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and Workplace Relations

Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) Program 2023

Delivery of the Skills for Education and
Employment (SEE) Program 2023 -
Stakeholder responses to consultation

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Context and consultations

Project rationale

The Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program provides language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy (LLND) assessment and training to eligible job seekers, with the aim of improving their ability to participate in further training or employment.

In December 2021, the former Department of Education, Skills and Employment (the department) released a discussion paper ([Discussion Paper – Delivery of the SEE Program 2023](#)). This discussion paper sought stakeholder feedback on possible changes to the SEE program to inform future procurement, contracting, funding and delivery arrangements for the next contract period, with current contracts being extended to 30 June 2024.

The changes aim to:

- improve client access and participation
- increase program outcomes with a greater focus on quality LLND training
- improve performance reporting while also reducing administrative and compliance burden on providers where practicable
- ensure the program is responsive.

Consultation approach

The discussion paper informed the consultation process and was held between December 2021 and February 2022. The department received **28 submissions** in response to the discussion paper, **72** people attended **3 workshops** and **872 SEE program participants completed a participant survey**. Current SEE providers submitted feedback on the existing payment model. Twenty-seven questions were used to guide written submissions.

Summary of key themes

Overall, stakeholder responses were positive and highlight the important role the SEE program plays in providing foundation skills training to eligible Australians. Key themes have been identified below and arranged according to the chapters in the discussion paper. The themes include:

- access and engagement
- training delivery
- the payment model
- performance
- quality assurance
- challenges and opportunities for future program design.

Access and Engagement

Approximately 16% (151,000) of job seekers on the employment services caseload self-identify with English language needs or have completed less than Year 10 schooling. This indicates these job seekers may need LLND training to gain a job or as a pathway to further study.

Participants in the program identified Employment Service Providers (ESPs) as critical to job seekers accessing the program, including:

- 67% found the program through their ESP
- 17% had support from a SEE program provider
- 8% found out about the program from friends or family
- 5% found information about the SEE program on the internet or from SEE program promotional material.

The reliance on ESPs to correctly identify job seekers who need LLND training and then refer them to the SEE program was raised as an issue to accessing and engaging with the program.

Suggestions to improve the referral pathway for job seekers included:

- Making the SEE program the first-choice program for job seekers with LLND needs by incentivising or mandating SEE as an activity.
- Improving ESP understanding of the SEE program through clear and explicit marketing that promotes the benefits of the SEE program to ESPs and job seekers.
- Making referrals less complex and with fewer steps for errors.
- Giving providers the ability to refer job seekers.

Of those job seekers that commence in the program, approximately 19% leave within the first 50 hours of training. According to SEE program data, since July 2021, 3,521 clients withdrew from training within the first 50 hours. The major reasons included:

- 26% failed to attend or could not be contacted
- 19% found employment
- 16% reported personal challenges
- 13% health reasons
- 5% other training.

Stakeholder feedback supports this data and offers some of the possible reasons for early withdrawal from the SEE program, including:

- Barriers that prevent client participation, such as health, mental health, special needs or caring responsibilities.
- Lack of support such as counselling or pathway guidance services, including from referring agencies, to help providers manage client barriers and ensure they continue to engage and participate in training.
- Incorrect referral into the program.

- Training options that do not match client goals. Training has a narrow focus on workplace literacy in Vocational Education and Training for 'job seekers' rather than preparation for different types of training and work.
- Emphasis on assessment in initial stages of delivery, both the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) and unit of competency, which is demotivating for some clients.
- Clients find employment.

To better engage participants, stakeholders suggested:

- The program should better recognise individual goals and circumstances. Participants reported studying in the SEE program for a range of reasons. Sixty percent of job seekers are seeking to gain skills for work or get a job and 40% to be able to communicate and participate community activities.
- The program needs more effective engagement strategies. There was strong support for funding a 'case manager' to support clients transition to the SEE program to help manage some of the non-vocational barriers to training.
- Funding be provided to assist clients with assistance for childcare, transport, and access to ICT (both access and devices).
- More flexible training hours to allow greater access for those who have work or childcare commitments during daytime training hours.
- Delivery of non-accredited training to support the transition of clients into the program.
- Improved access to work placement/work experience to help engage learners.

Training delivery

The SEE program provides job seekers with high quality and relevant LLND training. Critical to its ongoing success is the type of training and how it is delivered. Training is currently provided through accredited courses with client progress measured and reported against the ACSF.

Training

There was general support for SEE providers to continue to prescribe courses based on the needs of clients, local community, and employment need.

