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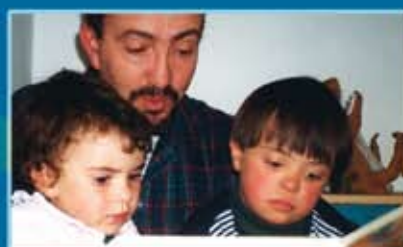
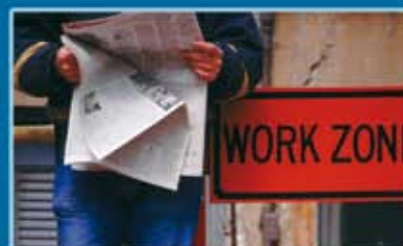
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Literacy Provision and Employment

PERSPECTIVES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL
TEACHERS, EMPLOYERS, AND ADULT
LITERACY PRACTITIONERS

- Bronwyn Watson • Deborah Neilson
- Niki Murray • Bob Dempsey
- Frank Sligo • Margie Comrie
- Franco Vaccarino



Massey University

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<http://literacy.massey.ac.nz/>

Department of Communication and Journalism

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This report is dedicated to the memory of the late Dr Su Olsson (1942–2005), friend, colleague, and objective leader in the Literacy and Employment Programme.

Executive summary

This report outlines the findings from a survey of secondary school teachers and employers in Wanganui and Districts, undertaken as part of the larger Literacy and Employment project. This survey follows on from an initial survey of Wanganui adult literacy providers in 2005 and a further in-depth survey in 2006 that sought to describe adult literacy services currently available in the Wanganui community. This survey investigated the perceptions of secondary school teachers and Wanganui employers with regard to literacy training opportunities they may or may not offer, and collaborations with literacy providers outside their own organisations. Further, it explored the perceptions of links between literacy and employment held by these two groups. The issues surrounding assisting secondary students with literacy difficulties, and maintaining employability of those with literacy difficulties are outlined in this report, with some suggestions for potential solutions and/or ways forward.

The Literacy and Employment project also held a series of focus groups with adult literacy practitioners to discuss key literacy provision issues from their point of view, collaborations with secondary school and employer agencies, and their perceptions of potential links between literacy and employment. An outline of the findings from these focus groups is included in this report to allow for practitioner's views on similar issues to be heard. However, for a more in-depth review of the key issues for adult literacy providers and practitioners, the reader is referred to previous reports in the Literacy and Employment report series, specifically, Provider Survey – Phase 1: The Provision of Adult Literacy Services in Wanganui, and, Perspectives of Wanganui Employers and Providers of Adult Literacy Services 2005-2006: A Report from the Wanganui Adult Literacy and Employment Programme.

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We are especially indebted to the adult literacy practitioners, secondary school staff, and employers who gave their time and shared their views with the research team.

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We are indebted to many other friends and colleagues not named here for their insights and support to date in this research. However, all remaining errors and omissions in this discussion paper are of course the responsibility of the authors alone. Further, the points of view expressed in this paper are those of the authors, and are not necessarily endorsed by the community groups which, as is normal in a diverse society, will have their own perspectives on the issues covered here.

Introduction

The Literacy and Employment project

Researchers at the Department of Communication and Journalism, Massey University, in partnership with the Wanganui District Library and other Wanganui community organisations, have undertaken a major longitudinal research project funded by the Foundation of Research, Science, and Technology (FRST). This project focused on adult literacy and employment in Wanganui and Districts (<http://literacy.massey.ac.nz>). Through a series of interlinked research projects, it was expected that the following four objectives would be achieved:

- To establish the literacy needs of both employed and unemployed adults in the Wanganui and Districts region
- To identify the social, attitudinal, and economic barriers to adult literacy learning of both employed and unemployed in Wanganui and Districts
- To evaluate the effectiveness of adult literacy programmes in promoting and securing employment outcomes
- To examine adult literacy learning processes and their relationship to employment.

The Wanganui community partners/subcontractors added four further objectives, specific to gaining tangible benefits for Wanganui. These were:

- To achieve positive, tangible, and practical outcomes for the Wanganui community, with a well-researched plan of action for the medium-long term (2005-2015) to address identified issues relating to literacy
- To establish a database of meaningful, relevant information relating to the links between literacy and employment in Wanganui and identify links to other social issues such as crime, health, and housing, and to provide benchmarks to measure future progress
- To develop collaboration between agencies within the Wanganui region; to strengthen the community and social infrastructure for future work and projects
- To build the research capacity within Wanganui.

The development of the survey

Following a series of meetings in early 2004 with groups in Wanganui, the need for a more thorough understanding of providers of adult literacy courses was identified. Discussion clearly indicated that the community could use information about adult literacy providers, the services they offered, and the challenges they faced, with immediate benefit for both providers and clients of adult literacy services (Caseley, 2004).

In 2004 through to 2005, the Wanganui District Library (WDL) and the Department of Communication and Journalism, Massey University (MU), worked together to create a survey that had two phases. The first phase would provide more understanding of adult literacy services available in Wanganui and Districts via a mainly quantitative survey. The second phase would allow for in-depth qualitative interviews with providers, discussing aspects of the services they offered, building on the phase one research, and placing results in the context of the overall research project (Caseley, 2004). These two prior surveys indicated a need to

understand the perceptions of local secondary educators and local employers with regard to literacy provision; therefore this third survey was designed.

The analysis of the first survey with adult literacy providers was completed in March 2005. The data gathered included information about literacy programmes currently available in Wanganui, the numbers of clients, funding channels available, staffing issues, and identified a number of challenges faced by providers and practitioners in their work (Neilson & Culligan, 2005). Feedback was given to providers on March 31, 2005 at an open presentation. The report is available on the Literacy and Employment website at <http://literacy.massey.ac.nz/publications.html>.

The second survey in-depth interviews were completed in September 2005, and the findings released in mid 2006. Of relevance to this report, one of the implications of the findings was that improved working relationships between local schools and alternative education providers needed to be developed. Further, providers discussed the need for adequate levels of support for students of secondary age who had literacy difficulties, along with pathways to support their transition to an adult literacy provider if necessary, and also back to school after working within an adult literacy provider for a period of time. This report is available at <http://literacy.massey.ac.nz/publications.html>.

Based from the finding of the need for understanding how collaborations between adult literacy providers, secondary schools, and employers could be improved, a third survey of secondary school teachers and employers was designed. This survey began in May 2007. The objectives were:

- To gather the perspectives of secondary staff and employers (and to obtain from this last group information additional to that gathered during the e-surveys conducted at the beginning of the project)
- To explore in some depth the challenges and barriers experienced by secondary staff and employers in their work with those struggling with literacy
- To provide a description of current assistance provided within secondary schools
- To determine secondary educators' perspectives on the impact of funding and resourcing for students with literacy difficulties
- To share ideas and strategies for increasing collaboration and sharing of resources among providers, schools and employers
- To assist providers, schools and employers by drawing information together and presenting a summary of relevant perspectives and issues for their consideration
- To determine how the views of school staff and employers fit with results of other parts of the Literacy and Employment project.

Contribution to larger project

Findings from these secondary school and employer interviews contribute to the full Literacy and Employment project by adding information about current literacy provision and career advice provided in secondary schools, the perceived impact of this on student employability, and the issues and challenges faced with regard to literacy provision from the position of both these groups.

This report allows for teachers' and employers' perspectives to be included for comparison with the perceptions of other stakeholders in the field. The aim is to identify individual variability and common challenges among those concerned with adult literacy that may be addressed within policy.

Methodology

Overview

The survey was divided into two parts – one dealing with secondary school staff, and the second dealing with local employers. Information was gathered from participants through open, unstructured interviews. Open interviews avoid specific, structured questions, using instead an interview guide and open-ended prompts. This method was chosen to obtain rich, detailed clarification of issues, with as many relevant, local examples as possible. Interview data was analysed using qualitative analysis (supported by the use of HyperResearch software), chosen to more fully realize the potential information contained in the interview responses.

Sample

The area covered by the Literacy and Employment project is the Wanganui and Districts area.

As mentioned previously, two groups formed the samples of interest in this survey: secondary school teachers, and employers. With regard to the secondary school teacher sample, Deputy Principals from each of Wanganui's five secondary colleges were approached to nominate staff involved in literacy and careers assistance for potential interviews. Eleven interviews were completed, representing thirteen staff from the five secondary schools in Wanganui. One interview involved three staff members from one school, while all of the others occurred on an individual basis. Staff participating in these interviews represented a range of roles such as Heads of English and Learning Support, literacy support teachers, coordinators of employment support programmes including Gateway, STAR and ASDAN, and other roles such as Librarian and Director of Learning and Teaching.

The employers approached were selected from a list who had indicated during an earlier employer e-survey (undertaken in 2006), that they would be willing to participate in further aspects of the Literacy and Employment study. The WDL initially approached schools and employers by phone to establish their interest in participation. Potential participants were then electronically sent information letters and appointments were made for an interview if they expressed interest in taking part.

With the employer sample, eight individual interviews were completed, with individual local employers. In most cases, employer participants occupied an owner or management role, or both, within their company, with one participant working in a human resources/administrative role. These participants represented businesses from the manufacturing, accounting, printing, land transport, plumbing, joinery, hospitality/accommodation, and energy sectors.

Development of interview questions

An initial meeting was held with staff from one of the local secondary colleges, to identify areas of potential interest for the study. The WDL and MU then formulated initial lists of potential question areas, which were refined through discussion between the research partners (see Appendices A and B).

Data collection

All interviews were carried out by a Wanganui District Library researcher who was also involved with the first two provider surveys. The interviews occurred between March 30th and July 31st, 2007 at the premises of either the school or the employer. Individual consent forms were signed at the time of the interviews. Interviewing, recording, transcription, and feedback processes were conducted according to Massey University Human Ethics Committee protocols. All interviews were tape-recorded.

Qualitative analysis methods used in current study

It is important to note that qualitative analysis is subjective and relies on human judgement. The analysis presented here is based on the current sample only, and cannot necessarily be generalized New Zealand wide. The following steps were taken in the analysis:

Following transcription and proofreading, transcripts were imported into a qualitative data analysis software package, HyperResearch. Each transcript was coded into key topics and subtopics, based on the questions asked during the interview.

A topic outline was then developed, encompassing key themes arising from the interviews, with other codes assigned as subtopics under these themes.

Each of these major topics was then manually summarised by the writer according to the range of information given and by highlighting the most frequently occurring comments. When identified, points for future consideration were also drawn from the data.

Secondary school teacher perspectives

Background

The teacher participants and their roles

The secondary school participants were thirteen secondary school teachers, representing staff from the five secondary schools in Wanganui. There were three teachers each from four schools, and one teacher from the fifth school. The participants included an Assistant School Principal, Heads of Department of English, Literacy and Learning Support, Directors of Learning and Teaching, Literacy Support teachers, Coordinators of employment support programmes including Gateway, STAR and ASDAN, Coordinator of Transitional Education Centre, Careers Advisors, and School Librarian.

The roles participating teachers performed in literacy support covered a wide range of activities. These included: coordinating literacy programmes; planning literacy programmes and timetables to fit the school curriculum while creating long-term and shorter-term individual literacy plans and goals to cater for each student's needs; identifying and working with students requiring literacy support, either in small groups or on an individual basis; following the literacy progress of students; collating literacy data about students and disseminating it throughout the school; moving literacy into all departments, across all essential learning areas, ensuring that each subject includes a framework for learning that accommodates good classroom literacy practices; and finding out who will be supporting each student, involving family where possible.

For the link-to-work programmes such as Gateway, STAR, and ASDAN, additional roles included making and maintaining community contacts; finding appropriate tertiary providers and work placement sites; supervising work placement; and coordinating work placements and tertiary classes with the school timetable.

For wider literacy and lifelong learning skills, teachers promoted reading for research purposes and recreation; taught information literacy skills such as accessing databases; prepared students for tertiary education; promoted information literacy and literacy as a life skill; and got to know students, and helped them with life choices. Literacy teachers also attended literacy training and professional development, and participated in literacy forums and meetings, both within their schools and with literacy teachers from other schools, including intermediate schools.

Definitions of literacy

Twelve of the thirteen secondary school teachers gave definitions of literacy, and while each one was different, in content and/or in emphasis, the underlying link between many of them tended to be a view of literacy as empowering through enabling students to function successfully, or, as one participant said, "to survive", in society.

One teacher, for example, preferred to define literacy as "functional literacy", saying it is:

The degree of literacy required to read a newspaper, gain a driver's licence, go to WINZ and deal with their forms; read road signs, read a TV Guide, that sort of thing. It's not reading a novel every week or anything. It's just functional literacy.

Two other participants took an even broader functional view of literacy. One did this through taking a practical approach with students:

I don't take literacy as being able just to read the word. It's reading symbols and understanding symbols, being able to interpret information in a bus time table, anything like that, being able to follow a flow diagram ... It's using your visual skills to gather the information that you require, to then be able to reconstruct it for yourself so you can use it.

Another described explaining the importance of literacy learning with students at school, by saying to them:

"Literacy is how you use your skills that you have to be able to effectively work in the community or to speak with others or to use the written text to be able to help yourself in the community. [It is the] same with numeracy [which is] is how you use your number skills and how that's going to help you in the community".

Other participants, while taking what at first glance was a seemingly narrower focus on literacy, still expressed it in broadly functionally empowering terms. For example, one defined literacy as "the ability to not just read but ... to have a real understanding of what has been read". Two specified literacy as the need to be able "to assess text" or "evaluate information especially on the internet", and another saw literacy as the ability to take information that had been read and to use it "further in the students' own medium". All three views thus defined literacy as enabling students to be critically aware citizens. Further, in some parts of their discussions when thinking about literacy, teachers began to speak in terms of multiple literacies, referring to life skills and specific literacies such as workplace literacy.

A further approach for teachers, rather than defining literacy, was to talk of different levels of literacy. One argument was that schools needed to ensure their students reached a level or standard of literacy that would enable them to function successfully in society. An example was one participant who spoke of "true sorts of literacies" as including the ability to fill in forms for such occasions as medical attention or accommodation, saying, "They've all got to have a literacy standard where they can read and understand". However, others spoke of literacy levels in schools as equating to the levels required to pass NCEA year levels. In the words of one teacher:

A school definition would cover several levels: the universal Year 11 expectation is eight literacy credits (basic level one); the next level is literacy requirements for university entrance [where students] need 14 level one maths credits (functional arithmetical literacy), eight level two credits, [and there is an] expectation that you could read at university level.

For three participants literacy was more about having the ability to find or access information or facts through developing both communication and technological skills. One explained:

Kids are knowledge workers. They don't have to know all the facts. They need to know how to access the knowledge; how to manipulate the knowledge; how to recreate the

knowledge, and, importantly for me, there's one other step. And that's about donating the knowledge back, so finding ways to do that ... Core to that are skills development, communication, speaking, listening, ability to use technologies, and to communicate effectively.

Another issue teachers raised in defining literacy was focused on where and how literacy should be taught in the school curriculum. There was an understanding among several participants that because literacy encompassed more than reading and writing it should be considered a part of every subject taught, and not merely situated in the English department. As one teacher stated, literacy "shouldn't just be in the hands of the English Department: every teacher is a teacher of English and language and literacy". However, it appears that the teaching of literacy does not always have an overall strategy throughout the school because the same teacher added, "The departments have their own policies".

Numbers of students within schools requiring literacy assistance

Participants were each asked about the numbers of students within their school requiring literacy assistance. However, because of the varying nature of teachers' definitions of literacy, as discussed above, and because some teachers had knowledge of the numbers of students accessing literacy assistance in some programmes rather than throughout the whole school, we are unable to offer an accurate picture of numbers involved.

How students with literacy needs are identified

Ten participants, representing five schools, responded to questions on identifying literacy needs. They spoke of a range of methods used to identify students with literacy needs. These included seeking information on past test results and academic performance from students' previous schools, asking the parents, administering a variety of standardised tests and using a computer software programme to monitor students' progress and "flag" those with literacy needs.

Table 1 lists standardised tests that participants mentioned were used in their schools. The tests cover a range of literacy skills including listening, vocabulary, reading comprehension and maths. According to participants, these tests are used to rank the students' achievement into stanines, a nine-point scale for grouping test scores. In one school, the stanines are grouped into three levels, which are used to "flag" and prioritise literacy needs.

Table 1. Forms of assessment named by participants and numbers of schools using them

Forms of Assessment	Numbers of Schools
Essential Skills Assessment (ESA)	2
Lexile	1
Paul Nation vocabulary test	1
Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT)	4
Supplementary Test of Achievement in Reading (STAR)	3
Woodcock-Johnson Whisker test	1

The Essential Skills Assessment (ESA), Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT), and the Supplementary Test of Achievement in Reading (STAR) tend to be administered to Year 9 and Year 10 students. Lexile was an assessment tool mentioned by just one participant who

described it as “an Australian ... multi-choice” computer test of reading that “matches students to books ... [giving them] a printout of the sorts of books they should be looking at to read, at their level ... All books have a Lexile level”. Other tests, not described, were the Paul Nation vocabulary test and the Woodcock-Johnson Whisker test.

According to four participants, secondary schools gathered results of PAT and STAR tests administered to Year 8 students at intermediate schools to aid the assessment of students’ literacy progress and needs. One participant described this process, saying that their school was “involved in an Enhanced Programme Fund project with other schools in the region ... that looks at transitioning the literacy data between intermediates and colleges”. Another participant elaborated further, stating:

EPF is extra funding from the government involving all the [local] secondary schools ... and the two intermediates.... We’ve got extra money to specifically look at literacy as well as helping the students who might be more in the middle band rather than just the ones sitting at the bottom.

Two participants also spoke of their schools using information on students who have been assessed by, and had literacy support from, SPELD, as one said, “so they are put into the system straight away”.

Computer data bases set up for monitoring and managing student literacy progress were mentioned by participants from two schools. Two participants spoke of paying a fee to another school to share a computer programme called Success Maker, which one described, “once the kids log in their responses it ... reports back a whole range of data which could be quite effective”. A participant from another school mentioned using a “student manager system, the software on our computer” to “traffic light” the students’ progress from year to year.

Teachers’ perspectives on the impact of NCEA on literacy learning

The National Certificate of Educational Achievement, known as NCEA, is, according to the official website:

New Zealand's main national qualification for secondary school students and part of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) ... along with approximately 1,000 other qualifications... NCEA is raising standards in all our schools – with its literacy and numeracy requirements, NCEA gives student the basic skills they need in life (<http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/>, retrieved 04/11/07).

Below, in *Links between literacy and employment* will be the teachers’ views on the impact of NCEA on the links between literacy and employment. In this section however, ten teachers, many of whom had previously taught and/or been educated themselves under the old School Certificate system, talk about their views of the impact of NCEA in relation to opportunities for literacy learning. While they spoke of advantages and disadvantages of NCEA, the majority were more likely to mention advantages than disadvantages.

Doing away with the old School Certificate system was an advantage for three teachers. Their reasons were that under the old pass/fail School Certificate system many students were perceived to have achieved nothing during their year’s work and that this led to lowered self-

esteem and loss of motivation. One teacher said, "I think it's a huge step forward from School Certificate which labelled people as non-achievers". The other went further, stating:

NCEA does help us a lot at Level One especially. We find we get a lot of students who ... under the old School C. would have simply failed the year, and have nothing. Once they work out how the system works they start accumulating early credits. That gives them a real sense of achievement and that's fantastic for those students ... If you can get some of the more problematic students at Year 9 and 10 into a Year 11 class that is working well and they are achieving those standards, you sometimes see it go hand in hand with behaviour change as well. They feel a bit more self-esteem. They feel better about themselves. The unit standards courses are just brilliant in terms of motivating students who would have got absolutely nothing under the [old] system.

