

## ★ Better literacy and numeracy skills mean better lives

Basic literacy and numeracy skills are essential foundations for life, learning and work. The importance of these skills is often highlighted during occupational rehabilitation, when an individual may be unable to return to the type of work they previously did. David Do from the Tertiary Education Commission describes their Literacy and Numeracy Tool.<sup>1</sup>



Literacy is the written and oral language people use in everyday life and work. Numeracy is an adult's knowledge and understanding of, and application to daily life, of mathematical concepts. It is valuable to have tools that can effectively assess the individual's literacy and numeracy skills so that other appropriate work options can be proposed and/or additional training in these areas can be facilitated.

We want everyone to fully participate in a modern high-skilled economy and society.

We want more parents to be able to read to their kids. We want more workers to be confident enough to speak up at work to fix health and safety issues, to be more productive, and to understand and manage their personal finances. We want more people to be engaged in their community and our democracy.

However, low literacy and numeracy skills hold many people back from reaching their full potential and the opportunity to improve New Zealand's literacy and numeracy skills remains significant. Adult literacy and numeracy skill levels don't always grab headlines, but they affect nearly every aspect of our economy and the wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.

About 1.3 million New Zealanders do not have the literacy and numeracy skills to fully engage in modern society.<sup>1</sup> This is 43 percent of adults aged 16 to 65. The majority of this group – 62 percent – were born in New Zealand and Māori and Pasifika adults are over represented here too.

The industries with the highest proportions of workers with lower literacy and numeracy skills are agriculture, manufacturing, forestry, transport, retail trade, aged care / home help, and food services. Changing technology and globalisation trends mean work and daily life require higher levels of literacy and numeracy and other skills.

The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) is responsible for funding tertiary education, and assisting people to reach their full potential. Our Adult Literacy and Numeracy Implementation Strategy sets out how we will work with the tertiary sector, employers and across government to lift literacy and numeracy skills. We have an Assessment Tool that helps diagnose literacy and numeracy skills and helps educators improve adults' skills.

The Literacy and Numeracy for Adults Assessment Tool (Assessment Tool) is New Zealand's key diagnostic tool for assessing adult literacy and numeracy skills. It takes the guess work out of knowing how well a person reads, understands language, and uses numbers in daily life. It's a key part of our literacy and numeracy work which focuses on improving learner outcomes from courses offered at the New Zealand Qualifications Framework levels 1 to 3.

The Assessment Tool is:

**diagnostic** – it's not a pass or fail test. It helps find out a learner's particular strengths and weaknesses in reading, general numeracy, writing, listening, and speaking at the start and end of a course (tracking progress). It helps educators customise their teaching and be deliberate about teaching areas which the Assessment Tool highlights as specific areas of learner need.

**consistent** – it's a nationally consistent, robust, well tested, and widely used tool that research confirms is helping educators achieve results with learners. It is linked to our

national framework for literacy and numeracy skills called the Adult Learning Progressions. To simplify, we'd like to see more learners at Step 4 in Reading and Step 5 in numeracy or above, out of a 6 step scale for these skill levels.

**online** – it's easy to do if the adult is familiar with a computer (paper-based assessments are also available). Results are available immediately, so they can be analysed to adjust teaching strategies to be more effective.

**adaptive** – the questions change in difficulty depending on the answers – incorrect answers usually mean 'easier' questions will follow, and correct answers usually mean 'harder' questions will follow. This means the Assessment Tool is much more accurate than a fixed set of questions.

**skills-based** – it assesses learners' literacy and numeracy skills, not the content they know. The questions are based on situations adults are likely to encounter at work and in everyday New Zealand life.

Using the Assessment Tool is part of good teaching practice in an educational context and there are also benefits for career development clients. It could help career workers to:

- identify areas for improvement that could help the client get back into work that suits their real capabilities; and
- better guide clients to the next step or intervention to help them back into work that suits their skills, or improve their skills so they can get into better work. This may include education or training which is funded by the Tertiary Education Commission or vocational training funded through an ACC Work Ready programme.

There are also other Assessment Tool options or 'flavours' apart from the main adult option. These options help educators work with diverse learners and include the popular Youth Option for learners aged 15 to 25, Maori learner reading assessment option (in English), and Starting Points options for ESOL learners and those who are just starting to learn English.

### **How would you use the Assessment Tool with a client?**

To use the Tool effectively, you will need to understand how the results link to the Learning Progressions and how to interpret the results to the adult. I'm happy to provide you more information. In the meantime, watch these two videos. One that gives educators pointers on how to brief the learner before they sit the assessment.<sup>2</sup> And one that has the right messages about what this Assessment Tool is and isn't. It is aimed at learners aged below 25 but the messages apply to all learners.<sup>3</sup>

It takes about 30 minutes to an hour to do a full length assessment. Snapshot assessments are less 'taxing' and take about half as long so they might work better in your context. Snapshot assessments are shorter versions of the full length assessments, but are slightly less accurate.

The Assessment Tool has great potential to help guide some of your clients to the next destination on their rehabilitation journey.

Email me for a trial code so you can see what it looks and feels like.

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#### Notes:

1. From a presentation by David Do at the CDANZ Research and Leading Practice Symposium 2015.
2. These results are from the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development 2006 Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey. New and updated results are due to be released at the end of June 2016.
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OAEGF8MxVQI>
4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CikpQBpesEM>