, has the support of fellow workers and allows the student to pick up colloquialisms that may be specific to the workplace.⁸³

⁸² Victorian Government Submission, p.8.

⁸³ Wilson Evidence, pp.236-237.

5.10 There are many employers who are yet to be convinced that a literacy problem exists within the workforce or that there are benefits to be gained from increasing the literacy levels of workers. On the other hand most employers recognised the need for a more literate workforce but several issues were raised in connection with provision, costs and responsibility for basic education in the workplace. Several employers believed that if literacy training was imposed on them they would not employ people failing to meet certain literacy standards. Some employer groups, while recognising the importance of literacy skills, believed that literacy was the responsibility of the community or the education system and should not be a responsibility of employers. Basic education skills were seen to be the responsibility of the individual, although it was felt that programs for both English language and literacy should continue, but not during the employer's time.

5.11 The Confederation of Australian Industry's view is that the employer has an equal responsibility (but no more than this) with governments, unions and individuals to provide for basic education of the worker. Employers will invest in training that they believe will provide some return. If the literacy and English language skills of their workers are impeding the effective use of labour and reducing productivity then employers will take steps to amend the problem.⁸⁴

5.12 Many small businesses do not have the resources or flexibility to provide programs in the workplace or to release employees for training during work time. Small employers' ability to expand and to increase productivity may be severely restricted by employees' inadequate literacy and the obvious difficulties in accessing training. One possible option for small to medium enterprises is the provision of joint training schemes. These may be off-site in community centres, TAFE colleges or a location convenient to participating companies.

⁸⁴ Nolan Evidence, p.579.

5.13 The National Board of Employment, Education and Training found that much of the present formal training system appears better designed for the needs of larger enterprises than for smaller firms and evidence points to a common feeling by smaller firms that formal, institutionalised training is often remote from their needs and concerns. Small firms which argue for training want it to be delivered at locations, times and in ways that are flexible and meet their needs.⁸⁵ The National Board of Employment, Education and Training recommendations are shown at Appendix G.

5.14 The Committee recommends that:

the Commonwealth Government make funds available for the Minister for Small Business and Customs to establish a pilot program which takes account of the special factors affecting small business and provides literacy programs for this workplace.

5.15 Given the importance of the issues associated with training within the small business sector the Committee regretted not receiving a submission from the Australian Small Business Association.

5.16 The Committee recognises that literacy problems in small business are not confined to employees alone. Some employers also experience literacy and language difficulties. As there is a high incidence of non-English speaking background people involved in small business both as employers and employees, and as many of these businesses are not involved in the Training Guarantee levy, careful attention must be given to providing relevant training packages as well as encouraging small businesses to participate in the English in the Workplace program.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ National Board of Employment, Education and Training, *Training for Small Business: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Employment and Skills Formation Council*, September 1990, p.2.

⁸⁶ Office of Multicultural Affairs Submission, p.12.

5.17 The Committee recommends that:

the Minister for Small Business and Customs examine the feasibility of providing English language courses for small business proprietors and managers of non-English speaking backgrounds to enable them to understand the requirements of Australian commercial law.

5.18 In each of the States and Territories literacy courses are provided by a number of community organisations. In many areas volunteer tutors are utilised in varying degrees as well. The Committee was provided with information on a range of alternate programs that would have benefits for the workplace by providing literacy training for workers who do not have access to workplace literacy programs and who are unable or unwilling to attend institutions such as TAFE.

5.19 Community programs are especially well placed to cater for individuals disadvantaged in terms of access to literacy training - women, Aborigines, non-English speaking background people, the long-term unemployed, those living outside major metropolitan areas and people in small business. The Government, through its commitment to social justice, has a responsibility to ensure that these people have access to appropriate training. The continued funding of community programs is one means of ensuring this provision.

5.20 The Committee recommends that:

the Commonwealth Government fund community literacy programs on a three yearly basis.

5.21 Many innovative programs have been developed utilising computer technology. One program already in operation is an essay writing program for use with secondary and tertiary students. This program provides students with

individual tuition on the correct way to write an essay. It presents an ideal way of improving the skills of people who may be unwilling to admit that they had a weakness in this area. Other programs have been developed, such as "The Talking Book".⁸⁷ This program has great potential for the teaching of English and for the development of basic literacy skills. These programs could easily be adapted to the workplace as long as computer hardware is available. This technology would offer the opportunity for individualised learning programs as an alternative, or complement to, group training.

5.22 Public libraries, at present underutilised, would provide one means of inexpensively providing literacy programs for people in the community who are in need of help. In Port Melbourne a local literacy program (Waterside Learning Inc.) is located at the library. Over 50 per cent of the Port Melbourne population are members of the library, a factor attributed to the library policy of friendly, community oriented service. One of the strengths of using public libraries is the way they are perceived by the public.

There need not be any sort of stigma attached to using public libraries. Public libraries can provide an acceptable "camouflage" for many implicit needs - such as a need for non-judgmental social contact, or a need for knowledge, information or particular skills, such as reading and writing.⁸⁸

5.23 It has been suggested that literacy programs be introduced to workplaces through mobile public libraries. As well as printed materials audio and video materials could be presented as a part of this mobile service.⁸⁹ Small businesses (and rural workplaces) are particularly disadvantaged in terms of access to literacy and English language programs. The use of mobile services would be particularly relevant for small business and rural workplaces.