The third teacher discussed the benefits of NCEA inclusion of a wider curriculum. In the teacher's view, students who were not at the top of the class academically were motivated to continue working on areas they found more difficult because they were achieving success in other areas such as sports science or performing arts. The teacher explained:

NCEA Level One particularly, and NCEA as a whole, gives the average or below average student some hope that he or she may not be good at maths but they've done really well in performing arts, in art, or in computer studies. So with the maths and the literacy, it is really just trying to get that up to a base minimum. You work really hard on that. We run sports science now in senior school and a lot of them do really well in those zones. And that's the beauty of it. Under the old system, of just a single exam we've had a vast number of kids who can't see a future because they can't get over the hurdle of that exam. And yet they do have abilities, do have skills. And, you know, NCEA at least allows them to build on those, while they're still working on the others to get those minimums up.

In one participant's experience, the motivation provided by the NCEA system where students were given extra support and encouragement and multiple opportunities to pass unit tests had led to a greater retention rate of students who had been less likely to achieve under the previous system of pass or fail on one exam:

Lots more of our students are staying longer. Where kids would have left really early because they weren't achieving, they are staying because they can see that they can achieve. NCEA is much better for that. Rather than it all being based on an exam at the end of the year, NCEA means ... they can do a piece of work and you can give it back to them for guidance and eventually, it might take a little while, they do actually achieve it.

Three participants viewed the opportunities for students to work at their own level while staying with their peer groups as an advantage of the NCEA system. One explained:

The beauty of NCEA is that it's multi-level. You might have a student who is working at Year 11 but because they've got native fluency in a language they can do it at Year 13 level. It is much more flexible. If a student has not achieved in one subject they can potentially repeat that while still moving ahead with their social group.

A second teacher who believed multi-levels of learning were an advantage, suggested that the reason why schools had not all implemented them successfully into their programmes was the

lack of supporting frameworks. In the participant's words: "I like the idea of individualised learning. I think schools have failed because they haven't been able to put in place learning frameworks to support it".

A further advantage of the NCEA system noted by a participant was improving literacy levels brought about by schools' need to raise literacy levels in order to raise NCEA results at the first level:

Literacy very much underpins NCEA results Level One. By the time students are in Year 11, the level of work or responses they can cope with can determine whether they gain credits in achievement or unit standards. So, as we've improved our literacy level, we've improved NCEA results.

There were also criticisms of NCEA. One was that the flexibility given students with multiple levels being provided in each class created a "logistical nightmare" for teachers that in some cases were only able to be solved by bringing more than one teacher into classrooms, increasing costs for schools. A further criticism was that the introduction of the system had not been well planned with teachers given insufficient preparation to enable them to implement the system. One participant said:

A big complaint with NCEA was that it was a great system, very badly introduced into schools ... It took [staff] ages to understand what unit standards and achievement standards were all about ... Student management and monitoring is a big issue: students need to know [where they are at] and the teachers need to keep the students informed.

However, one participant had major criticisms of the NCEA system itself. Some criticisms by this teacher were related to the reporting system and its impact on students' prospective employers. These will be discussed in *Links between literacy and employment*. Overall, though, the participant expressed a deep ambivalence towards NCEA, acknowledging benefits for students including disposing of the School Certificate system of "creating fifty percent of failures" and the improvement in students' self-esteem from successful completion of unit standards. At the same time, the participant held reservations over the ultimate value for students of what the participant saw as a system that gives them unrealistic expectations through such assistance as providing reader/writers and opportunities for multiple resits of tests. In the participant's words:

I don't know whether the gaps can be reconciled ... For very good reasons ... School Cert was tossed out ... and the remedy I don't think has really worked ... From a school point of view [with all the extra assistance] we've got a happy kid. Now if we'd labelled her adequately, realistically, then I don't think we'd have that happy kid.

A final concern, rather than a criticism, from another teacher was the difficulty for teachers to continue "teaching literacy" in the NCEA system at the Year 10 level. Students were becoming aware of how many credits they needed to pass before they could begin on the external exam work. The teacher stated that while it was encouraging to see students enthusiastically working to pass their NCEA units, "It was almost like a finishing race. They were wanting to get to that 80 credits before they went into externals". However, the participant believed it was important that teachers decide how much to focus on getting students through NCEA credits at the expense of wider literacy teaching. As the participant said:

It is hard to get Year 10s on board, thinking about NCEA. You don't know how much focus you should put on NCEA going through as a progression, or literacy going through as a progression. You don't want to lose literacy in the mask of getting NCEA credits so it's a bit of a balancing act.

Links between literacy and employment

For literacy teachers from all five Wanganui secondary schools participating in this research, a major teaching focus was on creating links for students between literacy and employment. According to the teachers, the five schools all run programmes that promote links between their students and employment. Some programmes are internally structured programmes, such as careers advice courses, while others are programmes where schools purchase access to an outside provider. For the students, access to the programmes differs among schools as do the focus, emphasis and breadth of the programmes. For example, in one school where there were approximately 30 Year 12 and 20 Year 13 students participating in "work experience" courses, the focus was on preparing students for the workplace who were less likely to contemplate moving to tertiary education. On the other hand, another school had a growing focus on providing opportunities for learning "transferable skills" for as many students as possible, not only students they saw as being "at risk" because of lower literacy skills.

When asked about their perceptions of the links between literacy and employment, many of the teachers mentioned issues connected to how externally sourced programmes operate. Therefore, this section begins with brief descriptions of the three major external link-to-work programmes mentioned by teachers and offered in Wanganui secondary schools sourced through outside providers. Next is a discussion of teachers' views of the links between literacy and employment focusing on teachers' perceptions of the value of each of the link-to-work programmes their schools offer. Finally, because it was an issue raised by several teachers, we look at teachers' views of the impact of the NCEA system on links between literacy and employment.

Secondary school programmes linking literacy and employment

The three major externally sourced link-to-work programmes mentioned by literacy teacher participants are: Gateway; the Secondary Tertiary Alignment Resource (STAR); and the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) programmes. Teachers from four of the five schools spoke of using one or more of these three programmes. Four schools offered the Gateway programme, three also offered STAR, and one also offered ASDAN. As well as using the three major programmes, the four schools also offered what they considered to be other literacy and employment programmes including a careers advice service which will be discussed following descriptions of Gateway, ASDAN, and STAR. Teachers from the fifth school did not mention any of these programmes but spoke of running an internal programme that provides links for students to other literacy providers and a careers advice service.

Gateway is a Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) funded programme to provide workplace learning for secondary school students. The TEC website briefly describes the programme's aims:

Gateway offers senior secondary students structured workplace learning across more than 50 industries and hundreds of businesses around New Zealand. Students pursue

individual learning programmes, which allow them to gain new skills and knowledge in a workplace in their local community. The learning is hands-on and practical. Students are assessed in the workplace for unit and achievement standards which contribute to the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), as well as industry specific qualifications (<http://www.tec.govt.nz/templates/standard.aspx?id=469>, retrieved 05/11/07).

The TEC website further states that there are “hundreds of schools participating in the Gateway programme” throughout New Zealand and that once schools have successfully applied to the TEC for Gateway funding, the programme is “free to eligible learners” (ibid, retrieved 05/11/07).

STAR, the Secondary Tertiary Alignment Resource, is also a TEC-funded programme. It helps link senior secondary school students to work and/or further study. Through STAR, schools offer tertiary-level courses to enable students to try out a variety of careers and gain the relevant qualifications (<http://www.teamsolutions.ac.nz/articles/star05.pdf>, retrieved 02/11/07). The TEC website outlines the aims of the programme and bases for funding:

Schools receive STAR funding for the purpose of offering courses to their senior students. The goal of the policy is to better meet the needs of senior students. STAR funding leads to students undertaking courses of study and/or workplace experience that lead to skills and qualifications which promote their transition from secondary school to either employment or further education. STAR funding is allocated on the basis of a roll-based formula. To be eligible for funding, proposed courses must be in a non conventional subject area, as defined by the Ministry of Education, and be run by a provider accredited by New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) ... STAR funding is not intended to cover the full costs of all STAR courses. Rather, STAR funding is provided as a “top up” (http://www.cate.co.nz/About_Cate/funding.htm, retrieved 05/11/07).

Students accepted into a STAR programme for further study, enrol with the tertiary provider but complete their study at their secondary school, under the supervision of their classroom teacher. The tertiary provider supplies a course of study, which includes such essentials as study guides, books and audio tapes when appropriate, assignments and assessments, and the due dates. Examples are two 100-level Te Reo Māori papers offered through Te Aka Reo at the University of Waikato. Their website outlines the school’s responsibilities:

The secondary school is responsible for providing a suitable environment and facilities for the students taking the papers, in particular it provides six hours per week of supervised classroom time. The secondary school is also responsible for ensuring students' work is forwarded to the STAR Administrator by the deadline specified to avoid any marks being deducted for lateness (<http://www.waikato.ac.nz/smpd/programmes/star.shtml>, retrieved 05/11/07).

ASDAN, according to their website, is a United Kingdom programme. With branches in New Zealand, it is a NZQA approved programme. ASDAN programmes offer a “progressive awards system” that, they claim, provides:

flexible, activity based programmes for young people aged 14 – 19. The assessment framework of the programmes facilitates the development and accreditation of personal, essential and social skills within a variety of educational, community and world of work

contexts. The aim of the programme is to enable young people to understand themselves and others better and to become more prepared for making the transition to adult life. Personal and social competence is seen as a crucial factor in maximising opportunities for life long learning and becoming an effective member of adult society. (<http://www.asdan.co.nz/files/generic.asp?pageID=207>, retrieved 05/11/07).

With an emphasis on “co-operation and collaboration, rewarding achievement and assisting progression of learning” ASDAN programmes are, the website states:

based on a negotiated approach, with tutor and student setting individual targets. The programme offers choice for individuals to achieve differentiated levels. The students work primarily in a learning style that [enables them] to achieve targets ... [while working] within their own individual time frames ... Choice, negotiation and a feeling of more control over their own learning, raises self motivation, develops self organisation skills and positively affects self esteem. (<http://www.asdan.co.nz>, retrieved 01/11/07)

Careers advice classes were mentioned by teachers from all schools. Since the mid-1990s, government funding has been available under the Careers Information Grant (CIG) to enable schools to provide teachers to work with students from Years 7-13 on thinking about their future outside school, the options available, and the importance of planning their education to meet their future workplace requirements. The website states:

State secondary and area schools, and private schools, now receive the Careers Information Grant ... This money is to be used ... for providing career guidance for Year 7-13 students ... The original intention of the CIG was to provide staffing, resources and professional development.

Some possible uses of the grant include: Providing school-wide access to KiwiCareers; Individual career interviews for students using professional career practitioners; ... Career mentoring programmes; Careers library ancillary staff; Subsidising travel to career expos, etc; Buying resources...; Paying ancillary staff/careers assistant; Assisting with professional development (http://www.cate.co.nz/About_Cate/funding, retrieved 05/11/07).

Teachers' views of literacy and employment links

Teachers' views of the links between literacy and employment reflected their different definitions of literacy. For some teachers it was important for students to gain communication skills to carry to the workforce. For example, one believed that students need a “degree of expectation of performance and discipline in behaviour, manners ... and the basics of social life ... going out into the wide world”. (Elsewhere in the Literacy and Employment Project, the researchers have categorised these skills as life skills. However, this report reflects the perceptions of the teachers, and therefore their definition of ‘literacy’ is what is referred (see *Definitions of Literacy* above for clarification)). Others spoke of the need to teach students “transferable skills”, whether their plans were to leave school to enter the work force or to go on to tertiary education. One teacher was more concerned at what was perceived to be lowered standards of literacy, especially handwriting, which the teacher believed reflected badly on schools in the eyes of employers. However, most teachers' discussions of links between literacy and employment tended to centre on how the link-to-work programmes worked. For this

reason, we now look at their discussions of the Gateway, ASDAN, and STAR schemes and teachers' perceptions of their value.

Teachers pointed out that through Gateway, students spend one or two days a week of school time in the workplace learning skills such as those required by, for example, a barista, a forklift driver, a retail assistant, a vet nurse or a scuba diver, or by workers in the tourism and hospitality industry. One teacher explained:

With Gateway the students have to have ten credits and half of those credits have to be from the workplace. They generally just do core generic credits which are involved with the workplace, such as doing their CV, health and safety and first aid.

Learning these transferable skills was found by teachers to work on multiple levels. Students learn the more obvious skills needed to operate a forklift, for example, but at the same time learn of the wider social, communication and other literacy and numeracy skills required in the workplace. As one teacher noted, at their school they were, "redirecting our money into that transferable skill area so that the students ... academic or at risk, can do these courses". The school's policy is that those going on to tertiary education also need to learn workplace literacy because "even your university students need some edge to get those casual jobs that they need".

Unlike the teacher who believed that even those intending to go to university benefited from learning some workplace literacy, one teacher held more of a belief that academic and Gateway programmes were mutually exclusive. The teacher argued:

To some extent Gateway students self-select and it really means when they come to the Gateway choice they are saying, "Yes, I want to go the work direction rather than the academic direction" ... Sometimes we will steer a youngster out of the Gateway programme because really they're academically strong and interested. But they're also interested in some more practical things so we try and keep them in the academic programme.

However, two teachers from another school reported that because of the success of workplace experience in raising students' literacy skills and awareness of their literacy needs, their school now adds to the government funding they receive to provide much greater access to workplace programmes. As one teacher stated about their Gateway students, "They have more clearly defined goals ... All of our kids, if you stop them and ask them, they know what they have to do to get a job".

A further advantage of the Gateway programme noted by one teacher is that it gives employers the chance to view the students as prospective employees on a more "holistic" level than if they had merely turned up, CV in hand, to apply for a job. In the teacher's words:

You see a lot of them going out in Gateway ... the vast majority of our employers who take them on, feedback to us about them. And they're often saying, "Great kids". And what it's about is those other disciplines. Can they turn up on time? Can they present themselves well? Can they say, "Hello", "Good morning", and "How are you?" ... That's that holistic thing. Often when I've spoken to employers they've said, "Well look. The maths isn't quite up to scratch but we can keep working on that. There is measurement involved". Or whatever. They're prepared to keep working with some of those students

on those issues, because they know basically they've got a good kid who's honest, who can turn up on time, who they can actually mould, and do something with.

In the teacher's view, literacy is an important requirement for employment, but literacy learning does not stop when the students leave school to begin work. Moreover, there are many forms of literacy. If school leavers are given the opportunity to demonstrate to employers their wider literacy skills inherent in an ability to communicate and willingness to learn workplace skills, then employers are more likely to consider them for employment. Such programmes as Gateway thus provide opportunities for the extension of literacy learning into the workplace while leading to employment for school leavers.

On the other hand, according to one teacher, Gateway gives students the opportunity to learn where their skills and interests lie and which jobs are most likely to involve the sorts of literacy skills where they do excel. They are able to discover that if reading and writing, for example, are not their best skills there are still interesting and even exciting job opportunities available that require other literacy competencies, such as communication. For example, two comments were:

This student in particular is doing very well in childcare, but there's really not a lot of written work there. And as the reading's [not her best skill] she's totally comfortable with what she's having to do. And being early childcare, [her lack of reading skills are] not standing out.

We are very careful where we're going to place her. She is doing papers, unit standards through Ag Challenge, but we'll try and get her into an area where there's not a lot of reading and writing required. Maybe the SPCA or a bird sanctuary.

The link-to-work programme ASDAN was mentioned by teachers of only one school and was used alongside other literacy and employment initiatives. Comparing ASDAN with Gateway, one teacher commented that like Gateway, ASDAN is an individualised programme. However, ASDAN involves more group discussion with students' peers of their plans and experiences. Moreover, the teacher noted,

Gateway is ... the work experience side of it [while] ASDAN might be more about exploring choices, preparing for the workplace, being at work, aspects of the workplace, appreciation, international dimensions, managing money and personal review.

Students undertaking this programme have the opportunity to learn a wide range of literacy competencies through focusing on those needed to succeed in employment. A teacher explained:

ASDAN has quite a bit of career orientation in it. They work on the three work and study skills: show you can work together as part of a team and share tasks; [show you can] keep to your task and complete it on time; and show you can keep to the health and safety rules. When you go to work, they're the things that an employer wants to know that you can do.

In the teachers' view, through ASDAN, the students learn communication, team work and problem solving skills, how to do research on the entry requirements for occupations they may be interested in, write their CV, apply for jobs, take part in job interviews, and work experience.

Important literacy skills were gained, according to one teacher, because students learn how to write up an analysis of what happened at their interviews and work experience, what they might have done better, in what ways the job differed from their expectations, whether the job is what they really want to do, and if not, where they might go from there. Work completed forms credits towards NCEA from Level One to Level Three.

Teachers from three schools discussed the operation of the STAR programme, its literacy gains and how it links literacy and employment. According to the teachers, STAR provides extension programmes that allow Year 11 to 13 students enrolled at secondary schools to participate in NZQA-approved courses offered by a wide range of tertiary institutions. The programme allows students to study courses not taught in the school syllabus, enabling them to gain credits for such diverse occupational fields as hairdressing, agriculture, journalism, building, automotive engineering, photography and design, as well as a range of university papers. STAR was also cited by teachers as raising students' literacy levels by increasing their awareness of, and desire to attain, workplace literacy requirements. It works for some students as an extension programme, allowing them to complete university or apprenticeship papers while still at school. At the same time, as one teacher said, "at-risk students who, in the past, would have just stopped coming to school" are continuing their education because of participation in link-to-work programmes such as Gateway, ASDAN, or STAR.

At one school where teachers did not mention using Gateway, ASDAN, or STAR programmes, the teachers discussed opportunities for students to participate in university courses for extension purposes, and at a local tertiary provider in courses comprising a combination of theoretical work and work experience components, in fields such as agriculture and engineering.

Teachers' views on how NCEA links literacy and employment

Like many other National Certificates on the National Qualifications Framework, NCEA provides the bridge between school, the workplace and life-long learning (<http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/>, retrieved 04/11/07).

The quote above is taken from the official NCEA website. The research team believes that literacy (defined in both a narrow and broad sense) forms an integral basis to workplace and lifelong learning. This section examines teachers' views on how effective NCEA is perceived to be at linking literacy and employment.

In *Teachers' perspectives on the impact of NCEA on literacy learning*, it was mentioned that one participant was more critical than most of the NCEA system. As will be seen below in the section *Employer perspectives of NCEA*, much of this participant's criticism reflects the problems some employers stated they faced when trying to assess the literacy standards of prospective employees. It should perhaps be noted that, as coordinator of a programme in which students participated in work experience in places of employment for two days each week, the participant's role was "liaising with the employers".

According to this participant, NCEA functions on two levels, achievement standards and unit standards: those who study at achievement standard level receive their grades after sitting national examinations, while those studying at unit standard level do not sit external examinations. The first problem noted by the participant is that students' reports do not

adequately differentiate between the two levels of standard, leaving employers unable to make comparative assessments of job seekers' records and their literacy abilities. In the participant's words:

This is a personal criticism of NCEA. There is nothing on that set of results to show that they are unit standards as opposed to achievement standards. I would defy you to look at ten sets of results and rank those kids. You couldn't pick the best kid.

