Background to the Short Course senior syllabuses in Literacy and Numeracy

November 2017
1 Introduction

The Short Course senior syllabuses for Literacy and Numeracy complement the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy in Years P–12. The syllabuses provide teachers with advice about courses of study that meet the requirements of the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF)\(^1\) Level 3 in literacy or numeracy. Students who attain a C grade or above in a Short Course demonstrate literacy or numeracy competencies equivalent to ACSF Level 3.

These syllabuses are designed for students who are already performing at least at ACSF Level 2; they are not intended to be used by schools to develop literacy or numeracy retrieval courses.

Students may enrol in one course or both, simultaneously or sequentially. Students who do not achieve a C grade or above may repeat the course.

Each syllabus is designed to be delivered over 55 hours and contains general advice about learning and assessment in literacy or numeracy.

Schools may implement these syllabuses at any stage during Years 10, 11 and 12. Schools may develop a course for:

- students who want to meet the Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) literacy and/or numeracy requirements but do not wish to study senior English or Mathematics subjects in Years 11 and 12
- Year 10 students who want to meet the QCE literacy and/or numeracy requirements before enrolling in senior English or Mathematics subjects in Years 11 and 12
- students in the senior phase of learning at risk of not achieving the QCE literacy and numeracy requirements through other means
- students in the senior phase of learning as a stand-alone course of study
- students in any semester of Year 10 as an integrated component of the English or Mathematics courses of study
- disengaged or at-risk students as part of individualised learning programs.

Schools may offer the courses in timetabled school time or deliver them after school. Schools may also facilitate courses delivered in partnership with non-school providers.\(^2\)

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\(^2\) This arrangement is subject to the requirements of Chapter 9 (Part 2) and/or Chapter 10 (Part 2) of the Queensland Education (General Provisions) Act 2006.
Figure 1: Ways of using the Literacy and Numeracy Short Course senior syllabuses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 10</th>
<th>Year 11</th>
<th>Year 12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complementary course to meet QCE requirements</td>
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<td>OR</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>As part of an individualised learning program</td>
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<td>OR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stand-alone Short Course</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delivered over a year as part of a normal school day or after school</td>
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<td>OR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Embedded in English or Mathematics in Year 10</td>
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2 Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF)

The ACSF provides a consistent national approach to identifying and developing the core skills required in three domains of communication: personal and community, workplace and employment, and education and training. The framework is broadly based on the National Reporting System (NRS), a mechanism for reporting outcomes of adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy provision (Coates et al. 1995). While the NRS was primarily designed as a reporting tool, the ACSF has been designed as a generic framework with applications in a wider range of contexts.

2.1 Background

A draft version of the ACSF was published in December 2008 and trialled with many different learners in diverse contexts, including community and workplace based training, senior secondary, vocational education and training, and higher education. The final version of the ACSF was released in 2012.

The ACSF is informed by:

- a broad range of theoretical understandings
- an analysis of current accredited curriculum documents and relevant frameworks
- ongoing input and advice from key stakeholders, including experienced adult language, literacy and numeracy practitioners from across Australia
- the knowledge and experience of the project team, who have drawn on their national and international experience in the fields of assessment, verification, curriculum and professional development.

The Short Course senior syllabuses in Literacy and Numeracy are based on the final version, and complement and support the theoretical underpinnings of the framework.

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2.2 Key features

The ACSF describes **five core skills** — learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy. These skills are essential for individuals to participate effectively in our society. They are interwoven into all parts of our lives, being directly or indirectly linked to the physical, social and economic wellbeing of individuals; workplace productivity and safety; community interaction and capacity; and ultimately to Australia’s economic and community wellbeing. The ACSF reflects contemporary use of English in Australia.

The ACSF describes these skills across three interactive dimensions:

1. **five levels of performance** ranging from one (low-level performance) to five (high-level performance)

   Each performance level in each core skill is described in detail to enable teachers to make consistent decisions about an individual’s performance at any point in time. The five levels represent milestones along a continuum of performance and are described using:
   - indicators — statements that provide an overview of exit performance at each level of each of the five core skills
   - focus areas — strands within each indicator against which performance features are organised
   - performance features — detailed descriptors of what an individual is able to do at each level
   - sample activities — specific examples of what an individual might be able to do at a particular level of performance within each of the domains of communication.

2. **four performance variables** that may influence a person’s performance at any time across any of the core skills:
   - the nature and degree of support available
   - familiarity with context
   - complexity of text
   - complexity of task.

   Performance in the five core skills is not static. The ACSF recognises that a student’s level of performance in any skill is influenced by familiarity with the texts, tasks and context; the complexity of texts and tasks; and the degree and nature of support available.

3. **three domains of communication** that are broad contexts within which each core skill may be used:
   - personal and community (expressing personal identity, achieving personal goals, and understanding and interacting within the wider community)
   - workplace and employment (activities and tasks that an individual may be involved in as a member of an organisation or while working alone)
   - education and training (any form of structured learning).

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4 ibid, p. 5
2.3 Why are the Short Course syllabuses based on Level 3 of the ACSF?