⁸⁷ These programs were demonstrated by the Centre for Research and Development at the University of Technology in Footscray.

⁸⁸ City of Port Melbourne Submission, p.1.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p.4.

5.24 The media can also play an enhanced role in the delivery of literacy programs, particularly for those people who are unwilling to admit that they have a problem or for people who are prevented from attending courses due to distance or incapacity. Requests for information concerning programs available through the Adult Literacy Information Office (008 number) indicate the potential audience that can be reached through the media.⁹⁰

5.25 Current programs in the workplace are very limited in number. It is evident that the present demand for tuition is already greater than supply. This applies to literacy programs for people whose first language is English and English language training for non-English speaking background people. With the present arrangements for the delivery of programs shared between the Department of Employment, Education and Training and the Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs there is potential for duplication and overlap. It is essential that program delivery be co-ordinated. This should result in a streamlined service to clients.

5.26 The Committee recommends that:

the Commonwealth and State Ministers responsible for English language and literacy programs provide sufficient resources to meet actual community needs; and

the Department of Employment, Education and Training and the Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs co-ordinate delivery of literacy and language services.

⁹⁰ The Adult Literacy Information Office had received approximately 11000 calls (to November 22) requesting information on the availability of literacy assistance. Over 5000 of these calls related to programs produced by the Film and T.V. Office and the ABC.

5.27 National skills standards are fundamental to the successful restructuring of industrial awards and the creation of new classifications and occupations. The National Training Board in consultation with industry and key interest groups ratify standards developed by industry for occupational and industrial classifications. The National Training Board provides advice and assistance on developing standards. These standards are to provide bench marks for improving the responsiveness of the training system to industry needs, developing curriculum, providing training and for the assessment of competence and certificates of training. The National Board of Employment, Education and Training observed that in setting skills standards industry should specify the level of numeracy and literacy which is required.⁹¹

5.28 The Committee recommends that:

the National Training Board in ratifying competency standards developed by industry ensure that appropriate literacy standards are included.

5.29 This would allow existing programs to respond in a more systematic manner to language and literacy needs, and thus enable people with inadequate skills to take up further training opportunities as well as to participate more effectively in award restructuring.⁹²

5.30 The need for training and re-training has highlighted the need for broader bridging and preparatory courses such as literacy and numeracy. The Employment and Skills Formation Council recommended that priority be given to funding the development of bridging courses as part of the Commonwealth's support for curriculum development.⁹³

⁹¹ National Board of Employment, Education and Training, *Industry Training in Australia: The Need for Change*, Interim report on consultations by the Employment and Skills Formation Council, May 1989, AGPS, Canberra, pp.33-50.

⁹² *ibid.*, p.50.

⁹³ *ibid.*, p.50.

5.31 The Commonwealth has significantly increased funding for English language and literacy programs during 1989 and 1990 with \$40 million to be available over the next three years. Even though this is a significant increase on past expenditure it is still not considered adequate to meet the basic education needs of adults.

5.32 In a review of adult literacy expenditure it was found that expenditure levels were very unevenly distributed amongst the States and Territories and within Commonwealth Departments. The review points out that there are striking inequalities between States, and between provision for native English speakers and migrants. In the past people have not known how to seek assistance but with the stigma attached to literacy problems being weakened both need and demand is likely to rise significantly.⁹⁴

5.33 A re-direction of funds through a re-allocation of CRAFT (Commonwealth Rebate for Apprentice Full-time Training) and ATS (Australian Traineeship System) funding has been raised in the review of the training costs of award restructuring. The review stated that if a re-direction of funds were to be made then English language, literacy and numeracy programs should be given the highest priority.⁹⁵ The Committee is at present undertaking a review of CRAFT and ATS as a part of its inquiry into skills training and has not yet reached a decision on this matter. In any event the Committee believes that English language, literacy and numeracy programs should be given priority in terms of funding.

5.34 The Committee recognises the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government in the provision of funds for English language training and for the acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy skills.

⁹⁴ Coopers and Lybrand Consultants in association with Ashenden and Associates, *A Strategic Review of Commonwealth/State Adult Literacy Expenditure*, 1990.

⁹⁵ Training Costs Review Committee, pp. 58-59.

5.35 Commonwealth funded programs for other than basic education within the States should, wherever possible, be offered to industry on a cost recovery (or partial cost recovery) basis. The funds returned through cost recovery should be used to strengthen and expand programs. The Committee considers that access to basic education classes for the individual should be free. If further training results from the original training then the individual stands to benefit and would then be in a position to contribute to the cost of training.

5.36 The funds raised through the Training Guarantee levy are one possible avenue which should be investigated as a means of providing literacy and communication skills as well as funds referred to under a re-allocation of CRAFT and ATS. Literacy training is a legitimate training proposal of the Training Guarantee levy. This fact is not well known and must be promoted.

5.37 The Committee recommends that:

the Commonwealth Government ensure that employers are aware that workplace literacy programs fulfil the training obligations of the Training Guarantee levy; and

a proportion of the Training Guarantee levy funds collected through the Australian Taxation Office be directed to literacy programs in the workplace.

5.38 There are firms that have a strong commitment to the provision of basic education programs and allow their employees to undertake courses totally within work time or have provided 50 per cent of the time with some reward, at the end of the course for workers who have contributed their own time.