Aligned to this, the problem for prospective employers, in the participant's view, stems from the level of support given to some unit standards students to ensure they pass their units. The participant argues that students may be given multiple opportunities and assistance, including reader/writers, until they are eventually able to pass unit tests, while still not actually able to understand the material. Therefore, according to the participant, even a report showing that students have passed unit standards rather than achievement standards would not give employers the information they need to make informed decisions about a prospective employee's literacy ability or progress. Again, in the participant's words:

NCEA is structured in such a way that not to get Level One NCEA, you'd almost need to constantly avoid education. You'd need to have either major home disruption or major absentee problems ... If they miss it they're allowed to resit. They can get all sorts of help from teachers. It can be just about restructured for them so finally, finally they reach the desired standard. Whether they can sit down the following day and get it is beside the point. But on March 30 2007 after several attempts and a lot of input from staff, they've got it ... [they are deemed to be] functionally literate ... If I was an employer I'd be looking at [the report] and thinking, "Well, yeah, okay, she's fine". But then I'd bring her into my business: "My God, this kid can't write".

In this teacher's view literacy levels generally, but handwriting particularly, have dropped since the introduction of NCEA. The teacher argued that, based on their own School Certificate experience, older employers would have higher expectations, which might impact on the employment prospects of some students. Moreover, the teacher expressed a further worry surrounding the issue of literacy and employment in relation to the NCEA system. It was students who were given extra help and opportunities to complete unit standards or who received reader/writer assistance and then were assessed as "functionally literate", who may have developed a false sense of their literacy ability, and therefore their employability. The teacher, speaking of one student as an example, said:

All the way through her lifetime she's going to feature with WINZ. They're going to say, "Gosh, this kid can't read. What have the schools been doing?" They're going to feature, wherever she goes for a job. And there's no point her saying, "Well I had a reader/writer when I was at school".

However, another teacher argued that the use of reader/writer assistance under the NCEA system did not disadvantage students. Rather, in this teacher's view, students who might otherwise struggle were enabled by such assistance to gain employment and literacy skills, including the use of electronic technology. As the teacher pointed out, reader/writers are available when needed for those doing tertiary education. Furthermore, the literacy skills gained are transferable to the workplace:

If they've been identified at school, they can still have reader/writer assistance at university – so this is not a barrier. Others can use their laptops in lectures. In the work force they can use Dictaphones, computers, etc ... It doesn't even occur to me that someone wouldn't be in the workforce, unless there's a real physical problem.

Refuting the idea that literacy levels have dropped since the introduction of the NCEA system, a teacher stated that, on the contrary, with the new system students' awareness of the literacy competencies required for moving on to both employment and tertiary education has raised their literacy levels. The teacher said,

I would say a good ninety to ninety-five percent of the kids are aware of their literacy and numeracy requirements and they are looking for getting that.

According to the teacher, even those with the lowest literacy levels are now aware of how many unit standards they have achieved and the numbers they require to reach Level One literacy. The reason, the teacher suggested, is that with the introduction of NCEA, students had begun arriving back at Year 13 because they had not achieved an employment literacy requirement. This meant that teachers became more conscious of the need to improve their reporting systems and to "keep reporting to students where they are up to, rather than waiting until the end of the year" – something this teacher believed they had not understood when NCEA was first introduced. Further refuting the idea that employers tend to be dissatisfied with the literacy level of students today, one teacher said, "Gateway students are certainly highly rated. You get good feedback from employers".

Work experience and career advice

Because of the integral links between the link-to-work programmes offered in schools and students' future employment options, many of the teachers' comments on work experience and careers advice overlap with their discussion of the link-to-work programmes, ASDAN, Gateway and STAR, above. However, there were some specific mentions of career advice which will be looked at in this section.

Some teacher participants, for example, had been involved in careers advice programmes for Year 11 students, before the introduction of the link-to-work programmes. They had had one-on-one time with each student examining options for their future employment and the paths they needed to follow to achieve their goals – including the appropriate subjects offered in the senior school curriculum. These teachers and others were now using the link-to-work programmes to enable students to experience the sorts of employment options available, to see if their first or second choices were really what best suited them, and if not what would be better. They were also using the programmes to enable students to get a head start on achieving the literacy requirements for their chosen occupation.

For one teacher, work experience and future tertiary study were mutually exclusive because of the time out of the classroom taken by link-to-work programmes. This teacher advises those aiming to attend university not to participate in such programmes, saying:

Sometimes we will steer a youngster out of the Gateway programme because really they're academically strong and interested ... so we try and keep them in the academic programme.

However, the teacher noted that “our Gateway programme, [is] sometimes called the Career Development Programme”, and that “more average and at risk” students were advised that with the current tight employment market, the Gateway programme helped students along their career pathways because it gave students opportunities to make a start on the literacy requirements for their future occupations while gaining workplace experience. In the teacher’s words:

Now with greater training requirements and not quite so many jobs around ... we operate Gateway, a work experience programme. We’ve got about fifty youngsters who are in various places of employment in town two days a week ... Gateway differs from work experience as such, in that Gateway expects them to make more of a career choice and expects a youngster to be further down that career making pathway.

Another teacher spoke of advising students to do a STAR programme so they could make a start on their chosen occupation’s literacy requisites, thus shortening the time it will take to complete their training once they have left school. The teacher said:

STAR students go out to various providers to do different types of courses.... We pay external providers ... so virtually all of them have unit standard based courses that are industry based ... If they go on to university or [polytechnic] next year and they continue with [the same course], they’ll obviously bank those and move forward into Stage Two courses at tertiary level.

Careers advice in relation to link-to-work programmes appears to incorporate complex planning and discussion sessions. For example, decisions about whether students participate in link-to-work programmes and where they would take place were, according to teachers, taken after consultation involving teachers, students, parents and those providing the workplace situation for the students’ work experience. One teacher said, “We involve parents and it’s done fairly carefully”, while another elaborated, saying:

The students nominate the area of work they want. We let them nominate an employer they’d like to go with [and then] we have meetings with their family and the agencies involved with them, and discuss what the students’ interests are and where they would best be met.

A third teacher described how such planning and advice might take place:

All the time I’m making judgements ... [For example, a student] says he wants to be a dairy farmer, but I think he could achieve a lot more within the dairy farming area. But to do that you need to have some qualifications. [Therefore, I’d suggest] one day a week he’d go to [an external provider] for a classroom day, in addition to his work experience day.

A teacher from one school spoke of a student attending a further careers advice course, not mentioned by teachers from other schools. The teacher described how a student had attended a

course which is specifically designed for part Māori students with a focus on their future education and for future things. [It is based in Palmerston North] but our kids from here go to that. All the secondary schools in Wanganui are invited.

Literacy support provided within secondary schools

Description of learning support

Because the systems of literacy support described by teachers differed from school to school this section will outline aspects of literacy support mentioned, collating the descriptions of teachers within each school. Literacy support here tends to be defined as literacy teaching for any students who are not studying at NCEA achievement standard level. It should be noted that these are not necessarily the only literacy support systems within each school. They are only the ones mentioned by the teachers interviewed.

School One

According to the teachers interviewed from School One, extra literacy and numeracy support was provided through several avenues. The three main ones mentioned were their Department for Learning Support (DLS), their Transition Education Centre, and the Tumataara and Encounter (T&E) project. Using information from the teachers these will each be briefly described.

Most DLS students were from Years 9 and 10. However, Year 11, 12 and 13 level students requiring extra support were also catered for, most at this level working in individual programmes. Students who were unable to cope in mainstream classes spent their entire school day in the DLS. Included in the DLS was a remedial reading group of eight to ten students, who were given extra reading practice involving coping strategies such as skim reading, gaining meaning from pictures, identifying the type of text they are reading, and how it is structured. Students' home room was a mainstreamed class.

The T&E project was run in conjunction with another school. It was described as a government funded programme for two Wanganui schools aimed at identifying and helping Year 10 students "at risk" of underachievement, suspension, and/or early leaving to raise their achievement levels and gain qualifications (<http://www.beehive.govt.nz/ViewNewsletter.aspx?DocumentID=28922>, retrieved 12/11/07). The T&E group included up to ten students, usually with behavioural as well as literacy needs, who worked in school, setting behavioural goals at the beginning of the week, and rewarded with points and fun activities, such as a farm visit. Their timetable included a goal setting class and a literacy class.

The school's Transition Education Centre was a student support facility covering a range of transition to work and careers education programmes. At the time of the interviews they included Gateway (contracted for 50 placements), STAR, and other niche programming and correspondence study. Gateway and STAR have been described in Section B above. Unit standards were offered on topics such as coping with anger, change, drugs and alcohol, driver education, and transferable skills such as chainsaw operation, and scuba diving. Techniques used included scaffolding reading down to small paragraphs, using wider visual media such as OHPs, and breaking down the more usual hour-long timetable slots into shorter periods to cater for students' needs. Again, the aim was to keep the students in school longer to meet their numeracy and literacy requirements. The school had an offsite coordinator to work with students when they were out of the Transition Education Centre.

Two further literacy support initiatives were mentioned separately. They were mentioned by one teacher and it was not entirely clear where they fitted with other literacy support

programmes in the school. The first was a “Reading Option” where students with the highest literacy needs were taken out of class for three hours’ a week assistance with a reading teacher. It was not available for Year 10 students, and while it was run as a small group of 10 students, there was also provision for the students to have individual support. The second initiative was the “Home Room” for the 12 to 13 most needy Year 9 students. This class, run by one teacher and a teacher aide, received intensive input and students did not have to change teachers for every subject.

Data was provided to teachers throughout the school enabling all teachers to see how many students on their class lists needed extra literacy support, thus to organise their teaching strategies accordingly.

School Two

At the time of the interviews, literacy support in School Two was provided through two levels of assistance. Foundation classes were provided for students identified as those with critical literacy needs. The next level of students included those working at the NCEA unit standard level, those who had been streamed away from the NCEA achievement standard level. This school was also running a Learning Resource Centre for Years 9 and 10 students. The Centre was staffed by two primary trained teachers who identified individual assistance students required, such as reader/writers. It was assumed that by Year 11 this assistance would have enabled most students to move into the NCEA unit standards level.

School Three

According to teachers from School Three, extra literacy support for students at their school was apportioned after dividing students into two streams according to “ability”. Expectations of students differed between the two streams, with one stream working in smaller groups and receiving more individualised attention from teachers.

The Director of Assisted Learning (DAL) used a range of testing methods to develop a picture of the students’ needs. Younger students were taken out of class by the DAL for half an hour a week for individual or very small group tuition, while the senior students received a full hour’s tuition per week. The type of assistance provided depended on the underlying problems identified by the students’ SPELD report. These might be reading and interpreting exam questions, or practising dictation for using reader/writers. Some assistance was provided on a short-term basis, but usually once a student had learning needs identified the assistance continued throughout their time at the school. Extra individualised assistance was provided by GAP tutors, usually senior students from abroad who were tutoring while taking a year out between secondary school and university. Daily records were kept for students receiving help and monthly progress meetings held. Other teachers were kept informed of students’ progress.

Library staff also provided literacy support. They had an overview of research activities of students, provided an electronic toolbox to assist with research skills such as finding, evaluating and acknowledging sources and assisted less able students to choose suitable reading material for the literacy logs they were required to keep for university entry.

Further literacy support at School Three was that offered to international students who were supported through an intensive language programme as well as an NSEL programme, which students could move in and out of according to need.

As with School One above, the school management data system contained information which provided alerts to staff when a student had learning needs thus enabling teachers to organise their teaching strategies and provide appropriate levels of materials.

School Four

Teachers from School Four spoke of using the Gateway and ASDAN programmes. These have been discussed in detail in Section B, but extra comments on each from School Four's teachers are noted here before a brief description of other literacy support programmes in place throughout the school.

The Gateway Coordinator spoke of setting up a learning programme for Gateway students that included NCEA unit standards Levels 1, 2, and 3 within the school curriculum subjects alongside NCEA workplace unit standards. Doing this meant that the programme involved meeting each student's individual needs. TEC regulations require Gateway students to have 10 credits, including six from the workplace. These included "core generic credits involved with the workplace", such as first aid courses, and writing CVs. The Gateway Coordinator informed providers when students had learning difficulties.

The ASDAN programme was provided for Years 11, 12 and 13, with about 28 students in a class. Teachers commented that while the programme was suitable for all students, it was particularly good for students with lower literacy skills. Teachers aimed to present the programme "in a relaxed manner", with students working independently or in groups. Courses covered careers planning, work experience planning, gaining a range of different work experiences. The programme's structure centred on providing progressively more difficult challenges at bronze, silver, gold and platinum levels. Material could be presented verbally, using digital cameras, and computers and students develop literacy skills by writing about what they have done. There was a focus on cooperative learning techniques and setting expectations. Literacies addressed included reciprocal reading (predicting what will come next), skim reading, and time management, with students expected to set individual targets for themselves. Students attended ASDAN and general classes at school for four days each week, and on the fifth day attended a work placement.

As soon as those requiring extra literacy support were identified in Year 9 they were provided with a directed "Learning Attack" option to address literacy problems. The aim was to make learning fun in a small class situation of about 15 students. Fun reading and comprehension activities included plays, reading stories, and making up questions. The class differed from mainstream classes: it was not curriculum driven, had less pressure to achieve, and the material was not as "dense".

The literacy teacher worked with Year 9 and 10 students in small groups and as individuals, and on a one-to-one basis with some more senior students. School Four offered further literacy support through a peer reading scheme in which seniors assisted juniors with their reading and comprehension skills on a one-to-one basis. Also volunteer members of the public listened to students' reading and discussed it with them.

A team of teacher aides is employed by the school to support students identified as having high needs, including literacy, which, teachers pointed out, is only one of many issues these students tend to need support for. As with Schools One and Three above, all teachers were provided with data that informed them which students in their classes needed extra literacy support,

enabling them to organise their teaching strategies and appropriate level of materials accordingly.

School Five

According to the three teachers from School Five, literacy support was provided through the Learning Support Centre and a Literacy and Numeracy programme run by a group of teachers who formed a literacy committee or forum meeting regularly to discuss current programmes. The literacy forum attempted to address literacy across the curriculum, so that staff in each area worked towards the school's literacy goals, taking assistance a step further in the classroom, with teachers using common strategies across the curriculum. The teachers commented on seven main aspects of literacy support in their school.

Two major programmes for literacy support mentioned were the Gateway and STAR programmes. There were between 25 and 30 students in the Gateway course participating in work placement one or two days a week and then in dedicated English and other literacy programmes back at school. STAR participants attended a range of training providers to study NCEA unit standard industry-based courses such as hairdressing and automotive engineering that could not normally be resourced within the school.

Each year a target group of students with moderate to high literacy needs was identified. These students were then divided into small groups and twice a week given extra assistance by the literacy support teacher. At the junior level the school operated the Encounter and Navigator programme in which a tutor set behavioural goals for the week and students were given out of school experiences. The students in these programmes tended to be the ones having small group literacy support.

Teachers commented that, in their experience, students with the highest literacy difficulties were likely to need tracking due to truancy difficulties. To help overcome the problem, a community and whanau liaison worker was employed to conduct home visits with families, attempting to keep them engaged with the learning process. Related to this issue, one teacher noted that the school tried to offer flexible assistance to keep students enrolled. However, there were limits to what they could do.

Literacy resources used

The literacy resources teachers mentioned using are patently merely brief examples. One teacher, for example, commented only that courses for Gateway are purchased from the tertiary providers. Another said the same of the STAR programme. One teacher mentioned using the journal Choices because of its "high interest, not at too young a level". A teacher from another school spoke of "borrowing resources from different organisations, such as Rainbow Readers and the Success Maker computer programme, a good tool that gives feedback".

Other resources cited included Learning Media and the Tape Assisted Reading Programme (TARP). The ASDAN programme includes resources up to Level Three, including work on careers planning. Computers are used as a resource. One teacher gave a fuller list, speaking of the school's "fully networked" system, with all students having internet access; use of the National Library catalogue; offering books suitable for ESL students; and Toolbox for literacy and library introduction.

Dealing with personal issues

Schools provide a range of counselling services for dealing with students' personal issues. One teacher spoke of the school using the services of an "outside" counsellor, someone neutral who was not associated with the student's school or family. Others mentioned their school's Counselling Service and the school's Learning Support Centre. Some teachers spoke of "liaising with the parents", or "liaising with the family". One teacher talked about the school's emphasis on "early and continuing pastoral care" as a means of avoiding problems. Teachers from one school said they referred students with personal issues to the Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour (RLTB). As one commented,

Through her [RTLTB] and our student support worker and our kaiāwhina we make links with the family and the community. So it's a wrap around support programme for those students.

Teachers in one school stated that school house masters and house mistresses performed a similar role. For example, one teacher said,

As a house master or house mistress, you are in loco parentis for the student. You've got to make sure that that child's okay and would perhaps alert the teachers of that particular child [if there is a serious personal issue]. Perhaps with an email saying, "Look, Mum and Dad have split up", or at a staff meeting say, "Grandma has died and they're off for the funeral", or "something's happened and they're a bit fragile".

Drug and alcohol abuse were raised by teachers as important personal issues they dealt with among students. Most teachers mentioned that their schools were "trying to educate kids to make wise choices about using drugs and alcohol". One noted that doing so was "a huge part of the health programme in the junior school. And every teacher will deal with it". Another said that if students were found to have a problem, the school's guidance counsellor was used and, "We will do a lot of talking". At one school, a teacher stated, "If kids go to the Board for drugs and alcohol, it is mandatory to attend drug and alcohol counselling". A teacher at another school explained their procedure:

They can be perhaps withdrawn for a few days, maybe sent home to get a bit of time out. There is a fulltime counsellor, so the students can be perhaps referred there. I think it's very often, "Let's try the softly, softly approach to start with so that it doesn't destroy their education" ... That's what most schools are now trying to do in various ways with restorative justice and those kinds of approaches. For instance, a parent can ask for a meeting with all teachers if there is a concern.

Teachers named three nationwide projects used in their schools that were focused on helping Māori students deal with both school and personal issues. The first was Te Kauhua/Māori in Mainstream Pilot Project, which "looked at ways to help Māori students see themselves reflected in the curriculum, and to support teachers to be reflective about their practice and become agents of change for Māori" (http://www.tki.org.nz/r/Māori_mainstream/tekauhua_e, retrieved 13/11/07). The second was Te Kōtahitanga, a project investigating how to improve the educational achievement of Māori students in mainstream secondary school classrooms. The third project has been introducing kaiāwhina teacher aides with the role of aunty to Māori girls

and young women. The role of kaiāwhina, according to one teacher was to “make home visits, attend meetings, and ensure links were made between students, school and whanau”.

In some schools programmes were run for “at risk” Year 9 and 10 students. These included the Tumataara and Encounter, and Encounter and Navigator programmes which were offered as a means of providing students with out of school experiences to maintain their interest. Others used the Gateway and STAR programmes to try to maintain students’ interest and connection to their school and community. In these programmes students maintained their links to school by spending three days a week in classroom activities. While attending other providers or participating in workplace experience, these students remained under the overall guidance of their school teachers and counsellors.