Stakeholders supported the inclusion of non-accredited training with 92% of respondents indicating it is beneficial in providing support to vulnerable cohorts, as it:

- increases engagement for those who have had poor past experiences with formal education
- allows for tailored training to address specific barriers, including training to address areas of high LLND need, before enrolling in an accredited training pathway that has a narrower focus and assessment requirements
- provides flexibility to deliver 'tasters' or pathway courses to transition clients in and out of training.

However, feedback also identified the need for strong regulation and quality assurance of non-accredited training, including an application process and quality assurance against a quality framework.

Many stakeholders indicated that VET contextualised delivery (the delivery of LLND supported mainstream VET qualifications) is valuable but raised several challenges with delivery. This included that the training:

- is not always appropriate for SEE clients as they have low LLND skill levels
- may not match a client's individual goals
- costs more to deliver as the model of delivery is resource heavy requiring both an LLND teacher and a VET trainer, as well as extensive resource adaptation.

These observations were also reflected in the participant survey. Participants reported they enrolled in the SEE program primarily to improve LLND skills, with small numbers (17%) indicating they would be interested in re-enrolling in a VET contextualised course.

Distance delivery

Distance training delivery is considered a separate delivery model in the current contract and delivered by a single SEE program provider. Stakeholders were asked to consider how distance training could be delivered in the future.

Stakeholders viewed face-to-face as the most appropriate delivery mode for clients in the SEE program. This was corroborated in the participant survey with 62% of participants reporting they prefer face to face tuition in a classroom, and a further 16% indicated they preferred a mixture of online home learning and in class learning.

Eighty per cent of stakeholders felt all SEE providers should be allowed the option of distance delivery as it:

- enables greater access for clients who need LLND support, including for those who have caring responsibility and/or work commitments
- allows for more relevant and localised delivery.

Stakeholders also felt that distance delivery should:

- be supported by strong quality assurance measures to ensure high quality delivery
- remain distinct from 'Mixed Mode' (blend of face to face and at home/online learning)
- be delivered through paper based as well as online options, ensuring access and equity.

Project funding

Innovative project-based funding was introduced to the SEE program in 2021. Stakeholders support the continued use of project-based funding in the SEE program, with specific suggestions including:

- providing 'seed' funding to support providers to set up in new delivery areas or in thin markets
- introducing transition style programs (into or out of training) to act as a bridging course into the SEE program or into other training, or to address local employment needs

- providing funding for resource development, including for teacher professional development
- supporting VET contextualised delivery and pre-apprenticeship training.

Teacher qualifications

The SEE program is committed to delivering high quality LLND focused training to its clients and recognises that appropriately skilled and experienced teachers and assessors are critical to the success of the program.

Teacher qualifications are mandated in the accredited training products delivered by SEE providers, and as a registered training organisation (RTO), providers must meet these requirements in order to deliver training. There was strong feedback the department should not mandate minimum teacher qualifications which might be different, and in addition, to the training product's requirements.

It is worth noting many courses delivered in the SEE program have higher qualification requirements than mainstream VET. This is a result of the adult language, literacy and numeracy or Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) specialisation needed to deliver and assess certain courses.

Mandating teacher qualifications could present challenges to securing teachers in an increasingly thin market where training providers are experiencing difficulty attracting and retaining appropriately qualified staff.

Instead of a minimum qualification requirement, stakeholders suggested the program could better support the teaching workforce through the provision of professional development opportunities (including scholarships), better resource development, in-class support, and cross provider collaboration.

Payment Model

The current payment model, adopted in 2013, is an input-based model.

The majority of stakeholders were concerned about the need for the payment model to provide adequate funding for the:

- specific needs of SEE program cohorts
- administration of the program
- activities required to deliver a quality program.

Stakeholders indicated:

- the future payment model should be straightforward to administer and readily understandable by the department and providers
- a preference for a simple hourly-based model that includes administrative costs in the price, based on scheduled hours, not attended hours.

Providers were open to a standard price, noting that the SEE program has additional administrative and contractual costs that need to be accounted for in the payment model. These include:

- liaison with referring agencies
- marketing and promotion

- quality assurance audits
- contractual reporting requirements
- file monitoring and assessments
- administration and management costs including data entry
- cohort-related support costs and low engagement and absenteeism
- infrastructure, IT, teachers, and resource development costs.

Stakeholders indicated that payments based on milestones or student outcomes do not represent actual delivery costs and are not appropriate for the SEE program. They suggested that an outcomes-based payment model would be unsustainable in terms of its financial viability and cash flow.

