Appendix A: Bilateral Implementation Plan – National Skills Agreement Policy Initiatives

PRELIMINARIES

1. This implementation plan (Plan) is made between the Commonwealth of Australia (Commonwealth) and New South Wales under the 2024–2028 National Skills Agreement (the NSA) and should be read in conjunction with the NSA.

2. The Plan gives effect to the policy initiatives contained in the National Skills Agreement, which has been guided by the vision statement and principles endorsed by National Cabinet on 31 August 2022. It gives effect to the Parties' shared commitment to high-quality, responsive and accessible vocational education and training (VET) to boost productivity and support Australians to obtain the skills they need to prosper. The Plan will support governments to work collaboratively and purposefully towards national priorities, while preserving flexibility for States and Territories to align local skills supply with demand.

3. Once executed, this implementation plan and any updates agreed with the Commonwealth, will be appended to the NSA and will be published on the Commonwealth's Federal Financial Relations website (https://federalfinancialrelations.gov.au).

4. This implementation plan is expected to expire on 31 December 2028 (in line with the NSA), or on completion of the initiative, including final performance reporting and processing of final payments against milestones.

5. For each policy initiative, this Plan outlines the actions to be delivered, how progress will be measured and how the actions are expected to contribute to the overarching objectives of the NSA.

6. In considering bilateral Implementation Plans, the Commonwealth recognises that states are at different starting points across the different policy initiatives. Implementation plans may be updated at any time with the written agreement of the Commonwealth and the relevant State or States, including to incorporate additional policy initiatives, or additional activities under specific policy initiatives (Clause A90 refers).

7. The implementation plan does not cover the National TAFE Network initiative, as states will jointly develop a multilateral implementation plan for this initiative for agreement with the Commonwealth (Clause A122 refers).

In all public materials relating to this policy initiative, New South Wales will acknowledge the Commonwealth's contribution with the following statement:

Ensuring Access to Foundation Skills Training is a joint initiative between the Australian and New South Wales governments.

ENSURING ACCESS TO FOUNDATION SKILLS TRAINING (Clause A104 to A111 of the NSA)

In accordance with clause A110 of the NSA, the Parties commit to working cooperatively with other jurisdictions to develop a 10-year national foundation skills strategy to be completed by the end of 2024.

The Parties will review this implementation plan after the 10-year national foundation skills strategy is settled, and update it if required, to effectively deliver on the strategy (clause A111 refers). This includes funding for any actions agreed by SWMC in accordance with clause A105b of the NSA.

(a) Foundation skills assessment and referral that delivers a 'no-wrong door' experience for foundation skills learners (clause A107 refers).

'No wrong door' aims to ensure that Australians seeking foundation skills training are supported to access the training that meets their needs. This means, where someone seeks help with foundation skills, they can get that help and are not turned away or made to face onerous eligibility assessments. The Commonwealth has committed to achieving this ambition through an expanded redesigned Skills for Education and Employment program which includes a dedicated First Nations stream. Successful implementation requires Commonwealth and state/territory foundation skills offerings to work together in a co-ordinated way focused on meeting the needs of learners.

1. Current approach to people seeking foundation skills training

Foundation skills training is currently delivered under the NSW Department of Education's Smart and Skilled Entitlement Full Qualifications and Part Qualifications Programs, and through the Adult and Community Education (ACE) Program.

Currently, learners enter government-funded foundation skills training in NSW through a range of entry points but primarily through TAFE NSW, ACE providers, and other Smart and Skilled providers. Some learners with foundation skills needs are referred by community organisations and businesses while others self-refer especially to TAFE NSW and ACE, who are the main providers of foundation skills training. In terms of assessment, NSW government-funded providers assess foundation skills as required by the *Standards for Registered Training Organisations 2015* and NSW contractual arrangements. Assessment can include pre-screening, diagnostic assessment and student interviews. In some cases, Training Packages include foundation skills training in delivery of the qualification.

Government-funded foundation skills training in NSW covers a range of nationally accredited language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy courses and units of competency, and non-accredited foundation skills support through the ACE Program. There are varied and tailored approaches to supporting learners, including ACE Outreach Support Officers who focus on reducing stigma and engaging disadvantaged and disengaged learners into ACE courses. Supports are adapted to the specific needs and objectives of the learner. Government-funded foundation skills training in NSW is intended to support learners into employment or further training. The ACE Program also has a further objective to support learners to engage more fully in the community and broader society.

2. Developing an enhanced approach to 'no wrong door'

Through Smart and Skilled and the ACE Program, NSW already has a 'no wrong door' approach in that any learner who meets the eligibility requirements for government-funded training can access no-fee foundation skills training. With the NSA, there is an opportunity to review and enhance our current approach by identifying and implementing improvements to connections and transfers between NSW and Commonwealth providers and programs to ensure a 'warm referral'.

Our review will include consultations with stakeholders (RTOs; our regional offices; NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group; and consumer representatives if appropriate) on current entry points

and processes that connect learners to the services they need. We will review the current approach, identify any shortfalls or gaps, and develop and implement an enhanced 'no wrong door' policy and processes.

In reporting back to the Commonwealth, NSW will demonstrate what changes are being made and once implemented will monitor impact of the changes through further consultations with stakeholders.