5.39 There are still large firms and many smaller ones that believe that the costs for literacy training should be the sole responsibility of the individual or the government. The report of the Training Costs Review Committee supports the

conclusion that the responsibility for basic literacy and numeracy skills is an obligation of government. The report states:

The provision of basic literacy and numeracy skills, including those needed for a safe and productive working life, is pre-eminently an obligation of government. A government which pursues an active immigration policy must accept special responsibility for the English language education of new settlers. The [Training Costs Review] Committee believes that it is incumbent on governments, particularly the Commonwealth, to make a major financial commitment to vocational literacy and numeracy. Within this framework industry should be expected to contribute to communications modules related to skill development on the same basis as other training.⁹⁶

5.40 In general Australian firms do not have a good record in the provision of training for their unskilled and semi-skilled workers. This must change. Different business sectors have varying capacities to meet the costs of training their workers. However, the Committee does not believe that employers have an obligation to meet the total costs of providing for basic skills that should have been acquired during the compulsory years of schooling or prior to entry into the workforce.

5.41 The Committee considers that the following principles should apply:

- it is the responsibility of government to ensure that all people leaving the school system or entering the workforce are literate;
- it is the responsibility of government to meet the costs of providing basic literacy and English language training in the workplace;
- the upgrading of vocational literacy skills, because of workplace reorganisation or new technology should be the responsibility of the employer;

⁹⁶ Training Costs Review Committee, p.32.

5.42 Sometimes an employee may need additional basic education because of changed workplace requirements. In these cases it will not always be clear whether this upgrading of skills is basic or vocational. In these circumstances there may be justification to share the cost between the employer and the government. This would be subject to negotiation between the employer, employee representatives and the literacy provider.

5.43 Literacy is a national problem and the Commonwealth Government must provide "firm and decisive leadership".⁹⁷ Within a framework of co-operation between the Commonwealth Government and the State and Territory Governments the contribution of each should be clarified. A national strategy will determine common aims and identify priorities. Control of programs would remain with the States and Territories.

5.44 National guidelines are needed in areas related to:

- . the content of programs;
- . the delivery of programs;
- . the training of providers;
- . registration of providers;
- . skills audits;
- . integration of literacy into other programs; and
- . evaluation of outcomes.

5.45 One of the most important aspects of the national guidelines is the need to have suitably qualified adult literacy providers. Accordingly the Committee recommends that:

the Commonwealth Government, through the provision of special purpose funds, encourage State and Territory education authorities to train adult literacy providers as an urgent priority.

⁹⁷ Australian Council for Adult Literacy Submission, p.11.

5.46 The Green Paper proposed a National Literacy and Language Policy. This is to cover all areas of literacy involving children and adults as well as training in languages other than English. The policy seeks to encourage effective links between literacy and language and proposes several options.⁹⁸ While the literacy and English language needs of workers should be addressed in the final policy paper it is unfortunate that the discussion in the Green Paper provided little assistance to the Committee on inputs required and the outcomes to be achieved for the adult literacy area.

5.47 National policies are meaningless unless there is a firm commitment on behalf of government, business and unions. This means the commitment of resources. While business and the individual will profit from enhanced literacy skills it is Australia as a nation which will benefit from a literate workforce. To this end it is necessary for the Commonwealth Government and the State and Territory Governments to re-order their priorities to ensure adequate resources are allocated to basic literacy programs to support those areas which are not met by industry or individuals.

5.48 The Committee recommends that:

the Commonwealth Minister for Employment, Education and Training, working in conjunction with the relevant State Ministers and the Australian Education Council, develop an adult literacy strategy as a matter of urgency.

5.49 A number of submissions noted that unnecessarily complicated public documents and abstract reading materials found in trade manuals contributed to the difficulties people experienced with reading. Government should set an example by making sure that its own documents and letters are easy to read and understand.

⁹⁸ J.Dawkins, Volume One, p.46.

5.50 Accordingly the Committee recommends that:

the Commonwealth Government take a leading role in the use of plain English; and

the Auditor-General as a part of his efficiency audits undertake an examination of the extent to which plain English, in public documents, is used by government agencies.

ROGER PRICE, MP

Chairman

7 March 1991

CAROLYN JAKOBSEN, MP

Subcommittee Chairman

7 March 1991

APPENDIX A

DISSENT BY MR CHARLES, MR BRADFORD, MR ANDERSON, MR SCOTT

Pursuant to Standing Order 343 we add this dissent to the Committee's Report.

While the terms of reference of this Parliamentary inquiry tended to limit the Committee to examination of literacy only in the workplace some of us were concerned to examine the root causes of lack of literacy skills amongst both adults and youth. One of our members asked witness after witness; "given that we accept that we have an unacceptably high level of people in society with poor literacy skills are we still growing the problem in our schools?"

Substantive evidence was received by the committee that we are still growing the problem but no witness and no submission was able to quantify that judgment. A number of submissions and a number of witnesses claimed a change in teaching methodology in primary school reading programs as both inappropriate and acting to put a substantial percentage of students in the first three years of primary school at risk.

We were not able to substantiate the validity of those claims as there has been no continuous comparable testing over the period of the change. We believe, therefore, that the lack of testing prevents us from evaluating the effectiveness (or otherwise) of changes in methodology or the overall effectiveness of our schools in producing successful literacy outcomes in the entire student population.