A further strategy for dealing with some students struggling with personal issues has been to grant them exemption to leave school in Year 10 to take on alternative education options with other training providers. Two teachers expressed concern that this was not always the most appropriate strategy, with one suggesting that Year 10 exemptions “should be kept as a last resort”. The second teacher suggested the problem was that students at alternative education were treated more as adults, while Year 10 students needed the much more closely monitored nurturing provided in the structured environment of a school. Students were considered to not have the social skills to cope in an adult world and were at risk in terms of alcohol, drugs, and pregnancy. Leaving the structured environment of school opened up these risks. In the teacher’s words:

The last student who applied [for exemption] I said this was a really bad idea and they left anyway. The next thing we knew they were pregnant and they’d left the course and it had all turned to custard, very fast. The thing that we do offer at school is very intensive support. We are a constant. The student comes in in the morning, we’re there. We ask them, “How are, how are you?” and, “What sort of weekend have you had?” We’re a constant and we pick up very quickly if there’s something wrong with the students and we phone their caregiver. Once they’re into a more adult environment, there isn’t necessarily that same close watch on them ... I’ve heard some very good things about the providers. But for students who have large literacy issues, by the time they get to that age there are often lots of other issues as well. And I don’t feel these providers give the wrap-around approach that these students still need.

Processes for students returning after leaving school early due to difficulties

Teachers from four of the five schools spoke of the processes at their schools for students wishing to return to school after leaving early. Most noted that although they welcomed the students back if their tertiary education or employment options did not work out, very few students actually wished to return once they have left. One teacher remembered two students who, realising a tertiary course they had gone to was not appropriate for their needs, had chosen to return to school to gain achievement credits before undertaking tertiary study. The teacher said:

We’ve had a couple of examples ... of two girls who wanted to leave school. They were reasonably bright girls, just hadn’t achieved, got into other things. They got into a course. But when they ... realised the level at which they were working, they thought, “Hey, this

isn't me". There's a grace period and they came back. But, they needed to change their life. They usually wake up within a week, if they're going to wake up.

Teachers believed that students were mostly likely to want to return because they found they needed a particular NCEA credit, either to gain employment or to move into a tertiary education programme. One teacher discussed the options for those who wished to return, saying that although there were very few, some did return as senior students with a "clearer focus on where they want to go". Some went into the Gateway programme, some into transition education, and some into alternative education.

However, as one teacher noted, "Once they have left school and have had the freedom of fewer rules, they can feel it is a backwards step to come back to school, with uniforms, rules etc". For this reason, another teacher had found, as the NCEA credits most students are likely to return for are also offered by adult training providers, students are more likely to go there:

We do push the idea of second chance education. And that is massively important to us. Often they can come through us, do all the teenage things, get into a work situation, suddenly realise, "Hello. I need Level 2 English", or, "I need Level 2 Maths". They may blame the school for it, not look too carefully at themselves. But the system is there, where there are providers ... who run a Literacy Programme who can get them through those Level 2 English and Level 2 Maths and they can join the army and do a trade ... So, they can pick up kids. It's not the end of the road when they leave school.

Some teachers criticised the way the alternative education system is set up, saying that at present it was not fulfilling the intended aim of it being a temporary respite from school, to help students break disruptive behavioural cycles so they could then return to school to continue their study. One teacher stated:

There is a place for alternative education but I don't think it's doing what the Ministry intended it to – to be a time out of school when they can come back in again. I don't think they actually transition back into school.

Another teacher suggested students were less likely to need to return to school after leaving because schools were having more success in retaining students until either they were ready to move on to tertiary study or they had gained employment. The teacher cited a Youth Work Broker from Work and Income as saying that, lately "her client load has dropped dramatically".

Two teachers spoke of students returning to school recently. Students from one school had left at the end of Year 11 to take up employment, but their employer had told them to return to gain some required NCEA literacy and numeracy credits. The second teacher commented that those who returned were seldom students with high literacy needs. According to the teacher they were "usually borderline students with only small academic issues, not profound literacy problems". Like the students mentioned by the first teacher, they were much more likely to be students needing one or two more NCEA credits to gain work in a particular occupation.

Follow-up processes for students who have finished school

According to most teachers interviewed, follow up processes for students who have finished school are mostly informal. When asked what follow up processes were in place, a typical

response was from one teacher who said, "We do tend to hand them on with not a lot of feedback as to where they've gone". Another said, "We probably don't have a good system in place for monitoring. For the ones who had literacy difficulties, we would always be interested to know how they get on, but no official way of doing it". Most teachers reported that feedback tended to come informally, socially, through word of mouth.

Nevertheless, some formal processes were mentioned. A teacher reported that at one school students complete a leaving certificate stating what they are intending to do, although there was no follow up. Another formal process is completed by universities who send graduation lists to schools, which, one teacher said, are stored in their archives and included in their newsletters.

Gateway coordinators mentioned a formal follow up process. They have a TEC requirement of a follow up report on Gateway students, in February, three months after students finish their course. The purpose, a teacher stated, was to find out whether students are "in work placement, or still in school or just where they've gone".

One teacher reported follow ups of leaving students at three months, and again at six months. The teacher explained:

Anyone who leaves in Years 11, 12, 13, we are supposed to follow them up within three months. For this three-month survey we get an 80-90% uptake. There's always a group we lose completely. We are supposed to do another follow up six months later. If they've gone off to another school we lose contact. The informal ones who leave without doing the leaving certificate, we keep in contact through the Youth Work Broker at WINZ or Youth Aid. For the ones that formally leave and go to work, we contact parents. Of course we lose contact exponentially as time goes by.

However, the teacher did not make it clear whether this process was related to Gateway students only or was a school-wide process. Moreover, in their interviews, the other two teachers from the same school both said that in their school there were only informal follow ups of leaving students. This leaves the possibility that there might be more follow up in schools than was discussed by the teachers interviewed. This lack of mention may be due to follow-ups being the responsibility of only some teachers, or administrative staff.

While most teachers acknowledged that more formal follow up would be a good thing, one admitted: "I do not have time to do this. If there comes a time when we are required to, we won't do any of it properly. [Without increased funding or resources] it would be too much to do".

Funding for literacy provision within schools: Issues raised

The most frequently raised issue related to funding for literacy provision was the short term nature of literacy funding. Teachers spoke of their costs in time and resources in applying for funding and the difficulties in developing programmes when there was no assured continuity of funding. Two teachers explained:

It's one of those really difficult problems because in order for a school to have funding, you have to prove that you need funding and then you have to prove that you're using it

correctly for the benefit of the students. And it can become a very unwieldy process and can take a lot of hours. The paperwork's the killer and I have to do it every term which is huge.

Funding runs on a three year cycle. If we're serious about literacy, I would say on a national level there has to be a bigger commitment to help solve the problem in schools, because the issues often aren't just with the reading. They're related to other things ... We've had some government support but it took nearly two years to lobby for that. Apply again. The administration, the bureaucracy to get through to get that funding is huge. And you're constantly scouring the next Gazette to see what is out there.

As well as being concerned about the short term nature of funding, teachers also argued that "tagging" funding, whether to particular projects or numbers of students, made continuity of literacy teaching difficult. Some comments included:

Funding is a big thing, because the funding is tagged, it's mile-stoned, and it runs out. And then you're kind of expected to have built enough capacity to carry on from there, which I think is fine to a point, but I don't know how realistic it is in terms of sustainability. And my worry is that when the funding dries up we'll all go back to minding our own store again.

We have to have 30 [students] on Gateway. That's what the funding is for. You don't get any choice on that. And that can make it really difficult. Because you've got thirty and you know that the funding is attached to that number so if any [students] go out, you lose your funding. That becomes a pressure.

A further issue related to the tagging of funding mentioned by teachers, as noted in the first quote in this section, was that the funding did not cover the vast amounts of time taken in the administrative work required to maintain the literacy programmes. Another teacher described the difficulties involved:

I think for literacy in schools where we talk about closing the gaps, we talk about the vast distance between our top achievers and our low achievers and yet we're not really having a commitment other than to say to schools, "You have to do better with what you've got" ... It takes a lot of commitment of the people on the ground to work with those kids: to chase those kids; to chase the parents; often, to get the kids to where you want to go.

Linked to the issue of time taken by teachers dealing with administrative details, teachers pointed out that new regulations may be imposed once a funding cycle is in place. The new regulations require extra time by teachers, but the funding remains static. As a teacher stated: "What happens is that they put new things in but they don't increase the funding or the resources".

One result of this is that schools are forced to divert money from other projects if they wish to extend their link-to-work programmes to include a wider range of students. Two teachers described redirecting money to allow students other than those considered "at risk" to take part in programmes that prepared them for life after school with valuable transferable skills, such as those gained through studying in the retail, carpentry, catering or hospitality industries. A teacher explained one less than satisfactory solution tried:

There is no space available for all senior students or even all the Year 13's prior to leaving, to have some kind of a life skills programme. What I tend to do is I get the banks to come in and talk to them; I get visitors coming and talking. But that's optional. And to get an adolescent to give up his lunch hour or give up some time doesn't sort of meet it. I'd like to have a timetabled slot.

Another issue for some teachers was related to Ministry of Education funding for alternative education being under the control of just one school, Wanganui High School. According to teachers, students who want to leave school in Year 10 must all be referred to Wanganui High School, as the "operating" school for alternative education. Wanganui High School teachers take responsibility for arranging placements for the students in one of the alternative education centres. This distance between the original school and the student can mean that schools lose contact with younger students who gain exemption to leave school early to attend alternative education. Teachers claimed that alternative education does not always cater for the social needs of younger students. Students who subsequently give up are likely to leave, unnoticed, and end up "falling through the cracks". The teachers believed that this would be less likely to happen if schools retained responsibility for, and contact with, their own students.

Teachers from two schools saw the lack of funding to help teachers cater for students' social needs as a serious funding issue. One stated, "Schools are simply not resourced enough to pick up the social needs of students", while the other said, "Some schools are pretty stretched in the amount of resource time they can put in to support kids". One teacher also mentioned the cost to parents who have to pay themselves when students required reader/writers for exams as a funding issue.

Another teacher, thinking of the current emphasis on life long learning, was concerned at the lack of ongoing teaching support for "students in care once they leave school", saying that "society needs to be accountable for supporting these people". A further anomaly for students with high needs was the need for their funding for teacher aide assistance to be accessed through a range of government agencies, including ACC, CYFS, and ORS (Ongoing Resourcing Scheme, a Ministry of Education initiative). This, in turn, creates extra administrative work for teachers.

One teacher saw a funding issue involved in needing to provide support for English language literacy among the growing numbers of Māori students arriving in the senior levels at secondary after doing their previous learning in a total immersion te reo Māori school.

We need to cater for the emergence of bilingual students, who have come from total immersion schooling and into an English speaking system. How does NCEA cater for them? It is something we've yet to tackle ... We need to look at how we can enhance those bilingual kids. It is becoming a bigger issue.

Professional development for addressing literacy issues within schools

Professional Development (PD) for addressing literacy issues within schools was discussed by seven teachers from four schools. The PD mentioned ranged from the individual level, including a SPELD trained teacher who attended annual SPELD conferences, through the school-wide level, where teachers from all subjects were involved in PD for literacy teaching, to the inter-school level where PD resources are shared to assist in raising literacy levels

throughout the city, and to nationwide projects providing PD to improve literacy levels for Māori students. The issues raised included the need to make teachers aware that literacy needed to be taught in every subject, not just in English, and that teachers need to present ideas in a range of ways to cater for students' different learning styles. They also included the constant juggling of funds that needed to take place to provide PD that led to the need to find creative ways of providing PD, such as in-house peer reviews. This section looks at the gamut of literacy PD mentioned by the teachers.

According to one teacher, literacy PD had been provided in the school for about five years in an attempt to raise awareness among staff of the need to teach literacy as part of each subject:

We have all had training for probably five years ... on how to make the material more appropriate to the needs of our students ... Each subject is asked to look at the words they use. On the board there there's a list of technology words we use. We refer back to the words a lot. So they become used to them because we're using them all the time. ... And that's used right through the school.

Workshops with a literacy advisor and how teachers were advised on literacy strategies were discussed in detail by teachers from one school. One said, for example:

This is one of [the literacy advisor's] beefs. When you do a PAT test, why don't you say, "Look, these are the skills you already have" and show them and say, "We want to get you to this part where you can start using your decoding skills for this and this, and how do you think we could get there together?" Because for the kids it's all just a mystery.

Another teacher, after describing aspects of PD workshops and the effectiveness of literacy teaching gained from them, went on to suggest that to be more effective, PD needed to be more "sustained". In the teacher's words:

We ran a professional development course four years ago and it ran for three years. On effective classrooms. One of the things we were pushing was scaffolding down the learning and the ideas and reading and so on. You don't give kids five pages to read and say, take notes on. You give them one paragraph and you take them through it and you look at the vocab and then you do it. And then you do the next paragraph and so on. That was very effective, but like most things, it's not sustained ... Professional development has to be sustained to make literacy work across the board.

A third teacher from the school, after admitting that "the school has not done enough" literacy PD, said that more had been "timetabled" for the week following the interview. The teacher mentioned that important gains from their previous PD workshops with the literacy advisor had been resources for all staff members to access and the understanding that "literacy isn't just an English teachers job ... In our school now, part of the performance appraisal of each teacher means that they have to write down what they're going to do with regards to literacy in their classrooms. That's right across the board".

Competing interests in staff training frameworks was found to be a problem by a literacy teacher from one school. According to this teacher the problem had stemmed from the introduction of an Assessment for Learning Strategy some years after a Literacy Strategy had been in place. While the strategies had been considered complementary by some teachers,

others had focused on the new strategy only and in the process ignored important aspects of the Literacy Strategy. The teacher noted that although it was “disappointing”,

some good literacy practice remains, in terms of using vocabulary. But we never really moved into using writing structures and taking it that next step. There was a lot of work done around vocab and word recognition and doing pretty straight forward literacy stuff, key words, definitions, and things like that within lessons. I think a lot of the staff have taken that on board but you then need to keep developing it within the framework.

The teacher went on to say that staff literacy PD, at the time of the interview, involved introducing them to a “framework for learning that accommodates [both] approaches”:

Currently as a staff we’re looking at introducing a middle years programme, developing it together as a staff with ownership over core approaches to learning such as Literacy, Assessment for Learning, and Thinking Skills, so they’re not seen as competing but as complementary.

A Literacy Committee had been established in one school. Members of the Literacy Committee worked “closely” with a literacy advisor from Massey University, and then in turn worked with other staff members “across the curriculum ... across the course of the year to put together a detailed plan in terms of how we can be helping our students”. One teacher went on to say:

It’s constantly trying to keep your fingers in enough pies, to pay for release days to get ... two people to go on courses and then to bring back information or to do joint PD.

Not streaming students, one teacher believed, meant that teachers had needed to adopt a wider range of teaching styles to cater for the wider range of literacy needs in their classrooms. For this to work teachers needed to be supported through further literacy PD. In the teacher’s words:

What [not streaming students] does is put the responsibility back on the classroom teacher. Once you don’t stream, you have to cater for the different learning styles and needs of the kids. That means your repertoire’s going to increase ... [But teachers] need to be supported by working in frameworks that allow them to do that.

A formal “in-house” sharing of ideas with colleagues was a further form of PD for literacy teaching adopted at one school. Reasons for this option and how it was to be implemented were described by a teacher:

Our professional learning next year is developed through in-house, shared learning ... You find the most powerful feedback is what’s going on in your next door neighbour’s classroom that you rarely get to visit. So we’ve made our professional learning model for next year an open classroom programme ... It’s just one of those good approaches to professional learning as opposed to taking people off campus and hoping that they can come back and inspire everyone else. No, we all have to own it.

The Enhanced Programme Funding (EPF) project was talked about by teachers from two schools. Through the EPF, Wanganui schools were working together with intermediate schools to raise literacy levels by improving the sharing of literacy data between intermediates and

colleges and by funding schools to bring in a literacy advisor to run PD workshops. As one teacher said, “With all staff part of the EPF fund, we brought in [the literacy advisor]”. A teacher from one school noted that the EPF provided “only a limited funding pool to provide PD for a limited amount of time”. Another teacher outlined a plan for use of the EPF for PD to improve literacy delivery throughout the school, saying: “One of the things we’re doing this year with our EPF is targeting some of our Heads of Departments to have PD together”. Yet another teacher described how some of their EPF was used:

Through the EPF fund, we’re working on professional development for mainstream, core teachers, so that, say, the science teacher can effectively assess whether the texts he’s using are at the right level. Or modify texts that come out, or even source texts that are at the right level for our kids ... In the past we’d get a class list put out. Say, if you’re a Year 10 science teacher you’ll have a class list of the students and nothing on there tells you what their ability is. We are now putting an indicator down and trying to work out our student manager system.

Participating as a pilot school in Te Kauhua (described above in *Dealing with personal issues*) was credited with providing PD gains for one school. After commenting that the project had “looked at Māori student achievement and teaching styles to better help the achievement of Māori in school”, a teacher went on to say:

That was huge for us as a staff, looking at relationships and how we can work better for Māori kids in the classroom ... Te Kōtahitanga was part of that as well ... It’s much easier to teach kids when you know them and you get on with them ... The group work was a huge part of that which was also part of literacy. The two went hand in hand really well. It’s also part of our appraisal system: you’ve got to say what you’re actively doing to look at Māori achievement as well as literacy.

Collaboration between secondary schools & local providers

Current school links with training providers

At the time of the interviews, Wanganui secondary schools had links with at least 20 training providers. There appears to be a wide divergence among the schools in the numbers of their links with outside providers. Teachers from one school mentioned links with 15 providers, one mentioned links with nine, another with seven, one with four, and one school mentioned links with three providers. The teacher interviews show that some schools do, indeed, include more links to tertiary providers as part of their literacy strategy. However, the numbers of providers with school links is not exhaustive: during their interviews, teachers tended to be speaking from memory and in no case where there were three teachers from one school did they all mention the same providers.

A further possible factor affecting the different numbers of providers mentioned is related to the issue, mentioned above, of the control of alternative education resting with Wanganui High School. As teachers from one school pointed out, “Wanganui High School is our provider for accessing alternative education programmes, and they use 3-4 providers”. This issue of access to funding for alternative education, raised by teachers from more than one school, will be discussed further in the following section *Barriers to collaboration with tertiary providers*.

According to the teachers, some links to tertiary providers are purchased through the link-to-work programmes Gateway, STAR, and ASDAN. Others are made through a Youth Work broker at Work and Income, who, a teacher noted, “has a lot of information re availability of work for young people, she has access to funding to get kids driver licenses, and other sorts of assistance they need”. School departments, such as the school’s designated Transition Education or Careers Advice teachers, also make the links for their students to fulfil curriculum gaps and perceived student needs. Subjects mentioned by teachers included: agriculture, forestry, and dairy farming skills; hairdressing; child care and nanny courses; engineering; floristry; catering; retail; tourism and hospitality, restaurant service and barista skills; food technology; carpentry; automotive engineering; driving courses; fashion and design; information technology; health and safety; journalism; and photography.

According to the teachers interviewed, the literacy providers used by the most schools were local providers. There were many positive comments from teachers regarding their collaboration with local tertiary providers. One teacher, for example, commented that they had had very little contact with tertiary providers until the “ice was broken” when a successful day was organised “seven or eight ... or might be ten years ago” for Careers Advisors to visit the providers:

Careers Advisors were bussed around a lot of the tertiary providers ... That broke the ice. And suddenly we’d met the people. That beats a brochure. We’d been to their premises and talked, had a cup of tea with them. So then if a youngster popped up, you’d think, “Oh yeah. I’ve seen [this provider] will be ideal”, you had someone, some point of contact. And that was pretty good.

This teacher and others described the successful running of regular Careers Expos over the past ten years. The Expos also involved “a lot of tertiary providers” and had further developed communication between schools and tertiary providers. One commented that it had been:

a very confusing picture, almost a beyond the curtain before, but now the access is much better. The communication is very good ... We know where they are. We know who they are and we know what they provide. It’s fine.