Expected outcomes include insights into which assessment approaches work best, what are the challenges to conducting assessments, how to conduct assessments sensitively, how to reduce the stress inherent in most assessments as well as identification of new approaches and opportunities for engaging potential foundation skills learners.

NSW can share lessons from its consultation on 'no wrong door' with the Commonwealth and other States and Territories.

NSW accepts the 'no wrong door' approach may involve an upside risk of increased demand for foundational skills training, particularly when combined with the actions under this implementation plan to support the ACE sector. While the amount of additional training cannot be quantified it does represent a complementary commitment by NSW to the funding provided by the Commonwealth under this agreement.

2.1 Actions

- Consult with key stakeholders on current entry points and processes –October to December 2024.
- Review current entry points and processes– January/February 2025.
- Develop an enhanced 'no wrong door' approach and delivery plan by March 2025 for rollout in 2025-26.
- Roll out starting in April 2025 in line with NSW government-funded training providers' contract cycle for implementation from 1 July 2025.

2.2 Assessment

NSW funded providers assess foundation skills needs as required by the RTO Standards and NSW contractual arrangements. Broadly, NSW providers of foundations skills courses use a range of assessment methods including screening and diagnostic interviews, paper testing and various online tools to cater for the individual and the very varied needs of the learners needing support.

NSW will consult with our providers on current assessment approaches for foundation skills to inform the overall approach to assessment under the NSA. An underpinning principle of our approach is to have a range of assessment methods that facilitate assessment tailored to the needs of the individual learner, as we know that highly formalised assessment can be a deterrent to some learners to seek foundation skills support.

Actions:

Please note that development of the 'no wrong door' policy will not impede delivery of foundation skills training under ACE. The 'no wrong door' approach will initially focus on ACE and TAFE pathways and further consultation outlined above will determine how the broader VET market is encompassed.

- Consult with RTOs on current assessment approaches – by 31 December 2024
- Review existing approaches and develop an account of the overall approach to assessment for this Specific Policy Initiative (SPI) – by 31 March 2025

- Subject to the above, consider trials or other activities to be undertaken post 1 July 2025.

(b) Provide no- or low-fee access to foundation skills training in the state's VET and Adult and Community Education (ACE) (or equivalent) systems, for learners who have been assessed as at or below Australian Core Skills Framework and/or Digital Literacy Skills Framework Level 3 (clause A108 refers).

3. No- or low-fee access

No-fee foundations skills training has been NSW policy since the introduction of Smart and Skilled in 2015 and is part of the core fee policy settings. NSW currently provides no-fee access to foundation skills training through Smart and Skilled Entitlement Full Qualifications and Part Qualifications and the Adult and Community Education (ACE) Programs. The current policy is ongoing, noting that the NSW VET Review currently being undertaken is a comprehensive examination of the NSW VET sector. The NSW VET Review is due to report in August 2024 and the Commonwealth will be informed if there are any changes to NSW foundation skills fee policy settings.

To access no-fee foundation skills training through Smart and Skilled and ACE, learners need to be 15 years old or over, no longer at school, living or working in NSW and an Australian citizen, permanent resident, humanitarian visa holder or New Zealand citizen. In addition to the above criteria, learners who access foundation skills under the ACE program also need to identify as meeting disadvantage criteria or be living in a rural or remote area.

Government-funded foundation skills training in NSW covers a range of nationally accredited language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy courses and units of competency, and non-accredited foundation skills support through the ACE Program. This allows providers to tailor their support to learners. Anecdotal feedback suggests that the assessment requirements of the foundation skills training package are too onerous for some learners. Potentially, this could be an area of focus for the 10-year national foundation skills strategy.

The current system accommodates a limited amount of non-accredited and part qualification foundation skills training. The prospect of undertaking full qualifications in foundations skills can deter some low LLND learners, and some learners only require parts of a foundation skills course to achieve their desired goals (e.g. to be able to study or to enter employment). Stakeholders report that some learners return for further foundation skills training if they achieve their initial objectives.

The proposed ACE initiatives for the NSA below reflect the need for a range of foundation skills courses to meet the specific needs of learners.

(c) Activities that support the Adult Community Education sector or equivalent (clause A109a refers).

4. NSW ACE program

The NSW ACE program provides skills, support and training for today's workforce and everyday life. The ACE program delivers tailored and affordable education to provide equitable access to lifelong learning opportunities. This includes but is not limited to non-accredited foundation skills training.

Learners can access the ACE program in metro, regional, rural and remote areas and the program is targeted to local contexts. Community based adult and community education providers, including many Community College's deliver ACE courses, tailored to local needs.

NSW supports 31 ACE providers through the ACE program, providing payment by outcome-based grants. It funds ACE training programs for small and non-for-profit businesses and supports disadvantaged groups to participate in ACE training courses.

The ACE program currently provides flexibility for ACE providers to deliver units of competency of training, including foundation skills training units rather than full course enrolments. It also allows for non-accredited training delivery up to a 20% contract cap. There is an exception for First Nations and low LLND level learners who are excluded from the non-accredited training cap. The program is expected to provide pathways for learners into accredited and higher-level qualifications. Currently not all ACE providers deliver foundation skills, this is largely due to workforce availability and the current cap on funded places.