While agreeing with and supporting the majority of this report we came to the conclusion that it is imperative that we institute internationally comparable testing of all students reading, writing, and maths skills attainment at regular intervals throughout the years of both primary and secondary school. It is not good enough

to just segregate out from the system those students who seem to have problems. We must also determine the effectiveness or otherwise of the teaching methods and the ability overall of the system to produce. For that reason we reject the recommendations contained in paragraph 4.14 (recommendation 17).

In their place we support the following recommendations which deal with testing and other action to follow on and be taken in conjunction with such testing.

- A. That State and Territory Departments of Education be encouraged to institute standard, internationally comparable testing of all students' reading, writing and maths skills attainment at minimum stages being the end of years 3, 6, 9 & 12 and that results be reported.
- B. That State and Territory Departments of Education encourage all primary schools to monitor literacy development in the first three years of formal schooling through frequent testing and reporting.
- C. In conjunction with recommendations A & B that reading teaching methodology results be monitored by the Department of Employment, Education & Training and resultant program recommendations be made to State Departments of Education.
- D. In conjunction with recommendation B that reading recovery programs be implemented for all students not making satisfactory reading progress between the ages of five and eight.
- E. That the Australian Education Council implement a policy that students not be permitted to progress through the levels of primary and secondary schools without minimum satisfactory literacy performance.

F. That teacher training in literacy be made a priority; be accorded increased time in the training structure and take account of methodology recommendations flowing from recommendation C above.

Bob Charles

John Bradford

John Anderson

Bruce Scott

APPENDIX B

SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

Individuals

Baynham, Dr, M, Broadway, New South Wales
Brazil, Ms W M, Spence, Australian Capital Territory
Brear, Mr E T, Ivanhoe, Victoria
Bull, Mr G, Toowoomba, Queensland

Calabro, Mr J, Pascoe Vale, Victoria
Chandler, Ms M, Magill, South Australia
Clarke, Mr N, Boronia, Victoria
Coleman, Mr W, Geelong, Victoria
Costa, Mr J, Victoria

Dimovski, Mr T, Port Melbourne, Victoria

Gribble Ms H & Ms Audrey Grant, Melbourne, Victoria

Harrison, Mr B, Carlton, Victoria
Hewat, Mr D, Riddells Creek, Victoria
Hill, Dr S, Magill, South Australia
Holden Motor Company Employee
Hurrey, Mr W, Mount Gravatt, Queensland

Lighthart, Mr A, Lilydale, Victoria

Outram, Ms D, Mawson, Australian Capital Territory

McGinness, Mr N, Port Melbourne, Victoria
McNaughton, Mr Q J, East Launceston, Tasmania
McVey, Ms E, Alfredton, Victoria
Morris, Ms W, Port Melbourne, Victoria

Nugent, Mr C, Kallista, Victoria

Outram, Ms D, Mawson, Australian Capital Territory

Prior, Mr J, Nhulyunbuy, Northern Territory

Reisenberg, Mr J, Glenroy, Victoria
Rooks, Mr F W, St Kilda, Victoria
Rud, Mrs V, Gladstone Park, Victoria

Sofo, Dr F, Belconnen, Australian Capital Territory
Sousa, Ms C, Heidleberg, Victoria

Vickers, Ms J, Bendigo, Victoria

Windeyer, Mrs E P, Red Hill, Australian Capital Territory
Wood, Bishop C, Winnellie, Northern Territory

Zollner, Ms J, Kingston, Tasmania

Organisations

AAACE

ABB Transformers

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Australian Chamber of Manufacturers

Australian Council for Adult Literacy Inc.

Australian Council of Trade Unions

Austalian Mines and Metals Association Inc.

Bandiana Logistic Group

Bert Morris & Associates

BHP

Building Workers' Industrial Union of Australia

Bundaberg Sugar Company Ltd

Construction Training Council (NT)

Email Training Services Pty Ltd

English in the Workplace Program of the Adult Migrant Educaton Service of
Western Australia

Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia Inc.

Ford Motor Company of Australia Ltd

Housing Industry Association

Islamic Council of Victoria

Language Foundation of Australia

Literacy Action Association Inc.

Mayne Nickless Limited

Meat & Allied Trades Federation of Australia

Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works

National Electrical and Electronic Industry Training Committee Ltd
Nissan Motor Manufacturing Co (Aus) Ltd

Peter J Jones & Associates
Public Transport Corporation

Quality Educational Development Pty Ltd
Queensland Council for Adult Literacy Inc.
Queensland Group Schemes Association Inc.

Rothmans Holdings Ltd

SPELD NSW Inc.

Telecom Australia
The Textile Clothing and Footwear Council of Australia Ltd
TNT Australia Pty Ltd

Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council Inc.
Victorian Textile Clothing & Footwear Industry Training Board
Victorian Trades Hall Council

Western Mining Corporation Ltd

Schools and other Educational Institutions

ACT Institute of Technical and Further Education
ALBE Workplace Advisory Committee, Loddon Mallee Council of Further Education
Applied Linguistics Consortium, Griffith University/Queensland University of
Technology

CATALPA
Centre for Research and Development, Victoria University of Technology, Footscray
Institute

Goulburn Valley Community College

Hobart Technical College

Key Training Centre

Newport College of TAFE
New South Wales Department of Technical & Further Education
Northern Territory University
NSW Association of Community Adult Education Centres

Perth Technical College
Primary English Teaching Association

South Brisbane College of TAFE

TAFE Aboriginal Access Department of TAFE WA
The Tasmanian Council of State School Parents and Friends Associations

Workplace Basic Education Resource Project

Yallourn College of Technical and Further Education

Governments and Government Agencies

Minister for Aboriginal Affairs

Department of Defence
Department of Employment, Education and Training
Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs
Department of Industrial Relations
Department of Social Security

Footscray Department of Employment, Education and Training

Office of Multicultural Affairs, The Department of the Prime Minister & Cabinet

State Government of New South Wales
State Government of Queensland
State Government of Tasmania
State Government of Victoria
State Government of Western Australia

NSW Corrective Services

APPENDIX C

EXHIBITS

1. Mr Keith Green

Building Trades Unions, National Building Trades Construction Award, 1987 Edition.