One teacher spoke of a good relationship between their school and a tertiary provider, saying:

[They] have been very good. They have looked at curriculum alignment with what schools are offering in the senior school and how that can align with prerequisites, trying to get a seamless pathway for students to follow ... We have good dialogue with [them]. The liaison worker with schools is pretty accessible. We’ve had a meeting this year to look at some of the STAR courses and what else is available. They’ve seen the importance locally of working with the [secondary] colleges.

Two other teachers spoke in the same vein of a good relationship with other local providers, saying of collaboration:

It’s an easy process. They’re all very good. Very approachable. Very willing to work with the students and with me and make it as easy as possible.

We have had students on one day a week placement. They go there and do other forms of literacy that reinforce what we're doing. They're not doing anything basically different, but they're looking at it in slightly different ways. And the emphasis there is that everyone's an adult, so there's a level of behaviour that's expected. They're working with other adults, new adults, new teachers, or tutors. That's been very positive.

Another teacher spoke of the cooperation of tertiary providers who were prepared to discuss and cater for younger students' needs:

Other schools have issues with them. I know that. But ... all three of those have accommodated our needs. We've sat down and talked. I can say to them, "Look, here's our need. We don't want the course you're operating, we want this". And [changes have been made] after discussion.

Barriers to collaboration with tertiary providers

Of the thirteen teachers interviewed, only five mentioned barriers to collaboration with tertiary training providers. They raised a variety of issues, including access, "bureaucracy", and school teachers being upset by students' repeated absences from the classroom.

All five teachers spoke of access as an issue. For two, a problem stemmed from teachers' lack of access to Year 10 students once they were enrolled with an alternative education provider. As mentioned above, students who want exemption to leave school in Year 10 must all be referred to Wanganui High School who is funded to arrange placements for the students in one of the alternative education centres. The teachers were concerned that once the students were referred to Wanganui High School, their links to the student were severed. With no links to the alternative education provider, teachers lost track of the students and their progress.

One teacher expressed the sense of powerlessness hinted at by others over their loss of access to students enrolled with alternative education or tertiary providers:

The agencies need to take more of a responsibility for them. I mean, from a purely cynical point of view I've heard it said that they just want bums on seats because that's their funding. And once they're enrolled, I don't know how often they're checked to make sure they're still enrolled or still attending.

In a similar vein, another teacher was concerned over the lack of provision at tertiary providers for younger students' social needs that had led to students opting out of education altogether. The teacher explained:

It's very difficult because sometimes there's a feeling that students are desperate to leave school. They run off and join a [tertiary training course] but the provision isn't there necessarily for the other issues that the student has – the social behaviour or personal issues – and after a short period of time they leave and then they're lost. If they're over sixteen, or they've left school on exemption then that's it ... We can't help them.

The broken links between students and their schools also mean that students whose attitudes and behaviour have later changed and they might be ready to return to school, are not encouraged to do so. According to the teachers, there needs to be collaboration between the

students' schools and the providers. One suggestion was that alternative education might be established at the school. Having a teacher from the students' schools involved in the alternative education programme, and keeping the links open to encourage students to return to school, was another solution suggested by a teacher – a solution that might also alleviate teachers' concerns over the "fate" of their students. The teacher, who had visited another school, explained how the system might work:

Alternative education is run off-campus but with a teacher at the school, and students are fed back into school as they improve academically and behaviourally. They are much more closely aligned – maybe we need to do this. I would design an alternative ed system – still doing work placements, courses, gaining qualifications, but still participating in important social activities at school such as sport, kapa haka; then feeding them back into school when they've grown up a bit.

For four of the teachers, the access issue was related to cost. One said simply, "I'd like to use [a particular tertiary provider] because they run a couple of courses I want to use but I just find they overcharge ... They charge almost double what anybody else charges". The other cost issue centred on the Ministry of Education's requirement for students to have had a history of SPELD and/or psychological assessments before consideration for entitlement to reader/writer assistance. One teacher mentioned that there needed to have been at least two such tests "in a five year period". Another teacher elaborated:

We've got to document the fact that they need reader/writer assistance right from Year 9 all the way through. And you need quite a lot of supporting documentation as to why. Just the fact that they can't read properly or decode isn't enough. You have to have SPELD documentation or something from other agencies as well to show that they have got a difficulty before we can use it for an external assessment for NCEA. So we have to set up a record of the help that students have been given.

How this led to an equity issue surrounding access was described by another teacher:

Assessment is prohibitively expensive for our families and now that we don't get funding for it, it's ridiculous ... So where we had other very wealthy schools in Wanganui who would have maybe forty kids having reader/writers for Level One NCEA, we didn't have any.

A third access issue raised by a teacher was related to "high needs" students. The teacher believed such students were not always given access to a fair chance, saying of one provider:

Because they believe they don't want to take students on who haven't got any chance of completing a course, they gave my students a preliminary test and decided that they weren't the provider for them.

The teacher understood that the provider now offered a course more appropriate to a wider range of needs, but their school had not approached the provider again.

The second barrier to collaboration with providers raised by two teachers from different schools was a bureaucratic issue. Both teachers had experienced difficulties in collaborating with a

specific provider. One spoke of problems with delays in having results processed and returned to the school. The teacher explained:

We didn't get our results last year from the ... courses until the last day of school. The seniors had all left. I had to come back the next week and mail out all the result sheets to them ... And that to me is unforgivable, because the courses stop in October. Why does it take till mid-December to get the results? It's just their bureaucracy.

The other teacher, while sympathetic to causes for delays, perceived that she was "not a priority" for the provider, and was therefore left waiting for contact to be returned, causing problems with developing future plans.

The third barrier to collaboration with tertiary providers was related to tensions within the schools rather than between school and tertiary provider. According to two teachers, some teachers who were not involved in Transition Education or Careers Education teaching became upset over repeated absences from the classroom by students spending one or two days a week either on work placement or at a tertiary provider. As one teacher said:

Teachers are often frustrated by this [attendance at providers] because students are out of class, but I see it as a team effort. If we keep them in classes for that extra year and they don't get a taste of what is out there then we're cutting their options down.

Individual employer perspectives

Background

The employer participants, their employee numbers, and roles

Eight Wanganui employers took part in interviews for this survey. One employer was from a transport company, one was from the hospitality industry, one was in a firm that provided accounting services, two were in trades, two were in manufacturing, and one in energy supply. The participants' employees thus represent a diverse range of occupations.

Cameron and Massey (2002) established a typology of businesses, distinguishing them by size. According to their typology, a micro business comprises up to five employees, a small business from six to 49, a medium-sized business from 50 to 99, and a large business has more than 100 employees. As Table 2 below shows, the eight employer participants in this research represent a range of firms from micro to large, although the majority were in the small business category, and none was in a medium-sized business. Two were in micro-sized businesses, five in small businesses, and one was a large business.

Table 2. Numbers and types of micro, small, and large businesses and workers represented by employer participants

Business size	Number of businesses	Type of business	Worker numbers by business
Micro business	2	Trade	2
		Hospitality	3
Small business	5	Trade	6
		Manufacturing	23
		Energy supply	36
		Manufacturing	~20-25
Large business ~ Approximately	1	Accountancy	~42-43
		Transport	~200

Employers' definitions of literacy

When asked for a definition of literacy in relation to employees' needs, employers used a wide range of terms. Four defined literacy as reading and writing, but two of those qualified this. One added that literacy for employees also includes the need for confidence to continue to improve on their skills:

It's not just a matter of reading and writing. It goes further than that ... because the reading and writing; I mean if people haven't got the confidence or self confidence for themselves to go further really than that ...

Another, while suggesting that literacy is reading and writing, argued that employees must also have the literacy ability of communication, saying: "I don't think it's confined to reading and writing. I think it's more a communication thing; being able to communicate". This was a belief shared by three other employers, with one saying: "We need to be able to communicate

with [employees], and they need to be able to communicate with us". One went so far as to state: "Communication is the most important to get it working in the right direction".

In fact, although not all employer participants specifically mentioned communication skills, most definitions centred on aspects of communication skills as aspects of literacy they considered necessary among their workforce. For example, two spoke of the need to be able to use basic conversational skills, with one saying that employees needed to be able to transfer those conversational skills to their writing. As the participant explained:

I suppose mostly we're working in general conversation, and general conversation will go to your written form. You don't use outlandish words or anything like that. It's got to be fairly basic English out into the general public.

Two participants counted understanding as a vital part of literacy. One expressed it in terms of being able to write in a way that others can understand:

I try and keep the literacy to a base that people will understand. I would expect if someone sent something back to me, I could read it without saying, "Well what's that all about?" It's not turned inside out and using large words to confuse people where they have to go to a dictionary to find out what it's all about.

The other, however, talked of the need for employees to have an understanding of what they read and write and also an understanding of how society operates. The participant explained:

Literacy to me is [based] on the fact that people have got to be able to read and write, and understand what they read and write. They don't have to be a perfect writer. They don't have to be a perfect speller. I've got no problem with that sort of thing. They've got to understand what the ways of the world are.

Similarly, a participant spoke of literacy including common sense and the right attitude:

If somebody displayed common sense and actually thought for themselves and used initiative that would be a great plus ... If something's gone wrong, then they need to be able to see it and either tell somebody or fix it. But a lot of the guys here just don't. *Interviewer:* Is that tied in with literacy? *Participant:* Yes, I think it is because it all connects with your attitude to life and your interest in your job.

Interestingly, one participant also included the need to understand Māori words and New Zealand slang, citing problems with an immigrant worker who did not:

For thirty years he's been here. And he still doesn't quite get hold of the Māori names and still there's the way New Zealanders present themselves too. Because we use words that don't even come out of the English language, that's slang, and New Zealand slang really.

After prompting from the interviewer, one participant included numeracy skills as a basic facet of workplace literacy, along with "communication, reading it well, speaking it well, the verbal". One employer included computer skills, saying: "Certainly computer skills. Do they have NCEA Level Three in computer skills? Are they comfortable handling Microsoft suite of packages?"

Employer perspectives of factors leading to literacy difficulties

Employer participants expressed a variety of factors they perceived as leading to literacy difficulties. Most were related to two main areas: 1) family environment; and 2) school. Five of the eight participants suggested issues surrounding parents and the home environment, and an equal number pointed to school issues. Overuse of computer or video games and overuse of text communication were two further issues mentioned that were not specifically linked by the participants to parents or school.

Family environment

Issues surrounding parents and home circumstances perceived by participant employers to contribute to literacy difficulties included the interlinking factors of undereducated parents, poor socio-economic conditions, both long-term unemployment of parents, and the opposite where both parents are employed and too busy to have time to read to their children, parents not teaching life skills, and poor diet and health.

One participant, argued that, “mostly it’s from the home, if parents won’t or don’t read to them”. The participant, believing that literacy difficulties occur when reading is not instilled into children “from the cradle”, went on to suggest that one of the reasons parents do not read to their children is either because they are themselves undereducated, they cannot read, or they do not see the importance of reading. As the participant explained:

There is that “Books in Schools” programme, which is probably doing a lot of good. But then again we’ve got kids that are taking the books home that probably don’t even open them up again because the parents pooh-pooh the education. Maybe they’re undereducated themselves, and they’re angry because they can’t understand. And that’s probably where a lot of it stems from.

A second participant also attributed literacy issues to parents’ own literacy difficulties, but suggested, further, that the affected parents were likely to be located within a particular socio-economic situation:

But then they had children, [the] lower socio-economic group. [The] kids don’t do well at school so they drop out and the parents can’t help them. And the parents aren’t that focused around driving children’s education.

Another employer participant also raised family socio-economic environment as an issue, but believed it was long-term unemployment among lower socio-economic parents that was likely to contribute to literacy difficulties. At the same time, the employer suggested that difficulty with literacy was not the only barrier to employment. The participant explained:

I think literacy goes in hand with where people live and the way they live ... There’s a generation of people coming through that haven’t worked and maybe will never work, and they’re passing the same thing on to their children ... They ... probably find work too hard and more than they want to do. Just probably work doesn’t suit them and they’re probably not under a lot of pressure because they can get funding to carry their lives how they’re happy to live. Reading and writing or literacy is just part of the problem. I don’t think it’s the whole problem on its own.

On the other hand, one employer considered the problem of literacy difficulties may stem from tired, overworked parents who have no energy left for assisting their children at the end of their day's work. In the participant's words:

There are parents that will come home; obviously both parents are working. They'll come home at, say, half past five, six o'clock, put on the tea. They're tired ... And when the kids come home from school generally, if they're on their own and they have a brother or sister that's the right age to look after them, that's whoever they talk to. And there's sibling rivalry ... And then the parents come home tired, they yell and scream at the kids, "Here's your tea". Put it on the table. "Eat. Go to bed". So they don't get any reading matter.

Two final factors impacting on literacy related to family circumstances were raised by two employers concerned about diet and health issues. As one commented:

There are eating problems. They don't have the right food, [and] they might have some form of illness ... I see quite a bit of it ... because I get involved with the families themselves here ... They've no motivation, their kids have no motivation at all, low self esteem. There's probably a number of factors; there's probably the medical side of it, and the family side of it if you're not eating the right foods and not [exercising]. You have to get your blood circulation right and then thinking right and the family background.

The other employer expressed it more in terms of children not being taught "life skills" by their parents, saying:

The parents are missing out on giving the kids life skills. They're not saying to them, say, "You just can't go to work and do a day's work on a bag of chips and a bottle of coke. You need to have four sandwiches, piece of cake or a muesli bar, and you need an apple", or something like that.

School issues

School issues mentioned by employer participants as possible causes of literacy difficulties all centred on classroom management. Specific factors raised included the need for: smaller, more specialised classes allowing more opportunity for one-to-one assistance for students with difficulties; more discipline; more focus on reading books and less on using computers; addressing inequities in the system caused by Tomorrow's Schools; and more preparation for employment.

Three participants argued for the need for more one-to-one interaction between teachers and students as a means of helping those with literacy difficulties. As one said:

I feel that there is a gap in the schooling system. I think if people aren't quite up to the level they get left behind ... All [that is] needed is probably a bit more attention.

Another expressed the problem in terms of class size, saying that it is because class sizes are too big that there is not enough opportunity for one-to-one interaction. Two mentioned providing more specialised classes to cater for those with literacy difficulties, with one suggesting the need to "pick up the kids as they're coming through, and push them into a specialised classroom with a good teacher that doesn't yell and scream and push the kids down". The other explained the reason:

I don't think everybody has the same learning process. There's some brighter kids and some not so bright. Some people that are very shy and reserved are probably not as up there and don't ask as many questions or don't push through like someone that's brighter.

Two participants spoke of more discipline in schools as a means of contributing to literacy learning. One phrased it as, "schools have probably got to be a bit harder on them", while the other elaborated, linking difficulties with classroom discipline to class sizes:

Discipline ... does affect everything ... Teachers themselves, there are still a lot there that are so conscientious ... but today they don't have the time to be able to do it for every student. They end up with a student class of thirty.

For one participant, literacy problems were related to an imbalance of time devoted to computer use and reading books in schools. The participant argued that teachers are now focusing too much on computers and that there needs to be a return to more time spent reading books to improve literacy standards. In the participant's words:

You can't push it all back to the school, but ... I see schools are wanting a bookless society. They're going to computers, computer screens. They have PowerPoint presentations in front of picture theatre, that type of thing. I think the school needs to [provide] some hard print to read.

Of concern to one participant were the impacts on student learning likely to result from inequities created by the implementation of Tomorrow's Schools:

Part of the worry going into this brave new world of Tomorrow's Schools was there were going to be some inequities. There were going to be generations, perhaps, of kids who were going to be penalised ... because a number of communities will have the resource in people and cash opportunity to ensure their students get the very best possible bat at the crease. The flip of that is there are a number of communities who don't have the skill base and don't have the ability to pool funding to supplement Government revenue ... There will be kids who lost out of that. That will be a factor with some being labelled as low literacy.

One participant believed that schools could better prepare their students for employment, saying that school leavers are simply told,

"Go and apply for a job down there". "Dunno what to do". I don't think there's enough training on the literacy side of it, showing them what to do, preparing for employment, preparing for life, preparing for anything.

Computer games and text communication

Two participants perceived the overuse of some computer games as detrimental to literacy learning. Both participants, however, specified the problem as lying with games that involved fighting or killing. One criticised the lack of any reading component in such games, while the other described the issue as relating to excessive time spent playing the games as they did not "use your brain", saying:

Too much watching video games ... is no good for literacy. X-box and all that sort of thing. I don't mean anything that's got to use your brain like a card game ... Those sorts of things aren't harmful in moderation. It's the ones where you just sit there and you're fighting things all the time. That's no good.

Also concerned with effects of modern technology, one participant named the use of cell phone text messaging as detrimental to literacy levels:

You've got text messaging as well, which is all the short lingo. And they're all starting to talk it. I get texts and I think, "What are they going on about?" It's understandable to shorten the verses up to come into a text message, but they're starting to talk it ...

Employer perspectives of NCEA

The official website for NCEA claims that:

Under the old system, employers didn't know what part of a subject students were good at. With NCEA results, you get a really clear picture of what they know and can do. So you can match jobs with skills (<http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/>, retrieved 04/11/07).

Only two employer participants spoke of the impact of the NCEA system. One, who did not speak from a personal viewpoint, but rather from hearsay from other employers, stated that:

NCEA hasn't been useful for employers ... [because] it doesn't give them hard facts ... Probably if they really want to employ that person [they need] to go back to the school and have an explanation put to them.

The other, who had had personal experience, was strongly against the current NCEA system of reporting, referring to it as, "Absolutely hopeless. It's the biggest waste of time". The participant went on to elaborate, adding that there was confusion among employers over the differences between unit standards and achievement standards and also in how to read the reports to know which standards a prospective employee had passed:

You can't judge the kids ... from the NCEA qualification on what they'd be like in the workplace ... They have unit standards and achievement standards and unit standards are a lot lower grade. And we weren't aware of that at the time we employed [a new employee]; we weren't fully aware of the implications of it. [For one applicant presenting] his Level One and Two results we had to take them and see a teacher and have them explained to us. We couldn't read them and understand them. It wasn't clear what he'd passed and what he hadn't passed ... English is one of the things I look for. But, unfortunately, having especially a Level One NCEA qualification doesn't guarantee they can read and write.

Links between literacy and employment

Literacy levels in the wider Wanganui workforce

When employer participants were asked about the literacy levels they had seen among Wanganui employees, three of the five who responded tended to do so negatively, without referring to any specific levels or deficiencies.

One of the three participants with negative comments stated, "Some of them you certainly wouldn't think that they'd been at secondary school at all". The second said, "There are probably a lot of people out there that ... are very limited in what they can do. I think somehow, maybe they've been missed". The third replied,

Generally I think it's probably underestimated the number of people with problems in Wanganui ... A lot of people are out there and they've hidden it, and they shouldn't have, because we can help them as well ... I've seen a lot of school leavers that haven't had the required training, and I've been looking at taking on apprentices.

Of the two who offered a more positive note, one suggested the standard was, "Pretty reasonable, [though] still not perfect"; while the other did not feel in a position to comment because the participant's "workforce is very stable".