Outreach Support Officer (OSO) roles are currently funded until June 2025 and are focusing on engaging disadvantaged and disengaged learners into ACE courses. The OSO roles support ACE providers to identify need and tailor courses to meet foundation skills needs of community.

4.1 Actions

Action 1 - Increased access to foundation skills training	**Delivering improved access to ACE delivered foundation skills across NSW, with a focus on regional, rural and remote locations and regions with unmet demand**. This action is aimed at expanding reach of ACE providers to deliver additional foundation skills training. NSW notes that First Nations learners are a particular focus of this action and as such this action will include concentrated effort to procure First Nations ACE organisations to deliver training under this SPI. To ensure additional foundation skills training opportunities flow to community in a timely manner, the current ACE program and providers will be utilised for training delivery in the first year where demonstration of providers ability to deliver additional foundation skills training can be provided. NSW will engage with stakeholders about current gaps in foundation skills training delivery. Consideration will be given to both state and Commonwealth programs, and an approach designed to implement from 2025 onwards that will: • identify ACE providers not currently contracted to deliver foundation skills under the ACE program; and/or • identify current ACE providers that have capacity to expand the geographical reach of foundation skills training delivery, and • complement, not duplicate current foundation skills programs. NSW will also target inclusion of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to deliver foundation skills training under this SPI and/or to support training delivery to First Nations foundation skills learners by other ACE providers. NSW acknowledges capacity building may be required to support First Nations RTOs to meet required criteria for ACE sector inclusion. Where possible these organisations will be supported through the workforce

	development activities under this SPI to build capability. Partnerships between ACCOs and existing ACE providers may also be considered where capacity building and improved training delivery to First Nations people are the focus. Stakeholder engagement will seek to address: • what foundation skills interventions will look like, • appropriate funding mechanisms, • how success will be measured, • what wrap around services are required by foundation skills learners, • if/how wrap around services are funded under this initiative, • metrics for reporting, • suitability of timebound vs skill level measure of outcomes, • how to incentivise delivery of training in regional, rural and remote areas.
Objective	To increase the NSW ACE sector's delivery of foundation skills to meet demand in locations previously underserviced and to provide support for priority cohorts. Analysis undertaken by the NSW Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) and commissioned research undertaken by Nous Group demonstrates underservicing of foundation skills training in regions across NSW. The objective of this activity will be to support access to foundation skills primarily in under and non-serviced regions.
Delivery Method	NSW will develop a plan for ACE provider procurement to increase access and oversee implementation. Existing provider eligibility criteria for ACE Program – see above. Existing learner criteria for ACE program with addition of specifying LLND assessment at ACSF level 3 or below.
Expected reach and additionality	Expansion of providers and locations to be identified through above processes with a focus on gaps in locations of current foundation skills delivery. Note that ACE workforce capability development action below will support this training expansion. It is anticipated that this funding will provide approximately 2,500 additional training units per year. Training units may include units of competency under foundation skills qualifications and/or non-accredited training, where the non-accredited training meets agreed guidelines and is specifically related to LLND skill development. It is anticipated guidelines will be similar to the Commonwealth's 'The non-accredited training framework - For adult LLNDE learning contexts' released as part of the tender for the Skills for Education and Employment Program 2024-2028. Development of these guidelines will assist to determine the range of non-accredited training that will be included for delivery by providers.

Amount of investment - Commonwealth	Amount of investment – State	Planned start date	Planned end date
$10.8M	N/A Current ACE program will continue to include delivery of Foundation Skills training.	Existing ACE providers contracted within 3 months of signing to deliver additional units of training. Procurement of new providers by 30 June 2025. Further procurement to increase access may occur in subsequent years, depending on evaluation outcomes and success of first two procurement activities.	31 December 2028

Action 2 - Improving the foundation skills workforce	**<u>ACE workforce capability development</u>** NSW will consult with stakeholders to develop workforce capability development programs that may include: • Training and Education (TAE) scholarships with a focus on the First Nations workforce • Foundation skills upskilling for existing ACE trainers • Foundation skills specialist training for new trainers and supported by mentoring • Professional development training for existing foundation skills trainers • Projects to develop and share foundation skills resources and best practice. • NSW will seek to implement workforce capability programs specifically for new/existing First Nations facilitators Programs included will be designed to maximise the number of current ACE workforce that can benefit from these programs. It is difficult prior to stakeholder engagement to identify the number of trainers expected to participate.