Building Worker's Industrial Union of Australia, Joiners & Shopfitters Handbook 1987/88.

Building Worker's Industrial Union of Australia, 1989/90 Rule Book. Information Brochures

Victorian Building Industry Agreement 1989-1992

2. Ms Roy Pugh & Mrs Kerry Edwards

Contact Card, Contact for Adult Writing & Reading Help.

Hart, P, Holidays.

Hattenschwiler, Peter: *Tales of Youth.*

There's Not Much I Don't Know About The Game.

Kievit, M, Greedy Guts.

Mick, Embarrassment.

Workplace Basic Education.

Workplace Basic Education, Adult Education, Pasminco Metals - EZ Hobart, Report for 1989.

Workplace Basic Education, A Guide for Coordinators and Tutors.

Workplace Basic Education, 1988 Pilot Project-Final Report.

3. ABC Adult Education Radio

1, 2 & 3 Cassettes *Work is a Four Letter Word*, A series about literacy in the workplace.

Pearson, Geoff, *Work is a Four Letter Word*, Reading and writing in the workplace.

4. Queensland Group Schemes Association Inc.

Boggs, R, *Mental Arithmetic and Warm-ups*, A Manual for Primary and Secondary Teachers.

Committee for Maths in the Workforce, *What Can I Do....?*, Report from the Maths in the Workforce Seminar.

5. **Mr William Hurrey**

Laubech Literacy of Canada: *A Guide to Setting up Literacy Programs in the Workplace.*
From New Readers Come New Leaders
Industrial Tutoring Project Evaluation
Industrial Tutoring Project Final Report

6. **Albert Morris & Associates**

Australian Journal of Education, Vol 33, Number 2, August 1989.
Journal of the Australian Reading Association, Australian Journal of Reading,
Vol 11, No 1, March 1988.

7. **Mr Chris Nugent**

Education Department of South Australia, *Early Literacy Inservice Course*
Units 1-9 (ELIC).
Nugent, Chris, Curriculum Induced Disablements In Reading.
Nugent, Chris, Pardon Me For Being Adamant But There Are Different Kids
Out There.
Various documents on the teaching of reading
Video on reading and numeracy

8. **Victorian Government Representatives**

Steck, Jan, *Classes at Work*, A study of outcomes of Workplace Basic
Education Project Classes 1985-89.

9. **Mr Byron Harrison**

The Harrison-Winter Reading and Spelling Programs (An Overview).

10. **Mr Peter O'Connor**

O'Connor, Peter, *Cost Implications For Workplace Basic Education.*

11. Australian Council of Trade Unions

A Duggan and J Jackson, *English On The Job Project* for the Victorian Building Industry Agreement Working Party, Commonwealth of Australia 1990.

12. Australian Council for Adult Literacy

An ACAL fact sheet No. 1.
Additional information.

13. The Confederation of Australian Industry (CAI)

Confederation of Australian Industry, *The Training Needs of Managers*.

APPENDIX D

HEARINGS AND WITNESSES

Canberra, Tuesday 17 July 1990

Department of Employment, Education and Training

Mr John Muir
Dr Joseph O'Phelan
Mr Peter Pritchard
Mr Phillip Ritherdon
Mr Noel Simpson

Melbourne, Wednesday 8 August 1990

Islamic Council of Australia

Mr Bilal Cleland
Ms Nazmeen Sayed

Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council

Mr Rex Ennis
Ms Robyn Francis
Mr Keith Green
Mrs Heather Haughton

Hobart, Thursday 9 August 1990

Department of Industrial Relations & Training

Mrs Kerry Edwards
Ms Roy Pugh

Department of the Premier & Cabinet

Mr Dallas James

Adelaide, Tuesday 4 September 1990

Private Citizen
South Australian College of Advanced Education

Ms Margaret Chandler
Dr Susan Hill

ABC Radio

Mr John Geyer
Mr Anthony Ryan

South Australian Government

Ms Bronwen Blight
Ms Margaret Carruthers
Ms Nicole Gilding
Ms Pamela Metcalf
Ms Meryl Thompson

Perth, Thursday 6 September 1990

Peter J Jones & Associates

Mr Peter J Jones

Western Australian Government

Mr Nick Agocs
Mr Michael Kooperman
Ms Jennifer Riatti
Mrs Maxine Sclanders
Dr Glenys Sefton
Mrs Monica Verrier
Ms Katrina Wilson

