



Tertiary Education Commission
Te Amorangi Mātauranga Matua

Employer information pack

The Workplace Literacy Fund

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Overview of workplace literacy

“We’re doing this because we get fewer mistakes, we get a safer environment, we have more committed staff, less staff turnover and more cross-skilling, people who can back up if someone’s away. In the longer term, we’re totally committed to training staff. If we can get all our staff up to level 2 on the Qualifications Framework, we can only be better off.”

Every person who works uses literacy and numeracy skills. When we talk about ‘workforce literacy’ we mean all the skills people use including reading, writing, speaking, listening, problem solving, critical thinking, and numeracy.

Over a million New Zealanders need to strengthen their literacy skills to be able to fully participate in workplace tasks. At the same time, workplaces are always changing and your employees have to deal with new work practices and technologies.

Those employees who need to boost their literacy skills may be very good at their current jobs. So you may not realise how their skills impact on your business until new skills are needed. But the impact can be seen in:

- product wastage, errors and frequent reworking
- poor quality processes and documentation
- poor health and safety
- staff turnover and poor attendance
- poor communication with co-workers, clients and suppliers
- workers who are unwilling to take on changing responsibilities.

The Workplace Literacy Fund is one way to help these employees. The fund allows employers to build their employees’ literacy and numeracy skills to help develop a competitive, productive and flexible workforce.

Then you can apply to the Workplace Literacy Fund yourself. Or you can choose a provider to apply on your behalf. There are flexible criteria which means that you can get the kind of literacy training that will best meet the specific needs of your workplace.

This information kit gives further information and details.

What are the benefits?

Low workforce literacy limits the ability of New Zealanders to increase productivity, to innovate, and to meet changing customer and market demands. With higher literacy skill levels employees can gain higher-level technical skills and can make a more flexible contribution to your workplace.

You may also want to provide workplace learning opportunities for other reasons such as a commitment to a loyal workforce, a desire to ensure that existing staff can step up to new opportunities, and a desire to contribute to a local community.

Employers have told us:

“Investing in people is like buying a new machine. We will get a return on the investment. There will be a payback.

We are good employers... We've been in this community for a long time... We believe it would be helpful for the company and also for the individuals if they had better English.”

How to recognise low literacy levels in your workplace

“Ability of learners to communicate has definitely changed. It used to be a grunt and now it is a conversation... Staff meetings are now a two way communication.”

If your employees are not confident about their skills, they probably won't want others to find out. Often they will often have coping strategies to avoid drawing attention to their lack of skill in these areas. They may feel embarrassed and want to avoid being singled out. There are lots of possible indicators for this.

These include:

- writing that doesn't make sense (for example, key information missing, words in the wrong order or left out, lack of logic)
- data recording that is wrong or doesn't make sense
- details not recorded correctly (for example, telephone messages, orders, quantities, codes)
- spoken instructions not followed correctly
- production schedules, processes or systems not followed correctly
- incorrect estimates of quantities and weights.

To disguise reading and writing issues an employee may:

- want to take forms home to be filled in and returned the next day (“I'll take that home and bring it back tomorrow”)
- be reluctant to do any paper work and be late in filling in standard forms (“Oh, I haven't got time to waste doing that”)
- get others to write notes and fill in forms for them (“I've got dirty hands. I've left my glasses at home”)
- ask where they have to sign a form, without reading it (“Just tell me where to sign”)
- not apply for anything that requires a form to be filled in (“Nah, that's not my cup of tea”)
- be disruptive or quiet in situations where there is reading and writing to be done.

An employee who lacks confidence with speaking and listening may:

- rarely or never volunteer in group situations
- be confident on the job but very quiet in team meetings
- be reluctant to be involved in training (“I'm too old to go to school”)
- say they understand and nod in agreement but then don't do what is expected of them
- look blank or puzzled when you explain things but not ask for help
- constantly check instructions with their workmates, particularly those who speak their own language.

An employee with numeracy issues may:

- get confused when counting or recording numbers (“I can’t think with all that racket going on. I’ll do it later”)
- ask others to do the task (“Can you measure this up? I’ve just got to go …”)
- have poor timekeeping (“Is it that time already? I was too busy to notice”)
- be unable to understand production graphs (“Don’t worry about that, just tell me what I have to do”).

Employees whose first language is not English

Some of your employees may need help with spoken English or with reading and writing in English. A person may need help with spoken and/or written English language if they:

- can’t use the right technical terms for your industry
- are hard to understand
- watch people carefully for hand or body gestures, to get clues about what is being said
- have difficulty answering questions or need prompting to speak
- often ask people to repeat what they’ve said or to talk more slowly
- never volunteer answers
- are isolated because of language or cultural differences in the workplace.