	It should be noted that many of the above activities may be addressed in the 10-year Foundation Skills strategy. Once the strategy is developed and nationally funded activities are agreed, this plan will be reviewed.		
Objective	To enhance the capability of the ACE workforce to deliver foundation skills training. To ensure that foundation skills training is delivered by qualified trainers who have access to high quality, consistent training resources and specialist advice where required.		
Delivery Method	Stakeholder consultation will be used to identify the type of workforce capability activities required to support the sector deliver increased foundation skills training. An appropriate funding program will subsequently be developed for ACE providers to meet these training needs. Where possible, ACE providers will be prioritised to deliver foundation skills upskilling, professional development and TAE delivery, but TAFE NSW or alternate providers may need to be utilised. Current and planned trainers employed by NSW ACE providers will be eligible. NSW will develop guidelines for TAE scholarships.		
Expected reach and additionality	**Reach:** existing and new ACE providers and their trainers. **Additionality:** NSW currently support the ACE workforce through the Teaching and Leadership program, where Community Colleges Australia (CCA) and ACE providers propose and deliver projects to meet sector needs. In 2023/2024 one of the projects funded was a collaboration between CCA and industry experts to develop a foundation skills professional development program which will be piloted commencing 26 August 2024. It is acknowledged that this project will require additional funding to continue to develop the resources required to effectively support ACE trainers, which may be one of the initiatives funded under this action. This action is expected to result in: • An increased number of ACE trainers who can identify learners' foundation skills need and deliver foundation skill training for learners, • Existing foundation skills trainers benefiting from ongoing professional development. • New foundation skills trainers receiving mentoring. • ACE providers being supported to increase capability of delivering foundation skills.		
Amount of investment - Commonwealth	**Amount of investment – State**	**Planned start date**	**Planned end date**
$2.0M	N/A NSW currently provides $229,000	1 October 2024	31 December 2028

	funding each year to projects that support Teaching and Leadership uplift to the ACE sector. These projects are proposed and delivered by either ACE providers or CCA. This funding will continue with its sector wide focus, while this action will focus on trainer level support and uplift specific to foundation skills delivery.		

Action 3 - Phase 2 of Outreach Support Officer (OSO) roles *Note: this will be subject to evaluation of current ACE OSO program*	**Phase 2 ACE Outreach Support Officer program:** NSW originally introduced OSO roles as a response to flood recovery in the NSW Northern Rivers region, followed by expansion to Western NSW after flood events there. The roles were then expanded to all ACE providers and continuation of funding offered to flood affected providers. There is no NSW funding available to continue the program so roles are scheduled to cease on 1 July 2025. NSW will direct its efforts to meeting increases in overall NSW investment in foundation skills training that result from the combination of 'No Wrong Door', focused outreach, initiatives to increase workforce supply and capability. There are currently 40 full time and part time roles across the state with 8 Identified roles. The equivalent FTE is ~28. NSW plans to evaluate effectiveness of full-time vs part-time and regional, remote vs metro results to ensure the roles are funded where most needed and at an appropriate FTE level. It is anticipated efficiencies will be discovered to better target and fund these roles. This action is expected to result in: • Phase 2 - Reiteration of Outreach Support Officer program, implemented from 1 July 2025 – 31 December 2028, to support ACE providers engage disadvantaged learners and support them through training. • An updated funding approach informed by evaluation of the current OSO program. • The OSO program targeting attraction and support of learners who require foundation skills training. • Improved culturally appropriate support mechanisms for Identified OSOs and their ACE managers.

	• Improved understanding of the supports OSOs are providing disadvantaged learners and how these can be included/improved. Currently available data on the OSO program achievements from November 23 – July 2024 period*: • Number of learners supported: 3,343 • Enrolments attributed to OSO: 1,880 • Learners referred to wrap-around services: 449 • Number of training completions supported: 1,974 • Number of First Nations learners supported: 515 • Number of CALD learners supported: 1,090 • Number of learners with Disability: 626 • Number of learners with low LLND: 1,228 • Number of learners under 24: 688 • Number of learners that identify with more ACE categories of disadvantage: 1,574 • Number of Vulnerable Youth: 365 • Number of learners experiencing Domestic Violence: 365 *source: self-reported OSO data		
Objective	To deliver Phase 2 ACE Outreach Support Officers to engage and support disadvantaged learners through foundation skills training.		
Delivery Method	NSW to assess effectiveness of current OSO roles and outcomes achieved and if supported will launch revised Phase 2 program for 1 July 2025 to continue/and or increase outreach/student support officer program. The ACE OSO program will continue to focus on engaging disengaged learners who meet ACE program eligibility.		
Expected reach and additionality	**Reach:** Additional locations/target cohorts to be informed by the initial data available from April 2024. **Additionality:** Phase 2 program of OSO roles from 1 July 2025.Analysis of current program achievements will inform need for roles continuing and/or expanding. NSW plans to evaluate effectiveness of full-time vs part-time and regional, remote vs metro results to ensure the roles are funded where most needed and at an appropriate FTE level.		
Amount of investment - Commonwealth	**Amount of investment – State**	**Planned start date**	**Planned end date**
$9.0M	*N/A*	1 July 2025 for commencement of Phase 2 Outreach Officer program	31 December 2028

