



Tertiary Education Commission
Te Amorangi Mātauranga Matua

Employer information pack

The Workplace Literacy Fund

Contents

Overview of workplace literacy	3
Benefits of workplace literacy and numeracy initiatives	4
What you can do	5
Workplace literacy fund	6
Getting advice and support	7
What employers have said	8
Appendix A	9

Overview of workplace literacy and numeracy

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

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

Those employees who need to boost their literacy and numeracy 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:

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

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

There are flexible criteria which mean that you can get the kind of literacy and numeracy training that will best meet the specific needs in your workplace. You can apply to the Workplace Literacy Fund yourself or you can choose a provider who is funded by the TEC.

This information pack provides further information on what you can do and where to go for support and advice.

"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."

Benefits of workplace literacy and numeracy initiatives

Low workforce literacy and numeracy limits the ability of New Zealanders to increase productivity, to innovate, and to meet changing customer and market demands.

With higher literacy and numeracy skill levels employees can gain higher-level technical skills and can make a more flexible contribution to your workplace.

Improving literacy and numeracy skills has numerous benefits:

1. Improved communication means better teamwork - and this means fewer mistakes and greater efficiencies.
2. It's a confidence builder. Employers report improvements in their workplaces as a result of the confidence gained on these courses.
3. It enables many to follow a pathway into qualifications more easily.
4. Knowing how to do their paper work reduces stress levels for both workers and their supervisors - and it provides better information for your company.
5. Knowing how to measure and weigh accurately leads to less wastage.
6. Knowing how to read signs and policies leads to safer workplaces.
7. Improved English naturally means better communication.

What you can do

There are many ways you can improve the literacy and numeracy skills of your employees. Think strategically about your training investment. Then discuss your options with your in-house trainer, ITO, a workplace literacy provider or the TEC Employer Advisor. They can advise you about adding literacy and numeracy skills to your training framework.

Employers have a number of options available when deciding how to offer their employees workplace literacy and numeracy support and training funded through the TEC Workplace Literacy Fund.

1. If you have less than 50 employees to be trained; you should approach a funded workplace literacy provider. These funded Tertiary Education Organisations (TEO's) will provide a workplace assessment, 40 hours of customised learning (per person) and reports to your business and the TEC.
2. If your organisation expects to train more than 50 employees you can either contact a TEO (as above) or apply directly to the TEC for funding from the Workplace Literacy Fund. The employer application requires a business case outlining how you will provide workplace literacy and numeracy skills for your employees.

If you seek direct funding from the Workplace Literacy Fund your organisation can:

- subcontract a TEO of your choice. Employers often begin with this option as it is lower risk and can assist develop greater understanding of the impact of literacy and numeracy on business, or
- use (suitably qualified) in-house capability. This option is likely to suit businesses that have already established training capability and who wish to include literacy and numeracy in ongoing training.

When applying directly your business should consider and outline how it plans to develop internal capability and capacity to meet its literacy and numeracy need in a sustained way. Some key questions to consider are:

- What literacy and numeracy skills do our employees need in order to do their jobs well and be more productive?
- What kind of training arrangements can the company sustain?
- What specialist literacy and numeracy expertise can you access, including for example a senior management leader to champion the project?
- Do your employees have the appropriate resources and support, including systems and processes, they need to do their job well?
- What training pathways do we need to put in place to support our employees?
- What professional development do our trainers and managers need to provide ongoing support to our employees?

For advice on your options and the process contact the TEC Literacy and Numeracy Employer Advisor.

Information and advice is available from the TEC service centre (0800 601 301) or on www.tec.govt.nz or www.literacyandnumeracyforadults.com.

Workplace Literacy Fund

The Workplace Literacy fund is targeted at strengthening employees' workplace literacy and numeracy skills. The funding framework enables organisations to focus on both improving their employee's literacy and numeracy skills and on achieving business benefits.

Workplace literacy funding is available for businesses in two ways.

1. Through a TEO already approved by the TEC
2. By applying directly to the TEC for funding.

Employers wishing to access workplace literacy funding directly must submit an application outlining their business case for funding. There are four funding rounds per year for employers. Funding rounds close on the first Friday of the month in February, May, August and November for 2009 and 2010.

Considerations

- Literacy and numeracy programmes offered through Workplace Literacy should be targeted towards employees with no or low qualifications or low literacy and numeracy skills, and must be provided free to the employees.
- Requirements for employees - Eligible employees must:
 - be New Zealand citizens or permanent residents
 - not be full-time students
 - not be accessing Industry Training Organisation Embedded Literacy and Numeracy Project or Workplace Employee Targeted funding
 - be employed in the paid workforce, and
 - participate voluntarily.

All employees will need to have national student numbers (NSNs) and these will need to be reported to the TEC for monitoring purposes.

NSN's will also enable employees to access the Literacy and Numeracy for Adults' [Assessment Tool](#) when it becomes available in 2010.

The TEC website has all the forms and information you need for the [Workplace Literacy Fund](#).

Flexibility of initiatives

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

- demonstrate value for money innovative and sustainable approaches to raising workplace literacy and numeracy.

Getting advice and support

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

1. Industry Training Organisations (ITOs)

ITOs can help you identify and respond to literacy and numeracy needs within the context of your industry. They can also discuss whole-of-organisation training needs, including literacy and numeracy 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

2. Literacy and Numeracy Employer Advisor

The TEC Literacy and Numeracy Employer Advisor is available to work with employers to provide advice on accessing literacy and numeracy support for their employees, or developing their own literacy and numeracy initiatives.

This support is reactive to your business's specific needs and may include:

- introducing the benefits of workplace literacy and numeracy provision to businesses
- identifying how your workforce literacy and numeracy affects your business
- identifying how your business will benefit from implementing a literacy and numeracy initiative
- identifying what options your business has and which would suit your business best
- identifying what long term capability and capacity your business needs to support your literacy and numeracy framework
- engaging employers with the Workplace Literacy Fund and support applications to the fund
- developing key messages and modes of communication your business can use for its various audiences
- sourcing expertise to assist in implementing your workplace initiative.

The TEC also recognises that setting up in-house workplace literacy and numeracy provision requires a level of expertise which is flexible and accessible. Therefore support is available for employers that will assist them to structure a programme that delivers benefits to both employees and the business in an effective and efficient way.

For more information the Literacy and Numeracy Employer Advisor can be contacted through the TEC Service Centre on 0800 601 301 or servicecentre@tec.govt.nz.

3. The TEC Service Centre

This centre can provide information about the application process for the Workplace Literacy Fund, information on which providers you can talk to and link you with the literacy and numeracy employer advisor.

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

What employers have said

The best way to find out about workplace literacy and numeracy 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.”

“We used to struggle to get compliance. Now we can train them to understand why.”

Appendix A

How to recognise low literacy levels in your workforce

“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 these skills. 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 not 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, and they may have nothing to do with low literacy or numeracy 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 and numeracy 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 and numeracy skills they need in your workplace.