

Literacy Alliance Final Report, 17 December 2010



Literacy
Alliance

Background

The educational and workforce infrastructure and systems in which the adult literacy sector operates are undergoing rapid and significant change. All of these changes impact on the management and teaching practices of organisations with a role in providing or supporting access to adult literacy education. Organisations within the adult literacy sector need to consider and discuss these changes with each other and stakeholder organisations in order to respond in cohesive, effective and consistent ways.

Our six non-government organisations with (not-for-profit) interests in adult literacy and workforce development decided to meet regularly to work toward achieving high quality outcomes for adult literacy in a cohesive way. We are sharing information, reviewing our directions, building our understanding of, and planning effective responses to changes and initiatives within the sector, with a particular focus on workforce literacy. This provides a more robust approach to future planning than attempting the same activities as separate organisations. We are grateful to Ako Aotearoa for funding under the National Project Fund. Their support has provided a secretariat function and meeting costs during 2009/10.

Literacy Alliance vision

The vision of the organisation for literacy, language and numeracy in Aotearoa/New Zealand is: "that organisational and teaching practices ensure evidence-based literacy, language and numeracy provision leading to successful learning outcomes that create social and economic impact".

Outcomes

1. Building knowledge of the sector

Our organisations have a long history of working together in various groups and projects, including contributing to sector development. As our separate organisations have different perspectives on many of the matters we discuss, it has been challenging for our group to agree priorities, build consensus within the group and develop inclusive and broad understandings of the issues we face as organisations.

2. Building sector coherence and understanding

We have now established some clear ideas of what each organisation has planned for the future and are able to plan collective responses to the changes ahead. Through our collective efforts we hope to build and maintain consistent, high-quality delivery and teaching practice, and consensus about appropriate delivery mechanisms, which will benefit adult literacy learners.

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The Literacy Alliance shares observations and outcomes with others in the sector using an online community of practice that links practitioners, tutors, trainers, assessors, programme leaders and managers within our and similar organisations.

3. Supporting a high-level strategic conversation about literacy and numeracy

The Literacy Alliance sought, and was granted, the opportunity to meet with the Tertiary Education Minister, the Honourable Stephen Joyce.

The key points made to the Minister were:

1. That improving workforce literacy and numeracy in New Zealand is a key economic imperative that requires urgent attention.
2. There is good evidence linking investment in literacy and numeracy provision to productivity gains. Therefore, investment in this sector is a critical part when considering the productivity agenda.
3. That the current focus on funding embedded courses in the tertiary sector has been good, but is limited when hoping to address the scale of need in the New Zealand workforce.
4. There are a number of options for better targeting funding to need using the current system of delivery, including innovative ways to combine literacy and numeracy and vocational training. The Literacy Alliance suggests retaining tertiary funding for embedded initiatives while developing the scale of workforce literacy and numeracy opportunities.
5. The organisations within the Literacy Alliance are close to the coal face and can support a more pragmatic and effective engagement in workforce literacy and numeracy development.
6. That the Literacy Alliance is committed to working in partnership with government to improve workforce literacy and numeracy in New Zealand.

The Literacy Alliance was directed by the Minister to work with the Tertiary Education Commission to progress this thinking, and to provide some concrete suggestions for action. The discussion with the TEC resulted in the identification of issues and possible responses, delineated in the table that follows.

A: Leadership. A clear and transparent voice for LLN	
Coherence from government and those engaged in delivery	Clarification of other government expenditure on LLN related projects
Establishment of recognised partnerships with representative sectoral organisations	Approval of an updated LLN action plan in partnership with the Literacy Alliance and relevant government departments
B Scale: Define the required need and therefore the scale of delivery. Implement appropriate mechanisms to ensure scale is reached	

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Describe the LLN need and define relevant learner groups in order to match appropriate delivery mechanisms to needs of each population	Develop a better understanding of different workplace based provision options, (e.g. formal externally facilitated, formal enterprise training and informal)
Leverage existing public and private sector spend on employer led workplace LLN programmes	Matching funding from employers for facilitated workplace LLN programmes
C: Adoption of balanced performance measures	
More focus on appropriate output/outcome measures for delivery scenarios in both institutional and non-institutional settings	e.g. For embedded programmes – on credit/programme/qualification achievement. For intensive programmes – on LLN gain and application
Investigate models for appropriate referral mechanisms to support people with LLN needs getting the appropriate delivery options	
D: Quality of provision	
Develop an agreed framework for quality of provision in both institutional and non-institutional settings	Establish a collaborative working group to develop a quality framework. This work may lead to a quality mark to guide or determine eligibility for funding for provision

Ongoing actions and future plans

Although the current funding from Ako Aotearoa for the Literacy Alliance ends in December 2010, the Alliance members have agreed to continue the organisation, and the important sector strengthening work that has been initiated. The members were also keen to include other tertiary education membership organisations in the Literacy Alliance. Invitations to join the Alliance were sent to Te Taihū o Ngā Wānanga (The National Wānanga Collective), the Metro Group and NZ ITP. Representatives from the latter two groups attended the meeting held on 16 December 2010.

A relationship has been developed with the University of Waikato's National Centre for Adult Literacy. In recognition of the transfer of tertiary education policy development to the Ministry of Education, the members also sought a meeting with the MoE's Tertiary Policy Team and it is hoped that the success of this initial meeting will develop into an ongoing relationship.

The Alliance members also plan to develop a pan sector strategy document that will build on the recent document released by the TEC, Getting Results in Literacy and Numeracy. This will articulate how a broader range of measures and organisations can contribute to raising the levels of adult literacy and numeracy in New Zealand. The members plan to host a mid-year conference to ratify this strategy, once sector consultation has been undertaken.