In 1999, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) released the ‘Adelaide declaration on national goals for schooling in the twenty-first century’, which stated, among other things, that students should attain the skills of numeracy and English literacy, such that they are numerate and able to read, write, spell and communicate at an appropriate level. In 2008, MCEETYA affirmed in the ‘Melbourne declaration on educational goals for young Australians’ that ‘literacy and numeracy and knowledge of the key disciplines remain the cornerstone of schooling for young Australians’.

‘In reporting the Australian results of the 2006 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLS), the Australian Bureau of Statistics stated that of the five internationally identified levels of literacy and numeracy, the survey developers regarded Level 3 as the “minimum required for individuals to meet the complex demands of everyday life in the emerging knowledge-based economy”.

It is generally regarded that Level 3 of the ACSF best describes the functional literacy and numeracy skills required for life after school, for work and further education. This level has been cited extensively by government bodies and industry in discussion about literacy and numeracy.

Level 3 is used in setting and illustrating literacy and numeracy requirements for the award of three senior secondary certificates of education apart from Queensland: South Australia, Tasmania and New South Wales.

In January 2016, the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) Board endorsed the ACSF Level 3 descriptions in reading, writing and numeracy as reference points for the SACE literacy and numeracy benchmarks. The Office of Tasmanian Assessment, Standards and Certification (TASC) states that students ‘aiming for an award that meets TCE [Tasmanian Certificate of Education] standards requirements should be demonstrating the core skills at ACSF Level 3 (or above) in reading and writing (to meet the everyday adult reading and writing standard) and/or in numeracy (to meet the everyday adult mathematics standard)’. In NSW, the minimum literacy and numeracy standard for the HSC is also set at ACSF Level 3.

As stated previously, the ACSF identifies four performance variables. As ACSF Level 3 best describes the intersection of these variables with the standards of learning and features of schooling characteristic of the senior phase of learning, and is consistent with the literacy and numeracy requirements of other jurisdictions, this level was chosen as the basis for the Short Courses.

9 ibid
10 www.sace.sa.edu.au/documents/652891/ab3299cb-1c09-4552-801a-cb9f57a93d65
11 www.tasc.gov.au/students/courses/english/erw210114
Table 2 compares ACSF Levels 2, 3 and 4 for each of the identified factors that may influence performance.

Table 2: Factors influencing performance at ACSF levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACSF performance levels</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 2</strong></td>
<td>• may work with an expert or mentor where support is available, if requested</td>
<td>• familiar and predictable contexts</td>
<td>• simple familiar texts with a clear purpose</td>
<td>• explicit tasks involving a limited number of familiar steps</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• limited range of contexts</td>
<td>• familiar vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
<td>• processes include identifying, simple interpreting and simple sequencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 3</strong></td>
<td>• works independently and uses own familiar support resources</td>
<td>• range of familiar contexts</td>
<td>• routine texts</td>
<td>• tasks involving a number of steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• some less familiar contexts</td>
<td></td>
<td>• may include some unfamiliar elements, embedded information and abstraction</td>
<td>• processes include sequencing, integrating, interpreting, simple extrapolating, simple inferencing and simple abstracting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• some specialisation in familiar/known contexts</td>
<td>• routine texts</td>
<td></td>
<td>• includes some specialised vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 4</strong></td>
<td>• works independently</td>
<td>• range of contexts, including some that are unfamiliar and/or unpredictable</td>
<td>• complex texts</td>
<td>• complex task organisation and analysis involving the application of a number of steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• initiates and uses support from a range of established resources</td>
<td>• some specialisation in less familiar/known contexts</td>
<td>• embedded information</td>
<td>• processes include extracting, extrapolating, inferencing, reflecting and abstracting</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• includes specialised vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• includes abstraction and symbolism</td>
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2.4 How do the Short Course syllabuses use ACSF?

The Short Course senior syllabuses in Literacy and Numeracy have been derived from the ACSF by aligning the objectives, learning experiences, assessment and standards with the ACSF indicators (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Aligning the Short Course syllabuses with the ACSF

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACSF learning indicators</th>
<th>Indicator 1</th>
<th>Indicator 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active awareness of self as a learner, learning orientations and approaches to the management of learning:</td>
<td>• goal setting</td>
<td>• strategies for designing, managing and monitoring learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• designing and negotiating learning pathways</td>
<td>• finding, managing and evaluating learning resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• self-awareness, strengths, weaknesses, ability to reflect on performance, learning style</td>
<td>• transferring prior knowledge and skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• dispositions — active engagement in learning and degree of resilience</td>
<td>• selection and application of cognitive strategies to assist learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• constructing knowledge</td>
<td>• social construction</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• metacognition — designing, managing learning process.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Acquisition and application of practical strategies that facilitate learning:

- strategies for designing, managing and monitoring learning
- finding, managing and evaluating learning resources
- transferring prior knowledge and skills
- selection and application of cognitive strategies to assist learning
- social construction.

Short Course objectives

Learning

Learning strategies are part of the metacognitive processes that students need to plan, monitor, evaluate and regulate their thinking and learning. Students’ individual orientation towards learning and the range of strategies they can draw on to assist their learning are crucial to helping them adapt to rapidly evolving environments.

By the conclusion of the course of study, students will:
- plan, implement and adjust processes to achieve learning outcomes
- apply learning strategies.

Subject matter and suggested learning experiences/activities

Summative assessment

C grade or above for the reporting standard