Action 4 - Development fund	**Development fund**

	NSW will establish a Development fund to support additional projects, activities or research identified by Adult & Community Education providers and the department that aligns to and responds to the ACE Strategy and 10-year Foundation Skills Strategy (agreed in consultation with the sector). This may include activities that support innovation in foundation skills training development and/or delivery. This may also include paid marketing campaigns targeted at reaching dis-engaged learners and breaking down stigma associated with accessing foundation skills training. NSW will share insights from these projects with the Commonwealth and other jurisdictions to support their work in this space.		
Objective	Work with the sector to identify sector needs that will prepare them for the upcoming 10-year Foundation Skills strategy. Improve the reach of ACE into communities of dis-engaged learners.		
Delivery Method	NSW to engage with ACE sector and key stakeholders, (e.g. CCA, Reading Writing Hotline (RWH) to identify: • opportunities to identify unmet or emerging community demands, • projects that deliver innovation in foundation skills training development and delivery, • projects to trial wrap around supports that assist disadvantaged learners address non-vocational barriers to engagement		
Expected reach and additionality	This action is aimed to provide flexibility to respond innovatively to priorities identified through the NSW VET Review final report, NSW Skills Plan, and emerging issues identified through development of the 10-year foundation Skill strategy. Reach and additionality will be confirmed after stakeholder consultation and addressed in the program guidelines developed to support this action.		
Amount of investment - Commonwealth	**Amount of investment – State**	**Planned start date**	**Planned end date**
$1.0M	N/A	1 July 2025	31 December 2028

Reporting

a) Quantitative: Develop a set of indicators that will reflect No Wrong Door approach (e.g. number of entry points, reporting of referrals).

   Qualitative: Describe how the entry points are different from the current situation supported by student and provider testimonials.

b) Quantitative: number of no fee commencements for ACE and Smart and Skilled foundation skills training delivered in NSW and reported for ACE sector, TAFE NSW and private RTO delivery.

Qualitative: student and RTO testimonials on the impact of no fee access.

Action	**Quantitative**	**Qualitative**
Action 1 - Increased access to foundation skills training	Number of foundation skills accredited training commencements. Number of foundation skills accredited training completions. Number of foundation skills non- accredited training commencements. Number of foundation skills non-accredited training completions. Reported by cohort, ACSF level and regional breakdown Number of First Nations ACE providers delivering foundation skills. ACE learner commencements in foundation skills training by key cohorts, including regional/rural, First Nations learners	Case studies from key stakeholders including but not limited to; • Learners, • Trainers, • Providers, • Community organisations, • Peak bodies (i.e RWH, CCA), on improvements experienced in access to foundations skills as a result of action 1.
Action 2- Improving the Foundation skills workforce	Number of trainers upskilled to deliver foundation skills courses. Number of First Nations trainers trained/upskilled. Survey results of trainer satisfaction.	Case studies of benefit experienced by trainers. Case studies of trainer reported benefits to learners as result of this action.
Action 3- Extension of Outreach Support Officer roles	Number of ACE Outreach Officers recruited/retained. Number of learners engaged by and/or supported by OSO's, reported by key cohorts.	Case studies of outreach support achievements.
Action 4 - Development fund	Quantitative metrics as identified in projects funded.	Qualitative metrics as identified in projects funded

5. Contribution to the goals of the NSA

- **Effective pathways and transitions** – Development of No Wrong Door and ACE Program wrap around supports
- **Affordable courses** – No-fee foundation skills training
- **Accessible courses** – Expand ACE provider supply No Wrong Door; ACE Student Support Officers/Outreach Support; non-accredited foundation skills training
- **High-quality RTOs** - Capability development for the ACE foundation skills workforce; expanding of ACE providers to deliver foundation skills training
- **High-quality training** – Capability support for the foundation skills workforce
- **Expert educators and trainers** - ACE Student Support Officers/Outreach Support Officers; Capability support for the foundation skills workforce
- **Collaboration between governments and other stakeholders.** – Consultation on No Wrong Door and current assessment approaches. Co-lead the national 10-year foundation skills strategy.

6. Evaluation arrangements

6.1 Evaluation methodology

Action	Evaluation
Action 1 - Increased access to foundation skills training	Use a mixed methods approach (with the qualitative and quantitative indicators set out in the Reporting section above) to evaluate effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness. Assess the initiative against its objectives and the following questions*: • What lessons were learned during implementation? • What adjustments were made along the way? • What results were observed, and were they as expected? • How did results vary across cohorts, particularly for priority groups like First Nations and women? • How cost-effective was the initiative?
Action 2: Improving the Foundation skills workforce	Use a mixed methods approach (with the qualitative and quantitative indicators set out in the Reporting section above) to evaluate effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness. Assess the initiative against its objectives and the following questions*: • Is the program reaching ACE workforce as intended? • How many trainers have received training under this program? • What types of training? • How satisfied are participants? • How do participants feel the training will benefit their learners?

Action 3: Extension of Outreach/Student Support Officer roles	Use a mixed methods approach (with the qualitative and quantitative indicators set out in the Reporting section above) to evaluate effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness. Assess the initiative against its objectives and the following questions*: • Is the program reaching learners as intended? • Do the results vary across cohorts? • What adjustments were made along the way? • How satisfied are learners with OSO support?
Action 4: Development fund	Use a mixed methods approach (with the qualitative and quantitative indicators set out in the Reporting section above) to evaluate effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness. Assess the initiative against its objectives and the following questions*: • Did the projects achieve their individual objectives?
	*further development of evaluation questions will be undertaken during 2024/25 with the departments CESE.

6.2 Timing

- Interim evaluation will commence from start - mid 2026, with findings to be reported in Milestone 5 on 30 September 2026.