Numbers of employees with literacy difficulties

When asked about the numbers of their employees with literacy difficulties, the employer participants had some interestingly divergent responses. For example, the employer in a small manufacturing firm stated that, "Eighty percent of them, their literacy skills are not good ... Some of them you certainly wouldn't think that they'd been at secondary school at all". On the other hand, the employer of a large firm stated that only two to three percent currently had difficulties. However, this employer believed that the number was growing as it had become harder to find employees at the literacy level required. In the employer's words:

In my area there would be four that I know of that have reading writing disabilities ... With everybody ... I would suggest probably two percent, three percent ... but it's growing ... I think, because we're really, and I hate saying the words, scraping the bottom of the barrel, just trying to pick anybody up.

Two employers noted discrepancies in the literacy levels between older and younger employees. The first found that older employees had higher literacy levels than younger ones:

We don't seem to have a massive problem with anyone that's over thirty. We've never had a problem. It's the under-thirties that are the problem. *Interviewer:* Are you talking about attitude here or literacy as well? *Participant:* Literacy as well.

On the other hand, the second participant spoke of having more problems with low literacy among older employees, employed by the firm up to thirty years ago. However, as the participant explained, the reason was that the literacy demands of the job had changed along with new materials and technology used:

Anybody that joins us we've made sure that they have the level of literacy that we need. The problems that we have had are with people that joined the company back in the days when ... so long as they were physically capable and they could communicate verbally they didn't have to do a lot more ... We've got some employees that have been with us for thirty years ... Now we're at a level where mostly they're working with plastic pipe [which has] a very sophisticated method of joining ... We now have modern technology such as graphical information where using satellite type technology you can plot an area. And we have to ... fill out documentation ... [to] show exactly where our pipes are within the utilities network, so somebody else digging doesn't dig up our pipe and so on ... These guys have now got very high expectations on them with regards to competencies.

Literacy differences across employee roles

When asked if they had noticed any differences in the literacy abilities across different types of employees, the employer participants did not really discuss the issue in relation to different employee types. One noted that communication skills of young male apprentices in a smaller centre were not as good as those in Wanganui, saying that "their ability to liaise with client base was quite different. They weren't as approachable to the client base".

One employer, however, mentioned noticing difficulties for some employees who had successfully moved from skilled work to taking on a supervisory role, but were then unable to move to the level required for a shift from a supervisory to a management role. In the participant's words:

We had two that had come up through the ranks of supervisors ... but bringing them up to that next mark where we wanted them to be managers they struggled ... We found there were problems and we had to spend extra time with them. And, unfortunately, we should have given them more support, [because] they ended up getting so stressed about it ... Doing NZ Level 4 Management ... they couldn't actually do that ... They were good up to a supervisory level, very good, but to bring them up one more step, they weren't getting through what they had to do.

Importance of literacy in employees' work

Employer participants mentioned the importance of a wide range of aspects and levels of literacy in their employees' work. Some of these were occupationally specific, reflecting the idea that there are multiple forms of literacy. Included were: being able to read and write; accuracy in written work; being able to "do bookwork" including filling in invoices, receipts, quotes, and logbooks; legibility in writing; being able to communicate; and numeracy skills.

Five employer participants spoke of the importance of their employees being able to read and write. As one commented, "I do think that if you can't read properly – which is one of the biggest things for literacy – you cannot put yourself across properly". Most, however, qualified their employees' needs for reading and writing skills. Three, for example, said that it was accuracy in reading/writing that was important, but one employer said,

It is important I suppose. It's not one of the main things that I look for. If ... their main role was front desk or something like that, very important; it would be paramount. But for the roles that we have here with people, it isn't so important.

For others, the qualification was in the form of job-specific reading/writing abilities, such as being able to “do the books” filling out such forms as receipts, invoices, and quotes. Again, accuracy was stressed. As one participant explained:

It is extremely important that the heading on the invoices is right ... I vet them before they go to post ... to stop the kickback on me ... It's very important literacy is accurate.

For one participant, employees' continued employment depended on being able to fill in logbooks accurately. The employer had to expend time and money on training employees in the legal requirements for filling in logbooks. If employees lost their drivers' licences because their logbooks were found to be incorrect, the employer then had to train more employees. In the participant's words:

We've got things like rules ... for their logbooks. They've got to fill in a logbook right. Some of them struggle with that, and if ... they get it wrong, they automatically lose their licence for a month, so it's very important. No licence, no job ... It's just changed in the last three weeks ... so we have to put them all through training again.

The need for legibility in handwriting was mentioned by two participants, but only to say that it was not of high importance. One stated, “So long as we can read it, it's okay. It doesn't have to be brilliant”, while the other suggested the need had been transcended by computers, saying, “Writing today has to be good to a certain extent. But the luck of computers does solve it”.

Communication and verbal skills were counted as important by two participants, although neither gave reasons, with one saying simply, “We need to be able to communicate with them, and they need to be able to communicate with us”, and the other, “The communication has to be professional”. Numeracy skills were also mentioned by three participants as important literacy skills for their employees, but none elaborated on the reasons.

Literacy requirements for potential employees

Employer participants' literacy requirements for potential employees varied according to the occupation and roles in question. For most participants, the level of skill required differed, but the ability to read and write, understanding of English, and at least basic numeracy skills were high on their lists of requirements. Typical responses included:

Good understanding of English. Good understanding of maths because there are formulas. You have to work out cylinder sizes, volumes, air spaces, [so need to be able to] use a calculator.

[They] really just have to understand the written word well and be able to speak it well ... Because our people are engaged in all manner of communication means they have to be able to articulate that well, with the minimum of difficulty and error.

They definitely need to be able to read, write, and have a bit of maths behind them. But not a great deal ... All our jobs require measurements and somebody could measure up and box things for them.

They'd need to be able to read instructions for hardware, instructions for glue, specifications. They'd need to be able to read plans and specifications. They'd need to be able to do simple arithmetic in their head.

Some included the need for communication skills, both written and verbal, which for one employer also included telephone and computer skills. The employer explained:

I think we'd be looking for someone that could step into the job and would be fully qualified from the point of view of having written and communication, computer, telephone, and those basic skills ... I would say that if someone doesn't have those basic literacy skills – and I know we're talking about more than just reading and writing; talking about lots of levels of communication, financial skills, and so on – they probably wouldn't get offered the job.

One employer required employees to be able to sketch, referring to sketching as a form of literacy:

A lot of the language we use is sketches. The guys need to be able to do sketches and sketch things, which is all part of literacy really. So that's the way they communicate. And sometimes the easiest way to explain something to someone is to do a drawing.

One employer considered initiative, or common sense understanding, to be a necessary literacy requirement for employees, saying:

If somebody displayed common sense and actually thought for themselves and used initiative that would be a great plus ... If something's gone wrong then they need to be able to see it and either tell somebody or fix it. But a lot of the guys here just don't.
Interviewer: Is that tied in with literacy? *Participant:* Yes, I think it is because I think it all connects with your attitude to life and your interest in your job.

Needs of young people coming from school to employment

Several employer participants, when asked about the needs of young people coming from school to employment mentioned literacy skills, such as reading, writing, language, and maths. For example, one said they need, "Good understanding of English. Good understanding of maths", while another said, "English is one of the things I look for. But unfortunately having, especially a Level One NCEA qualification, doesn't guarantee they can read and write".

Other employers focused on a derogatory attitude towards trades which they believed was fostered in some schools today. For some, the problem was that schools discouraged students from considering a trade as a worthy career option. One employer described the issue:

One of the main problems we have is people's perception of a tradesman ... A tradesman now can earn a very comfortable, liveable salary ... They need to realise that the bar has been lifted a little bit and a lot of the jobs that tradesmen used to do that may have been a little bit mundane and repetitious – that did suit people that weren't as clever as they could be – are actually being done by machines in factories. So, the work that a tradesman does has changed and I think that's been missed ... We've tried to talk to the high school ... and they weren't really interested in us talking to the boys.

Related to this attitude, two employers spoke of schools underestimating the level of literacy required for young people being sent to apply to train in a trade, and of sending those who were ill-prepared or not at a level of capability required for such training. In their words:

The schools' perception of somebody that would make a good apprentice is someone who hasn't done that well at school but is maybe a nice person, whereas we're now starting to use computerised machines, which means digital read outs and very expensive machines ... Schools need to change their perception of the kind of person that a tradesman needs to be.

The schools are letting them down [by] putting them out into the workforce ... [For example, a youth] was recommended to us by the school. They said that he would make a good apprentice and he was okay when he first started. He had enough reading and writing skills to kick him off. But as we want to bring him through and teach him more complicated things, he's struggling with it.

Another employer argued that schools were placing too much emphasis on preparing young people for university education rather than for coping in the day-to-day world. The employer explained:

The children don't have that ability to put it across, to learn, to read properly, and to write properly ... I think there's too much emphasis on higher education in life ... I think that you don't need a university degree for probably eighty percent of life. But the emphasis on education today is ninety percent go to university. What good's it going to be? We're going to have a lot of people that have got high power knowledge and no ability.

In one employer's perception, young people would benefit from being encouraged to strive harder, especially at those things that do not come easily:

He can spell. He can read fantastically. He's not stupid in that sense and he does all the good things, but he cannot write. And it's only because he didn't have to, so why bother?

Two employers believed some school leavers needed to have learnt more self-confidence before they could become effective workers. As one said:

We're seeing a lot of school leavers that haven't had the required training. [They are the] younger ones mainly, not so much the older ones, and have a lot of low motivation, [and low] esteem of themselves.

On the other hand, another employer talked about school leavers, "especially younger ones", arriving at the workplace with a "cocky" attitude that interfered with their work performance.

Links between literacy and maintaining employability

The underlying message of employer participants regarding the links between literacy and maintaining employability was the need for everyone, including employers themselves, to be constantly looking towards the future. Several participants linked employees' lack of ambition to improve their literacy skills to their lack of ambition for the future or to improve their

employment position. Two participants summed up participants' overall perceptions of many of their employees and would-be employees, the first by saying:

The attitude of most people that come here, I suppose is, "it's a job and as long as I'm doing my job, getting my pay packet, I don't care what happens" ... They're very now ... They couldn't give two stuffs about tomorrow. It's today that counts and the pay packet they're getting now.

The second elaborated further:

I think that they don't show any interest in their futures ... [When they arrive we ask], "What are your goals in the company? Where do you see yourself in five years time?" And they say, "Rich". They want to be there, but they're not prepared to put in the hard yards to get there.

The consensus of the participants was that everyone needs to be aiming to improve their position in the workforce by improving their skills, which often includes improving their literacy levels. One participant said of his own position, "There's ongoing training of course ... I have to go and do credit standards to hold my ticket for any one year". However, the concern of employers is that too many employees do not understand the need for continuing literacy learning. One employer, for example, when asked whether those with literacy difficulties tend to see that by improving their literacy they would be improving their employment options, replied:

No. They don't realise they need to ... work and to get further ahead ... I don't really think they realise ... that by not learning properly they're not going to get themselves what they want out of life in the end.

In response to the same question regarding a particular employee, another participant answered: "No, I don't think so. I don't think he puts the two together. But he knows that we struggle with him because he can't fill his time sheet in so that we can read it".

Some employers spoke of their lack of success when trying to encourage employees to improve literacy skills to enable them to move to better positions within their businesses. One, in a typical example, described efforts to encourage a long-term employee to rise to the level of production manager:

We wanted him to get his licence but he just wouldn't do it. I don't know if it was a confidence thing, but ... he could read okay. If he'd gone and got his licence ... he would have been production manager, foreman, because he was that good. But because he wouldn't get his licence we couldn't ...

One employer pointed out that, in the case of trades in particular, there needs to be an awareness that a successful career is possible for those who know that ongoing literacy skills required are greater than they used to be. As the employer said:

A tradesman now can earn a very comfortable, liveable salary. But a tradesman that's a slug can't do that. So they need to realise that the bar has been lifted a little bit.

The attitude of employees to continuing literacy learning was argued by most employers to be an important issue, with one saying, "it has to come from themselves". Another added:

If you want to do something, there's only one way you're going to do it, and that's by choosing to do it yourself. Nobody can make you do it. If you send somebody on a literacy course that doesn't want to be there, there's just no point in being there. It has to come from themselves.

Several employers mentioned supporting employees through basic literacy training required for their roles. But one such employer was also concerned about attitude, suggesting that some employees might use cost as an excuse for opting out of undertaking further training to improve their promotion opportunities. Responding to the question, "Did he see the need to improve his literacy ... to stay employable?" the employer answered: "Yes, he did, definitely ... [but] there was a bit of denial on his part. I think he tried to blame the company by saying that we wouldn't pay for it".

Another issue raised by an employer was how to reach those with literacy difficulties who were not employed to equip them with basic literacy requirements for employment. The employer stated:

I would say unless somebody – and I guess it has to be WINZ or one of the social agencies – can help those people get from where they are up to a level where they can pass our one page CV-type test, and have an interview with a reasonable amount of confidence, then they just won't get the chance.

In a similar vein, a second employer was concerned about how to spread the message that by improving their literacy those with literacy difficulties who were unemployed or underemployed could improve their employment options. The participant, arguing that WINZ might take responsibility for showing the unemployed "what can be achieved, what the benefits are of attending these courses", described how it might be done:

You could say, "Look, you could work for ten dollars an hour for the rest of your life or you could do it hard for two or three years while you build up your skills and then get a job at fifteen dollars an hour and then maybe twenty dollars an hour". That's an incentive, because they can see that if they don't change themselves nothing in their life is ever going to change.

One employer discussed the growing numbers of legal requirements, at all employment levels, which demand increasingly complex literacy skills the further up the promotion ladder an employee climbs. In the employer's experience, unless employees are willing and able to continue their literacy learning, their chances for promotion dwindle:

There's more and more compliance in coming along to us ... more writing, more reading, Health and Safety, ACC requirements, the legal side of it ... People who have learning problems normally don't make it up to the top drivers ... We've got probably three or four that have problems, and they've done NZQA and we've got them through, and it's like, "Wow, I've got there", and ... they don't move on up because they're happy with what they're doing. They don't want to go any further, into dispatch or a manager's job.

Impact of literacy difficulties on future employment

The most immediate impact of literacy difficulties on future employment mentioned by employer participants was that without literacies of a sufficient level to be able to fill in a job application form or CV those seeking employment would find many occupations closed to them. Reasons given tended to focus on increasing literacy demands required in the workplace both to operate new technology and to ensure compliance of legal requirements for accurately keeping logbooks as discussed in the section *Importance of literacy in employees' work* above. One employer gave the example of the need for new trade workers to attend training courses, saying that those with literacy difficulties are not able to cope:

We are not able to employ them because what happens is the ... industry has to have a certain standard before you go into ... an entry job. They have to go away and be assessed and if they go down to block courses they just blow up because they can't handle it.

The problems created for employers by the necessity of training those with literacy difficulties was an issue raised by one employer. The participant suggested that job seekers with literacy difficulties will have trouble gaining employment because employers want to avoid the cost and effort involved in overcoming such shortcomings:

If there's someone out there now who is illiterate – and we're talking about the wider illiteracy, whether it's social skills ... reading and writing ... arithmetic skills, computer skills – the fear I have for them is they're not going to get the job because it's too big a burden to ask an employer to take that person on and take them from zero up to a point where you can start training them to do what you want them to do.

Another issue related to literacy difficulties was raised by an employer who explained that because of changes in literacy requirements in occupations such as trades to meet the needs of the growing sophistication of technology used, employees all needed to be re-educated. According to the participant, many experienced and skilled workers with literacy difficulties feared the thought of retraining so much that they had left their trade, or the employers had had to say, "Right, we'll let you go", because they refused to undergo the required examinations. In the participant's words:

They're trying to re-educate everybody. And that's putting a lot of people off. To give an example, there were over a few thousand-odd gas fitters and now they're down to seven hundred and eighty-odd gas fitters in the country ... After my audit I was talking to the auditor, and he said chaps were being physically sick prior to the audit.

For one employer, the problem for those with literacy difficulties arose when job seekers lost their confidence when they found that "even factory jobs" now require prospective employees to undertake a battery of literacy tests. The participant explained:

Jobs these days are not just straightforward. Half the time they put you through IQ tests and all kinds of things. And you go to a panel of two or three different people ... It does make it harder for them. Even for factory jobs now they have to go through a big, you know ... They sort of lose their confidence to get out there.

Other requirements for potential employees

Employer participants described requirements other than literacy for their potential employees. Some of these other requirements depended on the nature of the job. They included having physical strength, or being “physically able”, having “hand skills”, “practicality”, and “mechanical” or “job” experience.

Some examples of other requirements for potential employees were general and were more likely to be mentioned by more than one participant. Included were: having good “social skills”, such as having “an outgoing personality”, being a good “team player”, and “knowing how to feed and clothe themselves”; “ability to communicate” or to “speak well”; and having “a good attitude” for the job, by showing enthusiasm, showing initiative, having “a passion for the job”, or showing “a real desire to do well”.

Literacy support provided by employers

Assessments by employers

When asked how they assess potential employees for such factors as literacy skills and personality attributes, six of the eight employer participants mentioned a written job application in the form of either a CV and/or an “application form”, four spoke of a written test or form to be filled in by the applicant on arrival, and three talked of using an interview process. Five of the employers described using a combination of methods. One did not refer to any of the methods, saying instead, “probably, rather than check them out, I would give them a go”.

Employers who used a CV and/or application form spoke of doing so for different reasons. For one it was a way of following the school progress of potential employees to see how they had applied themselves to improve their standards. The employer said:

I would look at their schooling background. I would go back say five years to see where they've picked up maybe. And if they've picked up in the first or it's been hard for them in the first two years and they've picked up that means that they're showing that they're working hard, or harder.

Another requested potential employees to send in a written application to get an idea of their handwriting.

Preferring job seekers to fill in a form on arrival was explained by two employers as a means of ensuring the applicants filled in the forms themselves so they could judge their literacy skills more accurately:

When someone comes for a job we have a form that they fill out, and it's shown up some very interesting things ... We generally sit and watch them because it shows you more than the questions they're filling out.

They have to fill in a form when they arrive here, so we get to see their handwriting. We get to see whether they can answer questions, tell us what we need to know, give us certain undertakings that they've got no medical conditions that are going to prevent them

from doing the job and so on. So if people can't fill the form in, then they're likely to not get past that.

Holding an interview was described by one employer as the best means of discovering the personality of prospective employees. The employer spoke of asking such questions as whether the applicant plays sports, arguing that those who play sports are more likely to be disciplined workers and players of team sports are likely to perform well as members of a work team and be able to interact well with the public:

First I ask them if they play sport ... The sports player is a team player, generally. Obviously if they play squash or golf, they are playing with another opponent but ... generally they're very disciplined ... because they go out and practise ... In rugby they generally play in a team spirit and that gives them an outward look to the general public. They're not just talking to one or two of their mates; they're talking to their team as a whole. Fifteen of them.

The same employer also used the interview to ask if potential employees go to parties, giving the reason that those who go to parties tend to be sociable, an asset in the workplace:

I ask, "Do you go to parties?" ... Generally [those who do] are outgoing. And that's not to say that they're allowed to roll up drunk at work. But I'm no wowser. I like people to have some good times ... and generally if I'm interviewing I like a chatty person ... [as I'm] looking to see how they'll relate to the customers.

Five employers found that using both a CV and/or application form plus an interview helped provide the best overall view of prospective employees. One employer described the process:

We actually have a bit of a trick. We always ask for people to provide a one page CV. Okay. So that's their first test. And if they can't count to one, then we probably don't want them. Typically the first thing is we want a brief summary ... If we think they show potential then we'll interview them and we'll gain a lot more from the interview.

