

Workplace/Workforce Literacy Feasibility Project Final Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Submitted to Literacy Nova Scotia

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Executive Summary¹

Literacy Nova Scotia (LNS) is reviewing its role in literacy and essential skills related to the workplace and to workforce development. The Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES) has asked LNS to broaden its scope to include more activities related to essential skills and workforce development. LNS is undertaking this review as part of the updating of its strategic plan.

LNS engaged Brigid Hayes to undertake this review. During March and April 2010, she consulted with the key players in workplace literacy/education and workforce literacy. She also looked at documents to find out what was happening at the federal and provincial levels. She did this to understand who was doing what, where the gaps are, and what would be a useful role for LNS.

The landscape has changed significantly over the past few years. The Federal Government has devolved much of its responsibility for literacy and employability training to the province. At the same time, it has increased expectations for LNS, specifically regarding workplace and workforce literacy as well as essential skills.

The province has a well-developed strategy using its existing resources as well as new resources transferred from the Federal Government. The traditional division between adult education/literacy and workplace education and essential skills is reflected in the Department of Labour and Workforce Development's (LWD) structure and its relationships. Other bodies such as the Atlantic Council of Ministers of Education (CAMET) and the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) have become more engaged in literacy and essential skills.

In terms of workplace literacy and essential skills, the province through its Workplace Education Initiative is decidedly the key player supported by the Association of Workplace Educators of Nova Scotia (AWENS) (another important player as identified by most key informants) and the NS Partners Committee.

¹ This Executive Summary is based on a longer report prepared for Literacy Nova Scotia which contains a more detailed environmental scan, overview of key players, and analysis. The full report is available from LNS.

In terms of workforce literacy, there are more players. Community-based literacy organizations and others at the community level provide programming for the unemployed and those transitioning to the workplace.

The terrain is fairly well marked out in terms of workplace education (including adjustment) and adult literacy. It is less clear when it comes to employability programming.

Two silos exist in NS – workplace education and adult literacy. Organizations, practitioners, and to a certain extent, government officials typically stay within one of these silos.

Workplace Education organizations, practitioners, and some government officials remain sceptical about LNS's capacity to become involved in workplace education, and perhaps workforce development, given its use of the word "literacy". Others stressed the need for LNS to demonstrate that it truly understands the various approaches and nuances that relate to workplace education – the workplace is a different environment and not every literacy practitioner can make the transition. There was a sense among some key informants that LNS and community-based organizations were merely changing their terminology to "literacy and essential skills" without changing their practice.

LNS is seen as representing community-based organizations and involved in the "adult literacy" issue. Making the shift to include issues related to the workplace and essential skills will require a re-branding and a re-positioning for the organization.

There is respect for the organization and its staff and LNS is seen as a strong partner. The review found that LNS has a good reputation for supporting community-based literacy organizations, disseminating information, and providing professional development. Its traditional support has come from the Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning (NSSAL) that includes community-based organizations, the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC), and some school boards. Its scope has been defined as "adult literacy" which in Nova Scotia has traditionally excluded workplace education.

In order to expand its focus to include workplace literacy and essential skills, LNS will need to work in partnership with the existing players. However, LNS can take advantage of its existing strengths as it designs activities to support workforce literacy.

These are challenges that LNS will need to face as it moves closer to embracing the employability needs of learners. By examining its communications, recruiting members who reflect this new focus, building a workforce focus into existing activities, LNS will begin to put its intentions into action. LNS's examination of the possibilities, the development of new partnerships (or the re-vitalization of old ones), and a more inclusive approach is clearly the future direction.

The full report makes recommendations for next steps. It proposes a role for LNS, activities, and a communications plan.

Recommendations

Having reviewed the relevant documents and spoken with the key informants, the consultant is proposing a series of recommendations. These recommendations are presented for discussion and debate.