Federated Miscellaneous Workers Union WA Branch

Ms Susan Chmielewski
Ms Helen Creed
Mr Danny Kuzmanovich
Mr Stan Liaros

Brisbane, Friday 19 October 1990

Queensland Council for Adult Literacy

Ms Ann Kelly
Mrs Kathie Searle

Queensland Group Schemes

Mr Douglas Holzberger
Ms Janine Warnick

Private Citizen

Mr William Hurrey

Bert Morris & Associates

Mr Albert Morris

Applied Linguistics Consortium

Dr Brendan Bartlett
Mr John Stanley

Melbourne, Tuesday 30 October 1990

Private Citizen

Mr Chris Nugent

Workforce Education Subcommittee of Loddon Malley
Regional Council of Further Education

Ms Clare Claydon

Victorian Government

Mr Willian Cleland
Mr David Goldsworthy
Ms Barbara Goulborn
Ms Helen Gribble
Ms Margaret Learmonth
Mr Erik Lloga

Australian Chamber of Manufactures

Ms Rosemary Latimer

Private Citizen

Mr Byron Harrison

Sydney, Monday 3 December 1990

NSW Government

Mr James Athanasou
Mr Andrew Harper
Dr Susan Holland
Mrs Rosalind Strong
Ms Rosemary Wickert

Workplace Basic Education Coordinator

Mr Peter O'Connor

Canberra, Thursday 6 December 1990

Australian Council of Trade Unions

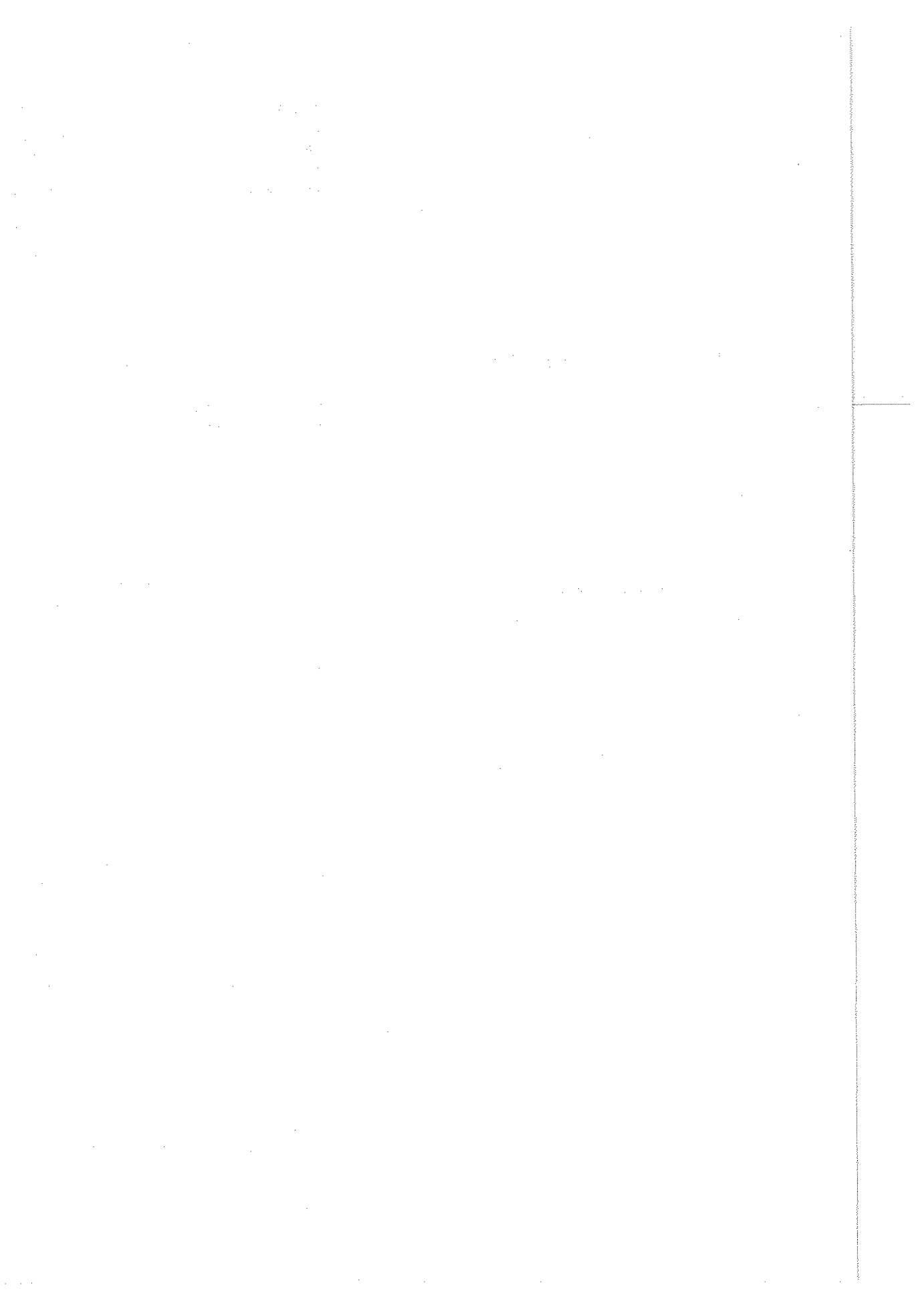
Mr Alan Matheson

Australian Council for Adult Literacy

Ms Rosa McKenna
Ms Marie Persson

Confederation of Australian Industry

Mr David Nolan



APPENDIX E

INSPECTIONS AND INFORMAL TALKS

Hobart, Thursday 9 August 1990

Pazminco EZ
Royal Hobart Hospital
Adult Education Department Office
Hydro Electric Commission