Including a test on the back of the application form was a method used by one employer. However, the employer did not seem overly concerned that the potential employee might get someone else to complete the form and the test. The reason appeared to be that the employer was more interested in their attitude to work than in their literacy ability. In the employer's words:

We have an application form and on the back of the application form is a very simple test, a bit of mathematics, and little bit of common sense. Most of the guys that come here for jobs prefer to take that sheet away and then come back ... We don't know if they've done it or whether their mates have done it. *Interviewer:* So how do you get around that? *Participant:* Oh, we don't. We just check and take them. I mean if we really wanted to you could have to fill it in here but we soon see where people are at when they've done their application forms ... But it's a good indication to me if a guy comes in here and takes the form down to the cafeteria so he can fill it out; he does it straight away, that's great ... They are supposed to write things like, "Are they prepared to work overtime?" "What are their goals?"

Just one employer spoke of giving all prospective employees a “risk assessment” that involved a thirty minute, multi-question “test” to discover the applicants’ suitability for the job on a range of issues, especially safety, such as whether they tended to take risks socially and physically. The test also could give an indication of whether they were telling the truth:

They’ve also got to do a risk assessment of multi-questions at the start before employment to get us a safety index. That’s done by every employee [right up] to a manager and takes about half an hour. They’ve got to get to a certain level safety index ... A number of things we take is whether they’re accurate, whether they’re lying, whether they are trying to answer the multi-question the way that we want them to think they are ... There’s about nine or ten factors that we look at ... [including] do you perceive yourself to be taking high risks socially? And then you have multi-type and true and false questions ... and you get a kind of a risk index.

For this employer, having poor literacy skills did not necessarily mean an applicant was rejected, but by knowing literacy was a problem, the employer was able to administer the test verbally. The employer described the firm’s actions:

We sit down with the particular person and some of them have got learning difficulties so we can pick that up that they’re trying too hard to get the job ... We know that they’re very experienced but they may have a learning difficulty so we take that to one side and say, “What can we do about that?” ... because it would impair them probably giving the right answer ... If we can talk through it with them they tell us the right answer anyway but just couldn’t put it in words or read it properly.

Giving a test to assess a prospective employee’s computer skills was mentioned as a tool by one employer, who said:

If there was somebody who was going to be doing a lot of computer work, we might get them in – if we’d selected them as the best candidate – get them in and give them a wee assignment.

Literacy assistance given by employers

Most employer participants appeared to agree in principle with the need to help employees overcome literacy difficulties. One employer said that they “expect them to ... go through NZQA”, but at the same time identify those with particular difficulties and try to give them extra help. Some employers had sent employees to classes for such work-related skills as a driver’s licence, and one participant stated, “I’d probably advise them to go to polytech”, adding, “most likely, if it was my position, I would pay for his course”. This same participant had brought in a training organisation to assist an employee who was deemed to be “almost illiterate”. The participant and training organisation had been interested in providing workplace training for a wider group who might benefit from literacy training, however the participant’s superior would agree to providing training for just the one employee. As the participant explained:

For one [employee] who’s virtually almost illiterate we got in with an organisation ... and we contracted with them to teach this particular individual ... Her methodology I thought was quite interesting. What she’d do is take a group of workers and say, “We’re going to

assess all of you as a group without picking an individual". We offered that to the manager concerned but he didn't want to pursue it ... I thought it was a good idea, because some of the other individuals in his organisation certainly aren't illiterate, but I think with a little bit of help they could actually be better than they are now ... Maybe it's a programme to get that individual up to where the others are and then perhaps give them all a bit of time. At this stage he didn't think it was appropriate to do that one.

Importantly, there was an employer emphasis on the need for employees with such difficulties to take some responsibility for helping themselves. A typical comment regarding the question of whether it was the employee or the employer who was responsible for literacy learning was, "They've got to work themselves. It's probably fifty-fifty". Because of the expense involved, employers were more likely to support literacy learning of employees who agreed to attend courses in their own time. One employer, for example, stated that they would agree to literacy training at work:

Depending on what the cost is, because if it costs and it's during working hours then the employer loses out twice. So [the boss] wouldn't be too happy about them taking it during working hours because we're flat out. But he would support them if they were interested in doing it after hours because that would mean that they are committed. You know what I mean? It's not just a get out of work scheme.

Another participant suggested the possibility of running literacy classes during the night shift, for those who had finished their shift for the day, saying:

We run a night shift here so we're open right till two in the morning. I'm not here till two in the morning but I'd be happy to stay behind to run anything or to help out.

One participant was a little dubious about approaching employees regarding their literacy abilities, concerned simultaneously about impinging on employees' right to privacy and the possibility that employees might take advantage of the employer. In the participant's words:

Usually people just want more for doing less ... I've never actually asked him to have a look and see which ones need that sort of help. I don't know if you're overstepping the bounds of the employer/employee relationship. A person might say, "It's none of your business", or "Oh yeah, that's great". Or they may just think, "Ooh, can I do it during working hours?" You know, get off work sort of thing.

Five participants mentioned literacy support in the form of encouragement for those who were seen to be good employees, but were lacking specific literacy skills needed for their work. Particular instances included being able to fill in timesheets and logbooks correctly, and improving verbal communication skills. Two employers, for example, talked about going through training manuals with their employees to ensure they understood them. A third described using a diary system to encourage an employee with literacy difficulties. This employer spent one-to-one time with the employee, setting down monthly goals in the diary and tracking progress made. The participant explained:

What I'm doing for him at the moment is I've got a diary. And I fill it in at the beginning of each month with things that he needs to achieve during the month ... And then at the end of the month we fill out a list of things that have gone well and we have a list of things

that haven't gone very well. But the kinds of things he has on his list of things to improve on are talking to people clearly, filling out his timesheet properly, really basic things.

Another participant spoke of everyone on the staff giving encouragement to a new employee who had difficulty with personal interaction:

This girl's got no interaction skills but boy can she type and her spelling is brilliant. She has learned a lot, but the actual personal interaction skills. If I was across talking now there'd be a lot of, "Yes. No. Oh okay", and maybe a slight snigger. And that's the finish of your conversation. We know that her mental ability is brilliant. We're now trying to bring her out of herself as a whole staff. And she is getting better. When she first came in she was too scared to even look at you. You can get a little bit more interaction now.

One employer stressed the importance of encouraging employees with difficulties by making sure they felt welcome in the workplace. As the employer stated:

It's just a matter of getting them into the culture of the workplace, having a bit of fun, and doing all the right stuff. I think a lot of it is just really commending them for what they've done well, and you can really get them moving. Giving them support in the NZQA and supporting them with a bit of a pat on the back that they've got to the next [step].

Professional development provided

Professional development among the employers interviewed ranged from none at all to a comprehensive programme for employees at all levels. When asked about the professional development offered, one employer clearly felt it was something that needed to be done but said that their firm was simply too busy trying to cope, especially with the expense and learning involved in keeping up to date with frequently occurring technological changes. The participant explained:

We never have enough time to be able to do the extra things. It's not necessarily work, just general life pressure. And I think that, because there's not enough time there's not enough effort on certain exercises. And that's where we have a problem. We're struggling to keep the whole thing running and keeping up with technology. We'd be lucky to go a month before we have to upgrade something or other on the computer. I'm not trying to make excuses. We don't do enough and we should.

Another who had not provided staff training or development "at this stage" said that the firm would "groom" good workers who needed help in a particular area, but did not mention what such grooming involved, merely saying, "If they show good in some of the areas ... you have to sort of groom them in others". This employer, however, would be "definitely" interested if a provider offered workplace training at the employer's premises.

One employer spoke of doing "training within the company", though did not specify what this entailed. The same firm also sends employees on work-related courses such as specialised driver licences. The participant added, "If anyone is interested in doing that we're certainly behind them. And we'll help them".

Another firm encourages staff members as individuals to upskill by contributing towards study time and 50% of course costs for those who undertake further study. They had also brought in a “facilitator” to train some staff in communication skills. The participant described the process, saying:

A facilitator has been involved with four of the staff ... around respect in relationships ... how we write to one another internally, how we relate to one another as clients of each other, and how we relate with the people who put a wage check in our bank account every couple of weeks.

While this firm had meetings with the “management group ... probably about five times a year, so are in a way always training through that meeting”, they had not instigated focused professional development training for management staff on a regular basis. The participant could see that doing so would bring advantages to the firm. As the participant said:

We had a professional development day about five weeks ago now. And that’s the first we’ve done for quite some time. Which was a good reminder to me that there needs to be a regular sort of commitment to that because people really think well of it ... The focus for that particular day was about being a great team leader, or a great manager.

Three employer participants mentioned that employees at their firms work through an Industry Training Organisation (ITO) towards NZQA qualifications appropriate for their industry. The participant from the first firm who mentioned ITO training described how employees are taken on as apprentices with an apprenticeship involving 8,000 hours of study and work over four years, including five three-week block courses at either Palmerston North or Wellington. One employee at this firm had also attended “a course on leadership and management and communications, partially funded by [the ITO]”. The employer explained the responsibility taken by the firm towards an apprentice:

Generally with an apprenticeship, offering an [employee an] apprenticeship and him telling us that he wants to be an apprentice means that we’ve both made a commitment to each other so ... we have a responsibility to teach them before they can work and call themselves tradesmen.

At the second of these three firms, the participant claimed, “We are very focused on having virtually all of our employees on their NZQA framework”. Employees work on set extramural tasks with in-house guidance from the ITO for one hour per week as well as undertaking extensive on-the-job training. For some occupations within the firm, the courses involved attending out of town block courses, for some there were training courses for the use of new computer software, and for some there were courses with KiwiHost to gain skills in “handling difficult customers”.

The third firm, as well as encouraging employees to undertake NZQA study through an ITO, provided access to defensive driving courses, and brought in experts for half-day courses on fire fighting, risk management, and stress avoidance, with the stress management classes being attended by “all staff, so managers and administration people need to attend that as well”. Managers attended leadership management courses in Palmerston North each year.

Collaboration between training providers and employers

Awareness of training providers

Overall, there was not a wide awareness among employer participants of the literacy training providers available in Wanganui. While two providers confidently named several local providers, and others were able to name one or two, some did so with difficulty, vaguely aware of the existence of local providers but unsure of their names.

One employer was aware of several local providers through working with them in the past, but had not been approached by them in recent years. The participant stated: "We had a lot of agencies coming to us a couple of years ago. I don't know whether it's just stopped for us or whether it's stopped for everybody."

There were four employers who had a good working relationship with at least one provider each, though they were not necessarily a local literacy provider. That is, three providers had used out of town ITOs for their staff training. One of the three, however, was just beginning to work with a Wanganui provider for training and assessment for their employees, and looking forward to working with a local training provider. The fourth employer with a provider relationship did not access an ITO, but described the benefits of having students from a local provider for work experience:

We take somebody from there [a local provider] on a regular basis ... Often they're kids that for whatever reason haven't done well at school and some of them don't last. Some of them will last here three or four days ... They work here. We train them and ... give them jobs. We teach them how to do certain things ... We don't get any money for it. All we do is get their labour for free and it's work experience for them ... It's great. They come in with absolutely no confidence. And we've got quite a nurturing group here ... and they sort of take these kids under their wing and give them a bit of advice. You see someone develop, it's really, really rewarding ... We've employed three or four people from those programmes too. We won't go through the interview process; we'll just take them straight on.

Several employers agreed that they might be interested in attending courses or having a provider come to their workplace. As one said:

We're not that sure where to look. But with any of the guys and even for [my partner] and myself, if there were courses that we thought would benefit us we would go and do them.

Yet another conversation went:

Interviewer: If some providers can come in and do workplace training in literacy would you ever want to take that on board? *Participant:* I'd definitely consider it.

Barriers to collaboration with providers

Employers discussed several perceived barriers to collaboration with providers. Some participants said that they would not consider sending employees to some providers. The reason appeared to be based on three perceptions. The first was that those attending some local

providers were likely, in the words of one employer, to be “drop outs from school”, “ratbags”, or “troublemakers”. As the employer noted:

I notice the youngsters are generally drop outs from school that are just one away from the prison gate. They have real trouble trying to keep them under control ... behaviour wise and keeping drugs out of the way. And they have a lot of anger ... They're mayhem in a group. That's my visual experience, and also I've spoken to one or two of them. They just grunt and walk by. But all they're there for is to please the government's view that everybody's in employment.

The second perception by one participant (and implied though not so specifically stated by a second participant), was that most local providers were not legitimately “recognised” tertiary education providers in the way that the local polytechnic was accepted as “recognised”. For example, when asked if employees with literacy difficulties would be encouraged to go to some training providers, the first employer said, “No, I'd send them to a truly recognised education field. So that would be [the local polytechnic]”.

The third perception was related to the quality of teaching by some providers. One employer stated, “Personally, I don't feel a lot of these outside trainers do a good job”, claiming that part of the problem at one provider was that the staff were “lazy”, “lax”, and “came from harsh backgrounds themselves”. At another, the same employer stated that “Maybe the tutors are doing their best but it seems like holiday camps, to me”. Another employer, also saying employees would not be sent to a local provider, preferred to provide help as needed within the firm. The employer commented:

There are units on communication. But from what I can see, or from what I hear they do ... the tutors stand at the front of the class and tell them what they need to do, and apprentices nod their head. And that's their communication standards; units signed off on that.

On the other hand, some participants had been involved with local literacy providers through taking students on for work experience, with the possibility of offering them employment when their courses had finished. Although one participant spoke highly of the success of the collaboration, most had not found it to be a useful exercise. One, for example, had had problems with establishing employer/employee boundaries with a student who, the participant found, tended to take liberties, such as expecting to sit and chat over extended breaks. Another employer found that the students were unable to take responsibility, either for their personal well-being or for performing a day's work. The employer, feeling under pressure, decided not to continue the collaboration. The participant explained:

Every one of them that came to us couldn't cope with basic things like feeding themselves, getting to work on time. They all just found it too much pressure working here. We started getting ourselves a bad name for being too hard on them but all we were doing was just a normal day's work, we considered ... We had to put a stop to it because I felt that we were getting blamed for something that wasn't our problem.

Another participant had taken students on for a trial period with the expectation that they would move into full-time employment at the end of their training. However, like the previous

participant, the employer found the students tended to balk at full-time work. In the participant's words:

We thought we'd give it a try with two but they just didn't make the grade ... We actually had them on three months trial so they did the first three months before we commit to go on to the next two years. But they didn't like it ... They were younger ones mainly, not so much the older ones, that have a lot of low motivation, esteem of themselves.

A further barrier to collaboration with providers mentioned by employer participants was the cost. As mentioned above, a participant pointed out that if they were to pay the costs for their employees to undertake literacy training during working hours, the employer "loses out twice". Another employer, trying to find appropriate literacy training for an employee, also found the cost prohibitive. The employer stated:

When it came to real help, actual help of bringing him up to speed with his reading and writing, I could only find courses that we were going to have to pay for, which would be one-on-one tutors. And they were going to be thirty dollars an hour.

Recruitment

On the issue of staff recruitment, only four employer participants had comments to contribute. Most mentioned that because of the current low level of unemployment in New Zealand, there was a shortage of skilled workers available. For this reason, several noted the need to now employ unskilled workers and then train them to do the job. In recruiting employees, then, the employers were seeking workers with a good attitude, workers who would "fit with your group".

While the employers preferred to find employees with good functional literacy, communication, and social interaction skills, employers would sometimes overlook these necessities if a prospective worker had other attributes for the job, especially the right attitude to the job. One employer said, for example, "For me as an employer, one of the absolute keys has always been attitude, somebody who shows a real desire to do well". Similarly, a participant said, "I would give them a go because you can never get the hundred percent perfect person ... If they show good in some of the areas, you have to sort of groom them in others".

One participant elaborated further, saying:

I think specialisation in the roles and also the fact that there isn't a large pool of available, qualified employees out there has meant that employers' attitudes have changed. So we've gone from expecting the person to walk in off the street and do the job, to finding a candidate that we can train to do the job ... So what you do is you say, "I've got a role I want to fill". I find a person that has got the basic skills, that's got the ability to learn, that's got the attitude to do the job [and can] fit with the group. And once I've got them, then I'll train them to do my role. I think every employer accepts they now have a role to train.

The participant from a firm where only qualified staff were employed was able to say, "We've got an incredibly stable workforce and a number of people have been here for as long as the

company's been going". However, for employers who needed to expend energy and money in training their employees in a period of a shortage of trained workers there was a downside. A participant explained that once trained, the workers were likely to be quickly snapped up by other employers, pleased to be able to access trained staff. The result was a high staff turnover. In the employer's words:

They don't [stay long]. That's just the way it is at the moment. I think it's because we've got that shortage. If we train them up they'll jump ship and go somewhere else. We've had that experience here and no one rings for a reference. .

The complex nature of the process for recruiting workers in one firm was explained by an employer participant:

If we're looking for senior managers ... [we use] a consultant. From supervisor level down, we tend to run the process ourselves ... If it's at a level below a senior manager then we will either talk to ... one of the recruiting agencies who have those sorts of people available to them. We'll typically advertise in Taranaki, Manawatu, and Wanganui seeking people with those sorts of skills ... Typically the first thing is ... they'll be ranked pretty much on what the CV tells us, if they've got any references, how valuable they are. If we think they show potential then we'll interview them and we'll gain a lot more from the interview ... We'll typically interview probably five or six, and then narrow the field down, possibly do second interviews for one or two, and then offer the job. I would say that if someone doesn't have those basic literacy skills – and I know we're talking about more than just reading and writing; talking about lots of levels of communication, financial skills, and so on – they probably wouldn't get offered the job.

Conclusions

Individual secondary school teachers and individual employers had varied definitions of literacy to offer when asked to define the term. When taken as a group, their definitions encompassed not only the traditional literacy skills of reading, writing, and occasionally numeracy, but also the functional aspects of these skills, and multiple literacies, including communication skills in different settings, life skills, and workplace literacies.

Secondary school teachers felt that those with low literacy skills were often those with other personal issues as well, thus in need of an intensive holistic wrap-around approach to their education. Some teachers felt that when the student was in school, then systems of support were available; however, if the student was granted an exemption from Year 10, the school was unable to support the student further. Those with exemptions were referred to the funded school in the Wanganui area for placing students in alternative education. Teachers felt they lost contact with their students. They also felt that adult training providers were not equipped to deal with the holistic needs of these young people, therefore, students would leave the provider and “fall through the gaps”. It has been suggested by both teachers and adult literacy providers/practitioners that these young students need support in different ways than those who are older.

It was felt that those students that returned to school after a “time-out” were unlikely to be those with literacy difficulties.

Key funding issues mentioned by secondary school teachers were similar to those put forward by adult literacy providers in the earlier surveys. Teachers discussed the need for resource and time costs associated with applying for funding for programmes, the lack of continuity for programme funding once achieved, funding for programmes such as Gateway being based on numbers of students, funding not covering the administration aspects of programmes, new regulations being introduced but funding processes from the old systems remaining static, and the difficulty of not being resourced for the personal and social work that needed to be undertaken with some students.

Both the secondary school teachers and employers discussed the lack of financial support for students in school with low literacy needs, particularly with respect to the need for reader/writer assistance. In one example, the assessments that form the criteria for allocation of a reader/writer are largely (if not fully) paid for by the parents of the child. In the case of a low income-earning family, those in need of assessment may not be assessed, exacerbating the gap in assistance given to students between high-income and low-income earning families.

As with adult literacy providers and practitioners, secondary school teachers discussed the need for sustained literacy professional development opportunities.