Positioning LNS on the issue of workforce literacy and workplace education

1. LNS should play a role in workforce literacy and workplace literacy/education by building on its already existing strengths. This role should be based on partnership development, providing support to community-based organizations, undertaking research and knowledge exchange activities, training practitioners, and promotion.
2. LNS should adopt a two-track approach to the issues of workplace and workforce literacy/education. The issues of workplace literacy/education should be placed on a slower track. LNS should immediately embrace the notion of workforce literacy, including a focus on employability skills and their link to literacy and essential skills.
3. LNS should continue to support workplace literacy/education in a general way. It should continue to actively acknowledge the primary role of the NS Workplace Education Initiative (LWD) and AWENS in workplace education.
4. In the short term, LNS should develop an action plan to implement the two-track approach to issues of workplace and workforce literacy. The action plan should be based on three areas of activity – support to community-based organizations

(including professional development), research, and knowledge exchange activities – as outlined earlier in this report.

Specific Actions

5. LNS should incorporate topics related to workforce literacy into its professional development offerings. These topics would include training in how to use the Essential Skills profiles, using authentic materials, and employability skills development. It should consider partnering with AWENS in this regard.
6. LNS should move to reflect its commitment to workforce literacy by actively seeking out membership and involvement from the key players in workforce development (such as Work Activity, Career Resources Centres), and ensuring its publications and promotional material reflect this commitment.
7. LNS should offer to work with the Adult Education Division to ensure that the Adult Learning Curriculum reflects an employability and essential skills focus.

Partnership Development

8. LNS should meet with LWD – Adult Education and Skill Development Divisions; AWENS; and the NS Partners Committee – to launch a conversation about LNS's directions regarding workplace education.
9. LNS should develop a parallel relationship with Skill Development Division as it already has with Adult Education Division.
10. LNS should consider asking the NS Partners Committee and the NS Federation of Labour to nominate, respectively, the business and labour representative to the LNS Board of Directors. This would signal an acknowledgement of the linkages to the NS Partners Committee and the partnerships it has already forged with business and labour.

Communications

11. LNS should continue to use language that positions “adult literacy” very broadly as a continuum of levels as described by the International Adult Literacy Skills Survey². This language should be nuanced for various audiences in ways that communicates the concept without inadvertently creating barriers to understanding. This is especially critical in the area of workplace education where the term “literacy” is not used.
12. LNS should ensure that its communications clarify “who we are and what we do” and reflects its approach to literacy and essential skills.
13. LNS should communicate this broader approach to its federal and provincial partners and key organizations in writing and through in-person presentations.
14. LNS should provide OLES with this report so there is a clear understanding of the parameters within which LNS works and the roles of the other players.
15. LNS should take the lead in communicating the concept of essential skills and integrated approaches to literacy and employability skill development to the community-based learning networks and others in the wider employability field.
16. LNS should consider developing a discussion paper to stimulate a provocative discussion and thinking about literacy, workplace literacy and essential skills—what these terms mean to people in practice and how practitioners engaged in adult literacy and workplace literacy/education can learn from each other and build on what they have in common.

² “The ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities at home, at work and in the community, to achieve one’s goals and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.” Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). *Literacy, Economy and Society: Results of the First International Adult Literacy Survey*. 1995.

Appendix 1 – Key Informants

<p>Bobbi Boudreau Senior Corporate Policy Analyst Office of Policy and Priorities Government of Nova Scotia</p>	<p>Joe Brown Project Coordinator One Journey: Work & Learn Skills and Learning Branch Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Workforce Development</p>
<p>Marjorie Davison Director of Policy Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Workforce Development</p>	<p>Margan Dawson Executive Director Association of Workplace Educators of Nova Scotia</p>
<p>Ann Marie Downie Executive Director Literacy Nova Scotia</p>	<p>Karen Gatien A/Director Adult Education Division Skills and Learning Branch Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Workforce Development</p>
<p>Peter Gillis Executive Director Valley Community Learning Association</p>	<p>Jayne Hunter Project Manager Literacy Nova Scotia</p>
<p>Grail Sangster Executive Director Guysborough County Adult Learning Association</p>	<p>Shawnna Sequeira Workplace Education NS Manager, Skill Development Apprenticeship Training & Skill Development Division Skills and Learning Branch Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Workforce Development</p>
<p>Linda Wentzel Workplace Education Coordinator Nova Scotia Federation of Labour</p>	