6.3 Insights on jurisdictional foundation skills assessment tools

- NSW will share insights on the usage of assessment tools in the context of the broader assessment process, e.g. including interviews and further diagnostic screening.
- NSW will share these with the Commonwealth and States and Territories but not publicly, given assessment tools are commercial tools.

6.4 How NSW will disseminate findings

- NSW will disseminate findings in a short report to the Commonwealth, other States and Territories and NSW ACE, TAFE NSW and other Smart and Skilled providers who deliver foundation skills.

6.5 How NSW will action findings

- NSW will review initiatives that are already being delivered and update as needed;
- use evaluation findings to inform roll out of future tranches, where applicable; and
- use learnings to inform possible changes to Smart & Skilled and ACE programs.

1. GENERAL PROVISIONS

This section sets out considerations for implementation arrangements across all relevant Policy Initiatives under Part 6 of the NSA. States are to outline how the following apply across all relevant Policy Initiatives:

7. Linkages

7.1 Foundation Skills linkages to other NSA Policy Initiatives

- **Closing the Gap,** may provide additional investment in First Nations VET training delivery and this SPI will support foundation skills capability for First nations learners to support their ability to undertake further qualifications and/or support their completion of qualifications if co-enrolled. ACE providers in NSW traditionally achieve higher completion rates for First Nations learners.
- **Improved completions – especially for priority groups,** as above, increased foundation skills for disadvantaged cohorts can support improved completions when learners undertake higher level qualifications. ACE providers in NSW traditionally achieve higher completion rates for disadvantaged learners.

7.2 Foundation Skills linkages to existing NSW programs/activities

Smart and Skilled Entitlement Full Qualifications and Targeted Priorities Prevocational and Part Qualification Program, NSW Adult and Community Education (ACE) program including ACE Outreach/Student Support Officer pilot

8. Dependencies/pre-conditions required for success

- Strong training provider engagement to identify opportunities to deliver improved access to foundation skills training.
- Availability of ACCO's that meet ACE criteria
- Attracting new foundation skills trainers, including First Nations trainers, and supporting existing ACE trainers to upskill in foundation skills.
- Identify and target learners who need foundation skills support.
- Learner-centred approach to referral.
- Address stigma in a learner-centred way.

9. How student experience will be incorporated into design, implementation and evaluation of actions

9.1 Design and implementation

- Workshops with current ACE foundation skills learners will be undertaken to better understand:
    - personal motivation for learning,
    - how stigma can be broken down,
    - how can foundation skills training be better tailored for individual needs,
    - what type of learning works best (non-accredited/accredited).

- The NSW approach to No Wrong Door will be learner-centred to improve the learner experience of accessing and having positive experience of LLND support in NSW.
- Delivering improved access to foundation skills across NSW will improve the learner experience by making it easier for learners to access foundation skills support.
- Workforce capability development initiatives will improve the learner experience through access to trainers with better skills to provide foundation skills support and shared foundation skills resources.
- The Outreach and Student Support Officers initiative will improve the learner experience by supporting ACE providers to identify need and tailor foundation skills courses to meet the needs of the community.

9.2 Evaluation

- Evaluation will be informed by student experiences e.g. the qualitative indicators outlined in the Reporting section above.
- To make sure our initiatives enrich the student experience, NSW will:
    - Review initiatives that are already being delivered, based on initial evaluation findings; and
    - use findings to inform future program implementation.

10. Engagement arrangements

Engagement on the draft ACE Strategy and targeted engagement with CCA for further development of activities.

11. Reporting

The Parties will work to develop reporting arrangements on the progress of implementation, information to support public communication on policy initiatives, and deliverables/milestones.

The Commonwealth will work with states to develop templates:

- A short six-monthly status update will be required on all policy initiatives in a single report. This report will include how implementation/delivery is tracking and will identify any emerging issues or risks. The first of these reports will be due by the end of March 2025 and subsequent reports will be due at the end of March and the end of September for the life of the NSA.

- Performance reporting on milestones will be due by 31 March and 30 September each year until the cessation of this Agreement, or the final payment is processed. As part of the performance reporting, states will provide evidence of what has been delivered in the reporting period. Payments will be processed once performance reports have been assessed and accepted.

MILESTONES AND PAYMENTS

2023-24 (from 1 January 2024)

The Commonwealth will make payment subject to the performance report demonstrating the relevant milestone has been met. After the initial payment, second and subsequent milestone payments will be assessed and processed in the following reporting period. Performance reporting will be due by 31 March and 30 September each year (if six monthly reporting in any given year) or by 30 September each year (if annual reporting in any given year) until the cessation of this Agreement or the final milestone is processed. As part of the performance reporting, New South Wales will provide evidence of what has been delivered in the reporting period. Payments will be processed once performance reports have been assessed and accepted.