Perth, Wednesday 5 September 1990

Good Samaritan Industries
Canning Vale Prison
Launch of International Literacy Day
Australian Pacific Air Conditioning (APAC)
Fremantle Hospital
Laundry and Linen Service at Murdoch

Melbourne, Monday 29 October 1990

Ford Motor Company
Centre for Research and Development, Victoria University of Technology, Footscray
Institute
Holden's Engine Company
Confederation of Australian Industry

Melbourne, Tuesday 30 October 1990

Cockatoo Primary School

Canberra, Thursday 15 November 1990

Senator Nick Sherry

APPENDIX F

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Commonwealth Government programs

The major Commonwealth programs to improve English language skills are the Adult Migrant Education Program and the Vocationally Oriented Adult Education and Literacy Program to operate from 1991. This will combine the Non-Government Adult Education Program, the Advanced (Vocational) English Program for Migrants and the Adult Literacy Program. This program will be administered through the Department of Employment, Education and Training.¹

The Adult Migrant Education Program is an English as a Second Language program which concentrates on the teaching of English language skills; it is not primarily a literacy program. The aim of the program is to enable non-English speaking background people "to reach proficiency levels consistent with their educational, vocational and social goals". The Adult Migrant Education Program is delivered through eight state and territory Adult Migrant Education Services, nine higher education providers and four smaller community colleges.² The Adult Migrant Education Program includes the following components: formal classroom based courses, English in the Workplace Program, tutor support, distance learning and individual learning centres.³

The main objective of the Adult Migrant Education Program is to provide new arrivals with enough language training to allow them to operate competently in Australian society. The recent restructuring of Adult Migrant Education Program gives priority to migrants in their first five years of settlement. The Program is not

¹ Office of Multicultural Affairs Submission, pp.4-5.

² Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs Submission, p.1.

³ Office of Multicultural Affairs Submission, p.4.

able to meet all of the needs of longer term non-English speaking background people, those seeking to enter the labour market or all of the annual migrant intake. There is currently a backlog of people in need of English language training. As well as this problem many of those leaving the program have not reached minimum social proficiency levels in English.⁴

The Adult Migrant Education Program National Plan, due to be fully implemented by 1992, will aim to redress the problem of minimum social proficiency levels and to enable skilled migrants to reach higher levels needed for professional employment and/or training.⁵

As well as these programs the Commonwealth has funded seeding projects, research, materials development and the professional development of adult literacy teachers (in 1988 and 1989) through the Adult Literacy Action Campaign of the National Policy on Languages.⁶

Other labour market programs and services such as Jobtrain, Skillshare, the Australian Traineeship System and programs through the Department of Social Security and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission are included in the role of the Commonwealth Government.⁷ Initiatives to be implemented through the Active Employment Strategy with an increased focus on literacy skills in programs for the unemployed will help to address pre-vocational needs of those seeking employment or access to further training.

Provision of literacy programs around Australia

The provision of literacy programs differed markedly from State to State and also within workplaces. Information was received from several State Governments

⁴ *ibid.*, pp.7-8.

⁵ Working Party on Post Secondary English Language Training Report 1990, p. 10.

⁶ *ibid.*, p.5.

⁷ *ibid.*, p.5.

during public hearings in Adelaide, Perth, Sydney, Melbourne and Hobart. Representatives from the Department of Employment, Education and Training informed the Committee of their department's role at the first public hearing in Canberra.

The following paragraphs provide a very brief overview of the main providers of literacy and English language programs within those States and Territories that contributed submissions to the inquiry and/or whose representatives appeared at public hearings held by the Committee.⁸

Victoria appears to have the longest history of any State or Territory in providing basic education programs. There are four main providers in Victoria offering a range of services:

- . the Adult Migrant Education Service;
- . the Council of Adult Education, a statutory body;
- . TAFE colleges; and
- . community providers (run by committees of management).⁹

The Victorian Government has stressed the need for workforce literacy rather than a focus on workplace provision. A focus on workplace provision is seen as too narrow and excludes those not in the workforce.¹⁰

Where government funded programs are delivered in the workplace in Victoria, a tripartite approach involving unions, employers and government is used. The Workplace Basic Education Project currently operates over 50 classes per year in a variety of workplaces. A range of industries have held programs with 74 per cent

⁸No information is included from those State and Territory Governments whose representatives had not appeared before the Committee and/or provided a submission to the inquiry at the time the report was drafted.

⁹Gribble Evidence, p.395.

¹⁰Victorian Government Submission, p.3.

of classes from the public sector and 26 per cent in the private sector.¹¹ Programs offered through the Council of Adult Education are funded by the Division of Further Education but a substantial amount of money is raised by the Council through user pays programs.¹²

The main provider of adult literacy programs in New South Wales is TAFE which operates a number of programs across the state. The Adult Migrant Education Service provides a range of programs in English language training for non-English speaking background people.¹³

The New South Wales Government has established a Taskforce on Workplace Literacy to provide advice to the Government on workplace provision of literacy programs. Representatives from New South Wales TAFE Authority and the Department of Further Education, Training and Employment are on the taskforce.¹⁴

The New South Wales Government is committed to the concept of second chance education within the TAFE commission. The Government spends over \$40 million on literacy based activities per year of which approximately \$20 million is related to TAFE.¹⁵

The TAFE system in New South Wales is the largest provider of adult literacy programs of any institution in Australia. Through New South Wales TAFE students are able to gain a certificate in adult basic education. This award can be articulated into an equivalent of year 10 and onto year 12.¹⁶

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.3.