Stakeholders raised concerns that an outcomes-based model would incentivise providers to push clients to achieve outcomes before they were ready, as they would only be able to receive payment when clients achieved outcomes.

Stakeholders also identified other risks of an outcomes-based payment model including:

- Misalignment with the actual program outcomes, as the long-term goal is an increase in a client's LLND skills as measured against the ACSF, and this is not always captured with Unit of Competency (UoC) outcomes.
- Administrative burden of monitoring and reporting milestones.

Stakeholder responses to loadings, based on for example cohort or location, were mixed.

- 20% of responses indicated that loadings were not appropriate for SEE as clients can have multiple barriers, and some clients do not disclose barriers as they feel a sense of shame or embarrassment about having LLND need.
- Feedback suggested administering different loadings would be administratively burdensome and complex. It was suggested that a single loading be incorporated into the price of SEE to reflect the needs of the general cohort.
- Loadings were supported for thin markets, particularly in regional and remote areas which tend to have lower referral numbers and smaller class sizes.
- Other suggestions included support for loadings for small group training, support staff such as tutors and multilingual staff and for counselling or pathway guidance officers.

Performance

The department measures the performance of the program and providers.

The key outcome for the program is that learners show improvements in their LLND skills. The Government measures this by assessing the proportion of learners in the SEE program who increase one or more levels on the ACSF or the Digital Literacy Skills Framework (DLSF). The target, 80% or higher, and the result rating is reported annually in the Portfolio Budget Statements and the Annual Report. In 2021-22, the 80% target was exceeded, where 96% of all assessed participants progressed one or more levels against the ACSF or DLSF.

Provider performance is measured through a provider performance framework that includes key performance indicators and contract compliance.

The discussion paper flagged the introduction of a new performance and compliance framework for the next contract. It also proposed a series of new key performance indicators.

There was a strong view from stakeholders that the current model places a heavy administrative burden on service delivery providers.

Feedback suggested that future KPIs:

- consider the administrative impact future KPIs, with a view to reducing this burden
- measure activities within a provider's control
- not duplicate the role of the Australian Skills Quality Authority's (ASQA).

Stakeholder feedback indicated that the current measure of performance based on learner progress against the ACSF is not appropriate as a KPI. Stakeholders indicated ACSF assessment in the program caused undue burden for the program's teachers and learners and that an indicator to measure a program's 'quality' should be more holistic. Stakeholders recommended a number of changes, including:

- removing the 200-hour rolling ACSF assessment requirement and aligning ACSF assessment to a provider's academic schedule, or when learners are ready to progress
- only assessing a learner's ACSF at the pre-training assessment and at the completion of training
- measuring student progress by mapping UoC achievement to the ACSF, or through a portfolio or formative approach to measuring LLND increase against the ACSF.

Stakeholders suggested measurement of service delivery effectiveness could be achieved through capturing outcomes, such as if a learner:

- enters work or further training (including returning to SEE)
- increases employability including capacity to undertake job search
- develops soft skills or social and personal indicators, such as confidence.

Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance (QA) forms part of the department's performance and program management process. The QA provider performs three roles for the program:

- ensuring quality delivery of the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) and LLN focussed training
- professional development – ACSF workshops and resource development for SEE providers and their LLN workforce
- resource development.

Stakeholder feedback suggested that although the role of the QA provider is valuable, there is a need to reduce the administrative burden associated with QA.

Stakeholders also suggested that the department can improve the QA process by reducing the number of file verifications that focus on accurate assessment against the ACSF, and to review the way ACSF progress is reported including the frequency of measuring ACSF progress.

Suggested changes that would improve the role and process of the QA provider included:

- taking a risk-based approach to QA to reduce administrative and reporting burden
- considering a more holistic QA process with the goal of continuous improvement and 'best practice' in service delivery
- encouraging a more collaborative partnership between the QA provider and SEE program providers focusing on professional and resource development
- an increased focus on the provision of professional and resource development.

Procurement

The department outlined its approach to procurement, through an open tender process, and sought feedback on the length of contracting arrangements and the use of the multi-provider model.

Strong support was given for longer contract duration as it provides stability allowing for better management, including resource/staff development, which flows on to the 'end users' with specific examples including:

- retention and growth of staff through professional development
- development of resources and delivery
- better management and promotion of the program
- long term program benchmarks/outcomes through can be defined by the department through analysis/research.

Mixed feedback was received about allowing providers, especially smaller niche providers, to tender for specialist service delivery. Some feedback indicated it would be more engaging as it would meet learner need, while other feedback suggested it was already part of SEE delivery, and that SEE providers already provide service to learners from all backgrounds within their contract regions.