2024-25

Policy initiative	**Milestone 1: 12 September 2024** (indicative date)	**Evidence**	**Payment Value (Commonwealth funded)**
Ensuring Access to Foundation Skills Training	Commonwealth acceptance of bilateral implementation plan	Bilateral implementation plan agreed with the Commonwealth	1: $2.280 million
Policy initiative	**Milestone 2: 31 March 2025**	**Evidence**	**Payment Value (Commonwealth funded)**
Ensuring Access to Foundation Skills Training -	Commonwealth acceptance that NSW has implemented processes to increase access to foundation skills training, including: • contracting ACE program providers to deliver additional foundation skills training in under-serviced and non-serviced regions (demonstrated by contracts with ACE providers to deliver	Report signed by New South Wales senior official with responsibility for skills that outlines key activities of the Ensuring Access to Foundation Skills Training from September 2024 to March 2025, which includes information on: Increased access to foundation skills, including:	2: $1.250 million

	additional foundation skills training, number /dollar value of additional training places funded). • Delivering workforce development support for existing and new ACE trainers to deliver foundation skills, (demonstrated by training schedule, number of trainers signed up to undertake training and/or professional development activities, identification of RTO's delivering training). • Reviewing current ACE Outreach Support Officer program and establishing a new program for ACE Outreach Support Officers (demonstrated by findings from review of current program • Establishment of development fund program (demonstrated by program guidelines, reporting on stakeholder consultation)	• Progress to date on increased access to foundation skills training • The number of additional foundation skills training units contracted to be delivered by ACE providers under this initiative • Results of stakeholder engagement on development of guidelines of non-accredited training and training program design, including wrap around services. Workforce development program, including: • evidence of stakeholder engagement and sector input in developing workforce development activities, • the number of ACE trainers in process of professional development and what training they are receiving. Outreach Support Officer program, including: achievements, recommended improvements to program and planned procurement process. Development Fund program, including the program guidelines and details of any projects funded.	

2025-26

Policy initiative	Milestone 3: 30 September 2025	Evidence	Payment Value (Commonwealth funded)
Ensuring Access to Foundation Skills Training	Commonwealth acceptance that NSW has implemented further processes to increase access to foundation skills training, including: • a procurement program that increases access to foundation skills by increasing ACE provider numbers or number of regions with training delivery and which specifically targets inclusion of First Nations ACE providers, to be demonstrated by (procurement documents to sector, example deed/funding agreement, names of additional providers contracted to deliver foundation skills, names of First Nations ACE providers approved to deliver training/or plan on improved First Nations representation, number of training units/$ value of additional training places to be funded) • delivering workforce development support for existing and new ACE trainers to deliver foundation skills, (as demonstrated by training schedule, number of trainers signed up to undertake training and/or	Report signed by New South Wales senior official with responsibility for skills that outlines key activities of the Ensuring Access to Foundation Skills Training from April 2025 to September 2025, which: • includes a report detailing progress to date on increased access to foundation skills training • reports number of ACE providers delivering foundation skills – before implementation and after. • reports on number of additional foundation skills training units delivered by ACE providers under this initiative • includes the number of ACE trainers upskilled or in process of professional development and what training they are receiving. • provides detail of new Outreach Support Officer program contracts awarded and program guidelines (subject to evaluation of current program supporting continuation) • provides detail on projects funded under Development Fund and any outcomes achieved to date	3: $3.375 million

	professional development activities, identification of RTO's delivering TAE units). • new program guidelines for ACE Outreach Support Officers, and the number and distribution of roles • performance indicators agreed with the sector • development fund program updates, as evidenced by details of programs funded		
Policy initiative	**Milestone 4: 31 March 2026**	**Evidence**	**Payment Value (Commonwealth funded)**
Ensuring Access to Foundation Skills Training	Commonwealth acceptance that NSW has implemented processes to increase access to foundation skills training, as evidenced by: • reporting of training units delivered • ACE Outreach Support Officer program achievements for the period 1 July 2025 – 31 December 2025, measured against performance indicators agreed with the sector • Workforce Development program activities for the period until 31 December 2025, as evidenced by, number of trainers signed up to undertake training and/or professional development activities	Report signed by New South Wales senior official with responsibility for skills that outlines key activities of the Ensuring Access to Foundation Skills Training from October 2025 to March 2026, which: • reports the number of additional foundation skills training units delivered by ACE providers under this initiative • reports any additional procurement activity undertaken to improve access to foundation skills • reports on outcomes achieved by Outreach Support Officer (OSO) program, including: o Number of learners supported, o Geographical distribution of learners, o Qualitative case studies of OSO impact	4: $2.500 million

		• reports on workforce development program, including number of ACE trainers upskilled or in process of professional development and what training they are receiving.	

2026-27

	Milestone 5: 30 September 2026	**Evidence**	**Payment Value (Commonwealth funded)**
Ensuring Access to Foundation Skills Training	Commonwealth acceptance of increased delivery of foundation skills training, as evidenced by: • reporting of training units delivered, • evaluation plan, including evaluation methodology and draft interim evaluation report • ACE Outreach Support Officer program achievements for the period 1 January 2026 – 30 June 2026 • reporting of activities undertaken through Workforce development and Development fund actions for the period 1 January 2026 – 30 June 2026	Report signed by New South Wales senior official with responsibility for skills that outlines key activities of the Ensuring Access to Foundation Skills Training from April 2026 to September 2026, which: • reports the number of additional foundation skills training units delivered by ACE providers under this initiative • reports any additional procurement activity undertaken to improve access to foundation skills • reports on planned evaluation process and any draft evaluation findings available, • reports on outcomes achieved by Outreach Support Officer (OSO) program, including: ○ Number of learners supported, ○ Geographical distribution of learners,	5: $3.625 million