There can be many good reasons why employees act in these ways that have nothing to do with low literacy skills. If an employee shows a number of these behaviours over time, however, it’s worth considering that they may have an underlying anxiety about their lack of literacy skills.

Most adults want to succeed. You can ensure your workforce is skilled for the future by helping people to learn and apply the literacy skills they need in your workplace.

What you can do about this

“All our key staff are learners from the programme. These internal promotions have lifted morale in the workplace, and obviously the company has benefited from savings in recruitment costs.”

There are many things you can do to improve the literacy skills of your employees.

Think strategically about your training investment

- Take a strategic look at your training and speak to your in-house trainer, ITO, or a workplace literacy provider about adding literacy and numeracy skills into your training plans.

Think about changes you can make to your current workplace practices

- Examine your workplace documentation to check it is appropriate for employees with low literacy or numeracy skills.
- Consider the literacy requirements of your induction process and of your health and safety training, to make sure employees will be able to understand them.
- Train supervisors and line managers in better communication.

Consider arranging for employees to get tailored tuition at work, funded through the Workplace Literacy Fund

- Ask for an initial needs analysis to find out the literacy requirements in your workplace.
- Apply to the Tertiary Education Commission for funding from the Workplace Literacy Fund or ask a provider to apply on your behalf.

Workplace literacy projects

The Workplace Literacy Fund provides funding for specific literacy projects. But before you can design a project, you need to understand what it should do.

Initial needs analysis

“The results of the needs analysis shocked the heck out of us. The needs analysis explained the significance of literacy to our business.”

If you are interested in a workplace literacy project, you first need to have a needs analysis done. This is fully funded by the Workplace Literacy Fund. It will include:

- a description of the specific literacy, language and numeracy demands of your workplace and your business
- a description of the specific literacy, language and numeracy needs of some of your employees
- evidence that will assist you to decide what you would like to do next.

If you decide to set up a workplace literacy project, the evidence from the initial needs analysis will inform the development of a programme tailored to your organisation's needs.

What a typical workplace literacy project might look like

Along with the needs analysis a workplace literacy provider will develop a tailor-made learning programme for you. This should be linked to the needs of your business and the current literacy skill levels of your employees.

A typical programme run by a workplace literacy provider will involve:

- an initial needs analysis
- recruitment of employee participants
- assessment of each participant's literacy, language and numeracy skills
- a tutor coming on site at agreed times
- weekly sessions for individuals or small groups of employees (usually in work time)
- course content that focuses on the literacy and numeracy requirements of your workplace
- a programme that runs for a minimum of 24 hours over 24 weeks
- regular liaison between the tutor and a key contact or champion in your company to help the programme run smoothly and ensure that the learning is relevant to your needs and to your employees.

You should note the funding is flexible and there may be other ways to build your workforce's literacy and numeracy skills that may better suit your requirements

How to choose a suitable provider

The Tertiary Education Commission funds a range of workplace literacy providers around the country. You can contact the TEC or talk to a provider in your region.

Tips for choosing a provider

- Look through the list of eligible workplace literacy providers: these providers will have met the TEC's provider eligibility criteria. Contact the TEC Service Centre on 0800 601 301 to find out more.
- Choose a local provider who is willing to understand your particular requirements and how your industry and workplace operate.
- Alternatively, you may want to work with a person or organisation that is not on the TEC list. This provider will need to apply to meet the TEC eligibility criteria.
- Meet with the provider in your workplace and discuss the kind of work carried out there, the nature of the workforce and your particular needs.
- Ensure that the provider is prepared to be flexible in planning and scheduling to meet your needs.
- Ask for references from other employers and check them.
- Choose a provider you'll be able to build and maintain an effective working relationship with.

How to apply for funding

The [TEC website](#) has all the forms you need for the Workplace Literacy Fund. Both you and your chosen training provider will need to fill in parts of each form.

Please note: employees need to be New Zealand citizens or permanent residents to receive funding. You also need to show a level of commitment to workplace-based programmes by one of the following:

- a financial contribution
- a contribution such as providing training facilities or releasing employees for training during work time, or
- a combination of both.

The application process

All providers of workplace literacy programmes (either your firm or an outside provider) must complete a provider eligibility application form which is kept on file for 12 months. Funding is allocated for two components. These are:

- an initial needs analysis
- a programme of learning.

Please mail all forms to:

TEC Service Centre, Private Bag 76-928, Manukau 2241

Applications can also be emailed to: servicecentre@tec.govt.nz but must be clearly identified as Workplace Literacy.