¹² Gribble Evidence, p.397.

¹³ New South Wales Government Submission, pp.3-4.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.2.

¹⁵ Harper Evidence, p.467-468.

¹⁶ Holland Evidence, p.469.

Information provided by the Tasmanian Government relates to the Workplace Basic Education Program. Courses are negotiated with management and unions and are based on the principles of:

- . holding courses in work time;
- . the establishment of planning groups;
- . a curriculum based on student needs; and
- . voluntary participation.¹⁷

Companies are charged approximately \$7.50 per hour per student for tuition provided by Workplace Basic Education but as well as this cost the companies must bear the costs of releasing workers during work time.¹⁸

In South Australia the Department of Employment and TAFE is responsible for provision of literacy and language programs. Past effort in South Australia has concentrated on English in the Workplace. New programs involving literacy for English speaking people are currently being established.¹⁹ In South Australia the Adult Migrant Education Service operates through TAFE which is a situation that is unique to this state.²⁰ A witness at the Adelaide hearing referred to the DETAFE policy in which the approach taken has been to:

adopt a tripartite developmental approach and to opt for the development of an integrated and comprehensive service which would cover English speaking background learners, non-English speaking background learners and eventually the special needs of Aboriginal people and people with disabilities who have language and literacy needs in the workplace.²¹

¹⁷ Tasmanian Government Submission, Appendix.

¹⁸ Pugh Evidence, p.102.

¹⁹ Thompson Evidence, p.180.

²⁰ Blight Evidence, p.182.

²¹ Gilding Evidence, p.179.

The provision for adult literacy in Western Australia has been co-ordinated through TAFE. The main emphasis in Western Australia in adult basic education has been aimed at the non-English speaker. Programs for non-English speaking background people have been delivered by the Adult Migrant Education Service for a number of years but literacy programs for people whose first language is English are still very new. In 1989 a pilot program was run by the TAFE Adult Literacy Unit using National Policy on Languages funds. Following on from this program three programs are now operating on a fee for service basis with a further program planned to cater for English background and non-English background people as a joint venture of the Adult Migrant Education Service and TAFE Adult Literacy.²²

TAFE Colleges are the main providers of literacy programs for adults in Queensland. Most colleges provide a range of classes for small groups of students, train and support volunteer tutors and provide advice on literacy and numeracy to government agencies and the community. These programs are mainly intended for English background students but long term non-English speaking background people are also included. Learning assistance in literacy and numeracy is also provided for students undertaking full-time vocational studies. Literacy programs for isolated people are provided through the Distance Education College.²³

Education in English language skills for migrants in Queensland is provided through the Adult Migrant Education Program and the Advanced English Program for Migrants. Both of these programs have a strong vocational emphasis with provision for skills linked to TAFE mainstream courses.²⁴ The Queensland Government has recognised the need to improve the literacy skills of all people and has developed a strategic plan to this effect.

²² Western Australian Government Submission, Response by Department of Employment and Training and TAFE.

²³ Queensland Government Submission, pp.20-21.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.22.

APPENDIX G

NATIONAL BOARD OF EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Australian Committee on TAFE Curriculum should be requested to undertake a national study of the curriculum content of trade and secretarial courses to examine:
 - the adequacy with which they meet the needs of smaller firms for a broad range of skills and competences as opposed to the needs for more specialised and intensive skill acquisition of large firms; and
 - the extent to which they provide opportunities for the learning of business management, interpersonal and financial skills.
2. The Commonwealth-State Training Advisory Committee (COSTAC) working party review of group employment and training schemes being conducted in 1990 should be requested to examine guidelines on schemes' use of large firms and to report on ways in which these can be modified in order to encourage large firms to increase access to training by small firms.
3. In the future provision of additional Government funds to larger group schemes, priority should be given to funding for the employment of training specialists rather than administrative staff. This should encourage schemes to acquire expertise in the development of training programs for small businesses and in monitoring small firms' training needs.
4. Consideration should be given to providing group schemes with designated funds to allow them to provide supplementary training to apprentices and trainees, particularly in business management and financial skills where these are not provided by TAFE.
5. Consideration should be given to extending the development grants provided to employer and union organisations under the Australian Traineeship System to allow a wider range of training needs monitoring to occur within smaller firms and to allow these organisations to act as training brokers between small and large firms.

6. Guidelines for the provision of funds to off-the-job training centres under the CRAFT program should be amended to include a requirement for the provision of places to employees of smaller firms.
7. The National Industry Extension Service within DITAC should be requested to develop a training program for those who provide financial advice to small business, such as accountants and bank managers, to increase their awareness of available training courses and opportunities and to improve their capacity to give advice on the linking of business development and skill development.
8. The Department of Employment, Education and Training should be requested to develop training modules for group scheme managers and field officers to increase their ability to advise small businesses on the availability of appropriate business and financial advisory services.
9. COSTAC should be asked to report on current practices within TAFE on the assessment and recognition for purposes of advanced standing of knowledge and skills gained within the workplace and of how these practices might be improved and extended.
10. ESFC should initiate discussions with TAFE systems to institute policies on the provision of training for small businesses in a manner and at times that take account of their special circumstances and needs.