		○ Qualitative case studies of OSO impact • reports on program activities, including: ○ workforce improvement, the number of trainers receiving upskilling, number of new trainers ○ development fund, programs funded and results of programs	
Policy initiative	**Milestone 6: 31 March 2027**	**Evidence**	**Payment Value (Commonwealth funded)**
Ensuring Access to Foundation Skills Training	Commonwealth acceptance of increased delivery of foundation skills training, as evidenced by: • reporting of training units delivered, • Reporting program activities undertaken through Workforce development and Development fund actions for the period until 1 July 2026 - 31 December 2026, • ACE Outreach Support Officer program achievements for the period 1 July 2026 – 31 December 2026.	Report signed by New South Wales senior official with responsibility for skills that outlines key activities of the Ensuring Access to Foundation Skills Training from October 2026 to March 2027, which: • reports the number of additional foundation skills training units delivered by ACE providers under this initiative • reports any additional procurement activity undertaken to improve access to foundation skills • reports on program activities, including: ○ workforce improvement -number of trainers receiving upskilling, number of new trainers ○ development fund – programs funded and results of programs	6: $2.750 million

		• reports on outcomes achieved by Outreach Support Officer (OSO) program, including: ○ Number of learners supported, ○ Geographical distribution of learners, ○ Qualitative case studies of OSO impact	

2027-28

Policy initiative	**Milestone 7: 30 September 2027**	**Evidence**	**Payment Value (Commonwealth funded)**
Ensuring Access to Foundation Skills Training	Commonwealth acceptance of increased delivery of foundation skills training, as evidenced by: • reporting of training units delivered • reporting activities undertaken through Workforce development and Development fund actions for the period 1 January 2027 - until 30 June 2027 • ACE Outreach Support Officer program achievements for the period 1 January 2027 - until 30 June 2027	Report signed by New South Wales senior official with responsibility for skills that outlines key activities of the Ensuring Access to Foundation Skills Training from April 2027 to September 2027, which: • reports the number of additional foundation skills training units delivered by ACE providers under this initiative • reports on program activities, including: ○ workforce improvement -Number of trainers receiving upskilling, number of new trainers ○ development fund – programs funded and results of programs • reports on outcomes achieved by Outreach Support Officer (OSO) program, including:	7: $3.020 million

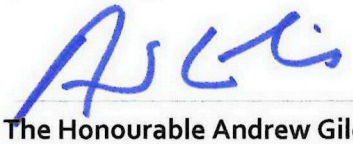
		○ Number of learners supported, ○ Geographical distribution of learners, Qualitative case studies of OSO impact	
Policy initiative	**Milestone 8: 31 March 2028**	**Evidence**	**Payment Value (Commonwealth funded)**
Ensuring Access to Foundation Skills Training	Commonwealth acceptance of increased delivery of foundation skills training, as evidenced by: • reporting of training units delivered • reporting activities undertaken through Workforce development and Development fund actions for the period 1 July 2027 - until 31 December 2027 • ACE Outreach Support Officer program achievements for the period 1 July 2027 - until 31 December 2027	Report signed by New South Wales senior official with responsibility for skills that outlines key activities of the Ensuring Access to Foundation Skills Training from October 2027 to March 2028, which: • reports the number of additional foundation skills training units delivered by ACE providers under this initiative • reports on program activities, including: ○ workforce improvement -Number of trainers receiving upskilling, number of new trainers ○ development fund – programs funded and results of programs • reports on outcomes achieved by Outreach Support Officer (OSO) program, including: ○ Number of learners supported, ○ Geographical distribution of learners, ○ Qualitative case studies of OSO impact	8: $2.500 million

2028-29

Policy initiative	**Milestone 9: 30 September 2028**	**Evidence**	**Payment Value (Commonwealth funded)**
Ensuring Access to Foundation Skills Training	Commonwealth acceptance of increased delivery of foundation skills training, as evidenced by: • Reporting of training units delivered, • ACE Outreach Support Officer program achievements for the period 1 January 2028 - until 30 June 2028	Report signed by New South Wales senior official with responsibility for skills that outlines key activities of the Ensuring Access to Foundation Skills Training from April 2028 to September 2028, which: • reports the number of additional foundation skills training units delivered by ACE providers under this initiative • Reports on outcomes achieved by Outreach Support Officer (OSO) program, including: ○ Number of learners supported, ○ Geographical distribution of learners, ○ Qualitative case studies of OSO impact	9: $1.500 million
Ensuring Access to Foundation Skills Training	Milestone 10: 31 December 2028	Report signed by New South Wales senior official with responsibility for skills that outlines key activities of the Ensuring Access to Foundation Skills Training from October 2028 – December 2028	Nil

The Parties have confirmed their commitment to this schedule as follows:

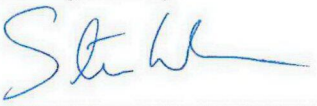
Signed *for and on behalf of the Commonwealth of Australia by*



The Honourable Andrew Giles MP
Minister for Skills and Training

12 September 2024

Signed *for and on behalf of the State of NSW by*



The Honourable Steve Whan MP
Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education

6 September 2024