Flexibility of initiatives

Applications for other initiatives that aim to raise employees' literacy, language and/or numeracy skills that do not meet all the criteria for workplace literacy funding can also be considered if they:

- reach priority employees (Māori and Pasifika)
- demonstrate value for money
- demonstrate innovative and sustainable approaches to raising workplace literacy.

Getting advice and support

There are several organisations that can provide you with free advice and support about workplace literacy.

Industry Training Organisations (ITOs)

ITOs can help you identify and respond to literacy needs within the context of your industry. They can also discuss whole-of-organisation training needs, including literacy and assist you with making arrangements for your employees to engage in industry training. Finally, they can advise you on accessing the Workplace Literacy Fund.

Contact the ITO for your industry or the ITF on 04 894 3190 or see www.itf.org.nz

The TEC Service Centre

The Service Centre can provide information about the application process for the Workplace Literacy Fund, and a list of providers.

Contact the TEC on 0800 601 301 or email servicecentre@tec.govt.nz

Workbase

The National Centre for Workforce Literacy Development (Workbase) is an organisation funded by TEC to provide an advisory service to new and established workplace literacy, language and numeracy providers and to employers.

Contact Workbase on 09 361 3800 or see www.workbase.org.nz

The Upskilling Programme Office

The Upskilling Programme Office (UPO) is a business consultancy service provided by the Department of Labour. The UPO relationship managers work with employers to implement and sustain a culture of organisational learning relevant to individual business objectives.

The Upskilling Programme Office services include consultancy, funding guidance, facilitation of provider selection processes, data collection and employee communications strategies.

Contact the UPO on 04 915 4277, email info@upp.govt.nz or visit www.upp.govt.nz

What employers have said

The best way to find out about workplace literacy is to listen to other employers. Below are some more quotes from employers and managers whose workforce have participated in workplace literacy projects.

“Putting it [the benefits] down as dollars and cents profit is impossible, but logic and experience says that if people are better trained, are more multi-skilled, are able to work in an environment where English is the business language even if it is their second language, then they must be able to better participate in the company.”

“Telling an engineer what a problem was so he came down to the line with the right parts, so the line gets back up more quickly. Before [the programme] he couldn’t explain what had happened.”

“Staff attendance has also improved, which has a significant impact on productivity.”

“We put out another flyer referring to ‘computer aided’ learning. That created a lot of interest. They want to be able to work with their children and grandchildren. They can see computers are the way of the future.”

“One Thai man said he wanted to participate in the programme because he was “so lonely” not being able to speak English.”

“Workers are willing to say they don’t understand, instead of just nodding.”

Appendices

Appendix A - The benefits of raising the level of workplace literacy

Benefits	Reasons
Increased competitive edge	Developing technology, flatter management structures, lean manufacturing and globalisation drive the need for workers to have more complex skill sets.
Improved quality, cost-efficiency and product specification Reduced wastage and errors	Estimating, calculating and problem solving are key skills for more effective systems and operations.
Reduction in accidents and lost-time injuries Improved health and safety compliance	A culture of health and safety with responsibility for oneself and each other requires reading, understanding, and interpreting health and safety requirements.
Improved customer-focus and satisfaction	Strong communication skills (which include literacy, language and numeracy) make this possible.
Better on-the-job communication, cooperation and teamwork	Giving instructions clearly, clarifying understanding, using initiative and making decisions increase effectiveness
Adaptable workers with transferable skills, able to manage change, adapt quickly and use new technology	Literacy, language and numeracy are the basis of transferable skills. Low skills affect employability and career advancement.
Better understanding of the business Better morale	Every industry, workplace and job requires a specific set of literacy, language and numeracy skills. When these are identified and workers understand them, they are better equipped to understand the business.

Source: Business NZ, Council of Trade Unions, Industry Training Federation, and Workbase, 2007: *The Key Steps Forward for Workforce Literacy*

Appendix B: Provider eligibility criteria for the Workplace Literacy Fund

The Tertiary Education Commission has set criteria for funding providers of workplace literacy. Any provider that you select will need to apply for provider eligibility to the TEC and be registered with NZQA.

Provider eligibility looks for evidence that the provider has the mix of skills and experience that are associated with successful high quality provision. These include:

- evidence that the training programme includes deliberate teaching of literacy, language and numeracy
- a sustained programme. Evidence shows that literacy is unlikely to be improved in a workshop or short programme. At least 24 hours of learning over 24 weeks is an example of sustained learning.
- evidence that the requirements of the particular industry and workplace are understood
- using a coherent and planned approach to teaching
- using an assessment to understand what learners already know and tailoring learning for individual requirements
- using robust processes to assess learner progress
- using highly trained and supported educators.