Secondary school teachers spoke of the need for different teaching styles for students with different learning styles. While supportive of this, the difficulty lay in the pragmatics of addressing different needs within a class of twenty to thirty children. Some teachers remarked that with the removal of “streaming” this task had become difficult. Employers also commented on the difficulty of addressing student individual learning needs within large class sizes, and advocated “streaming” so that students do not “get left behind”.

Five of the thirteen secondary school teachers mentioned barriers to collaboration with adult training providers. It must be noted that some secondary school teachers actively collaborated with alternative education providers successfully. However, two of the barriers mentioned appeared to be primary. The first of these was access to students was severed after they received exemption and were referred to another school for placement in an alternative education programme. Teachers discussed the need for a close alignment between the school of origin and the alternative education provider to allow for holistic support of the student, and to leave doors open for re-entry at a later date if the student so desired. The second barrier to collaboration came from within the school itself, where teachers became frustrated (and by implication unsupportive) of students being taken from class for placements at alternative education providers or employer agencies.

Employers discussed the skill shortages they saw in the Wanganui labour market, and the issues they faced with supporting and training those employees with literacy difficulties. Employers suggested that schools should focus, as part of their education brief, on preparation for employment programmes for all students.

Some employers discussed a lack of focus on the trades as a viable option for school leavers, and outlined that they believed this was due to a lack of encouragement from schools. Employers believed that the trades were marketed as a “low-skills” option, when in reality, literacy competencies need to be highly developed to work within the trades industry.

The employers and a secondary school teacher mentioned the difficulties for employers of understanding the difference between NCEA unit standards and NCEA achievement standards. There was confusion around what the standards meant in terms of what the potential employee could actually do, with one employer claiming that having NCEA Level 1 English still did not mean the potential employee could read and write.

Employers discussed the difficulties they had in training employees with literacy issues. Many employers were of the opinion that training opportunities worked best with an indication from the employee that they were willing to assist in their own training. This could take the form of an employer paying for an adult literacy provider to provide the training, while the employee did the course work in his or her own time. However, some employers were of the opinion that once people were in employment, there was no notion of lifelong learning, or they were not willing to upskill beyond what was necessary to hold their current position. Stories were told of employees who refused to upskill for promotion opportunities for reasons unknown (potentially fear, no awareness of the need to upskill to move ahead, or a lack of willingness to move from the current position). Some employers discussed the need for a future-focus in employees, stating the need for future training, if the employee wished to maintain their employability.

Employers mentioned some barriers to collaboration with adult literacy providers in Wanganui. These included: awareness of the provider (most were aware that providers were there in a general sense, but could not name who they were); and, personal perceptions of the programmes (i.e. the perception that all the students were “troublemakers” or “on drugs”; the perception that adult literacy providers are not “recognised” in the same sense as a university or polytechnic might be academically recognised; and the negative perception of adult literacy tutor teaching styles). These barriers implied a need for marketing of courses and perhaps

“open days” where employers could attend adult literacy training sessions to see for themselves what the programmes entail and how they are run.

Practitioner perspectives of literacy and employment

Introduction

The Literacy and Employment project held focus groups with adult literacy practitioners to discuss key literacy provision issues from their point of view, collaborations with secondary school and employer agencies, and their perceptions of potential links between literacy and employment. An outline of the findings from these focus groups is included in this report to allow for practitioner's views on similar issues to be heard. However, as mentioned previously for a more in-depth review of the key issues for adult literacy providers and practitioners, the reader is referred to previous reports in the Literacy and Employment report series, specifically, *Provider Survey – Phase 1: The Provision of Adult Literacy Services in Wanganui*, and, *Perspectives of Wanganui Employers and Providers of Adult Literacy Services 2005-2006: A Report from the Wanganui Adult Literacy and Employment Programme*. The reader is also referred to the report *A Survey of Professional Development Needs of Private Training Establishments in the Whanganui Region* by Harrison and McKinnon (2007) for a more in-depth review of the professional development issues that were discussed in these focus groups.

The following account of what we learned about literacy learning from adult literacy tutors (both their own learning and that of their students) provides insights into lifelong learning and its challenges. Tutors identified the need for a structured collection of approaches which might strengthen their professional field, and their perspectives appear here to illustrate key issues in this field and possible ways forward.

The Literacy and Employment Research Programme set out to explore the perspectives and experiences of various groups on literacy and employment issues, especially with the aim of developing possible solutions for literacy-related concerns within the Wanganui and District Community. An important group within the research programme was the staff and management from adult literacy providers. We surveyed this group twice during 2005 and 2006 and on the basis of what we learned from these surveys, we realised that further probing would provide more in-depth insights into any possible links that practitioner's thought might exist between literacy and employment. In addition, we wanted to explore in greater detail what literacy tutors saw as their professional teaching and learning needs.

With this in mind, two focus groups were held with tutors from Wanganui adult literacy providers during September 2006. The objectives of these focus groups were to identify how specialist literacy tutors and vocational tutors viewed likely connections between literacy and employment in Wanganui and the surrounding region; how their students understood such connections; and what practitioners felt might be done to improve adult literacy provision both in general and in their own specific practice. We also discussed with the tutors their own professional development and other teaching and learning needs.

Method

Focus group approaches were selected with the aim of fostering group discussion of the topics of interest. They were also aimed at helping tutors to learn more about the commonalities and differences in others' experience. The focus groups were held in local Council meeting rooms and facilitated by Richard Thompson, an independent and experienced Wanganui-based

facilitator. The question areas emerged from a series of discussions within the Literacy and Employment Research Team, including both university and community members (see Appendix C).

Each group session lasted for approximately 90 minutes and was also attended by a member of the Wanganui District Library Literacy and Employment research team. Participants per focus group were kept to a maximum of seven to permit tutors to become fully engaged in the discussion. Each person gave written consent to sessions being recorded on audio-tape for later transcription.

Participants

Invited participants in the focus groups were from those literacy and educational providers in Wanganui who had previously participated in the Phase 1 and Phase 2 provider surveys. This gave these tutors experience of working within a longitudinal research study, and provided the facilitator with opportunities to probe issues explored earlier, in more detail. The first focus group comprised six tutors with experience in literacy specialist roles. They represented two broad types of provider organisations: those with a dedicated literacy mission, and those who include literacy within their other courses. The second focus group had seven vocational tutors who taught subjects such as early childhood education, youth work, building, and agriculture. These tutors work for providers delivering vocational training courses, which may also have areas of literacy integrated within the course structure and content. The decision was made to split specialist tutors from vocational tutors as we wished to explore the needs of each group, and, operationally, some of the questions (for example, questions around integration of literacy in courses) differed slightly depending on the role(s) of the tutors taking part.

Summary of Findings

Tutors' views of links between literacy and employment

Both the researchers and the tutors were well aware that simple cause and effect connections normally do not exist between increased adult literacy and the gaining of employment. Under some circumstances, enhanced literacy can either result in an employment outcome or be very influential in it. More commonly, employment outcomes occur in the presence of possibly numerous intervening and moderating variables associated with people's life and community experiences.

Notwithstanding this, tutors in both focus groups generally agreed on the existence of subtle but important links between literacy skills and employment. Specialist tutors also concurred that any such connections are not straightforward, and that other important factors, such as enhanced personal confidence, influence the future employment prospects of their students.

Vocational tutors talked about ways in which they saw actual and enduring connections between literacy and employment for their students, describing the specific literacy skills needed in their particular job sectors. They highlighted the importance of literacy skills as a necessary precursor step in a person's ability to apply for and gain employment. Both literacy training and a person's awareness of being able to achieve were described as leading to increased confidence, which in itself can open up new employment opportunities.

A key link between literacy and employment is the need within nearly all employment sectors for employees to complete documentation and meet written compliance requirements. There was an implication that the connection may be increasing in strength as legal requirements increase for staff to possess qualifications for entry to work in areas such as youth work, building, and early childhood education.

Students' views of links between literacy and employment

Both literacy specialist and vocational tutors described variable levels of subscription to the idea of a literacy-employment link among their students. However, in general, this student understanding of the ways in which literacy may lead to employment appears to develop over time.

One specialist tutor estimated that 50% of her students understood the importance of a link between literacy and employment. Some students at the commencement of the course clearly had no insights into the ways in which literacy might facilitate their employment prospects. It was felt that understanding grows in complex ways, evolving gradually during the time that a student spends in a literacy training or vocational course.

Vocational tutors also raised several points about students' awareness of a literacy-employment link. Several described how some of their students commenced courses not expecting literacy to be included, and resist accepting that there is a need to improve their literacy standards to obtain work. A perceived correlation with age was mentioned by some tutors, so that students older than twenty are generally more likely to understand the employment value of literacy than younger students. Similarly, students with more life experience were often better aware of opportunities missed due to low literacy, therefore realising the need to undertake "second chance learning".

Discussion of the literacy-employment link with students in programmes

All tutors described ways in which they tried to be transparent in how they went about addressing the value of literacy for employment with their students. Specialist tutors detailed their approaches in defining the meaning and purpose of literacy and discussing with students the specific skills relevant to their courses, along with self-assessment processes. These self-assessment processes required the student to assess how they thought about their own literacy skills, and for the student to think about the types of literacy skills that were important for their particular vocational course. However, in some instances students who are undertaking literacy training for its own sake may not yet be vocationally focussed.

To address literacy and its links with employment, some vocational tutors include integrated literacy components in each module taught, employing the word 'literacy' in discussion with students. Students are encouraged to visit a 'literacy centre' if one is available within the training provider, thus trying to avoid the stigma of a person being singled out as needing to work on literacy. Vocational tutors felt it important to make students aware of the link between literacy and employment, although there were some difficulties in achieving this due to students' expectations and tutors' time constraints.

Factors that mediate connections between literacy and employment

Students' goals to gain employment

Literacy specialist tutors noted that some of their students initially have narrow, short-term goals, which may not include an aim to become employed. The goal of gaining employment is too distant for the stage some of them are at, particularly as many have not previously considered what their full potential may be. When the question of 'realistic goals' was raised in the focus groups, the point was made that tutors need to understand their students' goals in the context of the whole person. Once students start to understand what fresh and previously unrecognised opportunities may now be open to them, their horizons can expand.

Specialist tutors carry out individual goal-setting work with their students, while also encouraging motivation and perseverance. Goals are initially set as small benchmarks, and frequently re-evaluated, with the aim of setting realistic and achievable targets, while still permitting movement of the goalposts to further challenge the student. Tutors' in-class activities are designed to encourage self-reflection in the student, and assist toward goal achievement.

Vocational tutors also consider goals and motivation when they interview students pre-course. Students' being unable to achieve something initially often seemed to stem from low achievement of skills in mainstream education, rather than from a lack of innate capacity to achieve well. Sometimes there were differences between tutor perceptions of what a student should achieve and the standards set by students themselves, with tutors having higher expectations.

Some students may change their vocational aspirations as they start to recognise pathways to future careers through attendance at their course. Some tutors thought that those students who have to struggle more with literacy may actually achieve more of their goals in terms of literacy progress in the end.

An impediment to achieving the goal of completing the course can occur when a student is offered a job part-way through a course, therefore departing for the workplace without completing.

Student motivation and obtaining work

Specialist tutors described a range of motivational levels across their students. It can be impeded by a range of issues such as family difficulties or poor health. Motivation was seen as variable, changing as a student moves through a course.

Vocational tutors commented on students' varied motivators to attend training. Students may attend expecting to obtain work as an outcome, but may not expect to be required to study anything they define as "academic". Industry requirements involving higher expectations of literacy, such as in early childhood education, building, and youth work, are a substantial motivator to gain a qualification. Some students attend courses only in order to retain their benefit, which typically does nothing to build powerful intrinsic sources of motivation to learn. Some students are thought to see little value at all in seeking work.

Despite the complexity of these issues, the view emerged in the vocational tutors' focus group that individual motivation was a critical success factor. Methods used to encourage motivation

included tutors highlighting the money students may earn from subsequent employment, and the improved lifestyles that may result. Courses were presented as fun. Students were able to observe the successes of their peers: thought to be a highly effective motivator. Where possible, tutors tried to use experienced, older students to motivate younger ones.

Tutors acknowledged they needed to gain respect in the eyes of reluctant students before the students were prepared to undertake literacy study. Strong systems of support for students within the provider organisation were also considered critical. Students were continually provided with encouragement and moral support through phone calls, site visits, and tutor contact with employers while on work placements. Other internal motivators for students include graduation ceremonies and certificates of achievement, even for those who had not yet completed units or courses.

Post employment placement support

Specialist literacy tutors described how students had varied willingness to continue contact with the provider once in employment. Some enjoyed actively retaining connections with tutors, while others made no further contact. Tutors indicated that a follow-up period of between six months and two years would be ideal to keep students on-track with their literacy once employed. However in the absence of requisite funding for this, tutors are often unable to continue offering any such support. In the absence of supportive literacy backup, students who leave a course early and lose touch with providers may well regress in their literacy capabilities.

Tutors thought it essential for students' ongoing reinforcement of learning that they should have access to continued teaching after entering employment such as apprenticeships. Employers may be open to the possibility of their staff having ongoing learning, but could be deterred by the cost of providing this. Some practitioners reported that their organisations had been asked by local employers to assist employees struggling with literacy components of Industry Training Organisation (ITO) courses. However, even though literacy classes at night are possible, lack of attendance is a difficulty when classes are not compulsory.

Tertiary study outside the adult literacy provider

Specialist tutors stated that they are also approached for literacy assistance by students enrolled elsewhere, including those studying towards degrees, attending polytechnic, or having difficulties with distance learning methods. Tutors were concerned that this assistance was not available at the students' own institutions, which were seen as potentially 'setting students up to fail' by enrolling them without this support. It was felt that even when tertiary institutions did have literacy support for their students, it was probably not at the level or intensity needed.

Vocational tutors also identified a gap in literacy support services for students who have recently left adult literacy/vocational provider-run courses and moved on to polytechnic study. Many have to enrol in further study because of increasing requirements for qualifications in their proposed job fields, but need more assistance than that available to cope with the additional academic demands.

What is needed in a programme that prepares people for employment?

Specialist literacy tutors described several essential characteristics for programmes preparing people for employment. Tutors need to work from students' strengths, recognising what these are and how they can be built upon. This is in the opposite manner to a deficit model that is oriented to what the student lacks. Sufficient time must be available to staff and students so that students' strengths can be identified and used as a basis for further learning. Implied here is a partnership model whereby tutors work collaboratively with their students to identify what is needed, one to one. An approach of this kind works best in a supportive working environment in which both parties can share knowledge and problems, and work towards customised learning solutions.

Specialist tutors sought the following elements to be included in programme content: social skills, assertive speaking and negotiation skills, strategies to request help appropriately, strategies for maintaining health, knowledge of rights and responsibilities, and learning and thinking skills (such as memory, problem solving, and critical reading skills).

Vocational tutors said that having access to a Learning Centre and experienced staff to teach literacy were very important, as was funding to provide some one-to-one support for students in particular need of this. Teaching to the students' preferred learning styles was also seen as a crucial element in employment preparation programmes.

Vocational tutors and integrated literacy

How effectively vocational tutors can provide integrated literacy was discussed at the focus group for vocational tutors. Some tutors felt confident in delivering integrated literacy, as they received regular literacy support through their employer. Other vocational tutors integrate literacy into their teaching, but described this almost as a 'con job' – teaching literacy to students without making this explicit.

Vocational tutors described the difficulties inherent in delivering integrated literacy, especially lacking sufficient time and resources for this complex task. As well, the tutors themselves sometimes felt they lacked sufficient literacy skills to effectively carry out this aspect of their work. Some tutors thought that it was the responsibility of schools to teach these skills. The following sections of this report further discuss these concerns.

Professional development and tutors' other support needs

Student success and tutors' job satisfaction

Both specialist and vocational tutors noted that student success is gradual and takes place in small steps. This can sometimes be frustrating for staff, who in this very challenging profession do experience some days at work with little sense of achievement. Specialist tutors said their own achievement occurred when people in the relevant industry notice and praise the students in the workplace, saying that when students are praised and feel motivated, they do also. Success for practitioners could be measured in two different ways – by business outcomes, or actual student achievements. Success of students impacted on tutor job satisfaction. Levels of success, or outcomes achieved, are also affected by the funding pools available to the provider.

Vocational tutors noted that there can be many different definitions of what constitutes success for students, depending on the students' current circumstances and needs. For example, success may be seen as motivating a student to get out of bed and attend course in the morning, or as a student attaining an apprenticeship following a course. One practitioner explained that a tutor's definition of success is not necessarily the same as a student's, therefore he asks students to measure their own level of success. Tutors' job satisfaction is reduced by what they reported as up to 80% of teaching time being spent, in some contexts, on other needs (such as the personal needs of students), rather than on literacy or employment-related needs. This was seen as a serious issue for tutors, leading to reduced job satisfaction and burnout.

Anticipated career paths for tutors

Specialist tutors found it very difficult to plan any future career options given the shortage of nationally accepted qualifications in specialist literacy teaching. One participant wished to be more involved in literacy research, particularly as currently it is often carried out by those who are not specialist literacy trained.

Several vocational tutors reported that they wish to continue in the teaching positions they have, hoping to continue to build skills in their teaching and to further assist young people. For some this stemmed from a passion for teaching and for assisting youth to succeed; others desired to give something back to an industry they had previously worked in. One participant wished to move into teaching her vocational subject at tertiary level, while another expressed a desire to move out of the industry.

Professional development needs

Specialist literacy tutors emphasised the complexity of their roles and the extensive and demanding nature of professional development that was suitable for their needs. The recent emergence of qualifications in adult literacy education is a step in the right direction, but tutors do not yet feel well-resourced or well-supported in undertaking any such further education. Scholarships for such purposes and for ongoing training at advanced postgraduate levels would provide some pathways into a better-qualified tutor workforce.

To date tutor professional development needs have not been well-recognised by funders and sufficient income to sustain systematic professional development has not yet been forthcoming. Ongoing education needs for literacy tutors include more comprehensive and in-depth training in appropriate literacy assessment and diagnostic tools.

Vocational tutors' training and development needs in building their expertise in teaching and student support are still largely unaddressed in any systematic way. Tutors often try to fill the vacuum in professional development support by self-initiated activities such as looking up professional topics on the Internet and checking out library books.

Tutors provided differing perspectives on the question of whether vocational tutors should include literacy and other life skills within their vocational teaching programmes. Some expressed the opinion that having to teach literacy and related coping and life skills to their students detracted from their capacity to deliver training in the vocational skills they were experienced in.

Other support needs of tutors

Specialist tutors detailed a number of other important support requirements within their roles, including aspects described as already present, such as working within a supportive atmosphere where they can share knowledge and problems with others. One practitioner reported working within a system where another professional is available to provide social work services to students therefore removing the need for this work from the tutor.

Specialist literacy tutors commented on the still-unaddressed needs associated with their development such as: requiring more time and money to enable providers and tutors to stay better informed of research and others' practices, along with better recognition of their work as a professional specialist activity. The pay disparity across the sector is problematic and undermines the field with no set scale or transparency evident. Tutors are concerned about lack of job security and associated benefits, particularly as many are employed on a short-term contractual basis.

Some vocational tutors described the difficulties of including literacy teaching within their other work, noting that they do not have sufficient time or expertise for this. Some would prefer to concentrate on teaching their own vocational subject, and the comment was put forward that students with very low level literacy skills should have had these issues addressed at school. Teaching literacy in some instances created a dilemma for vocational tutors who had to juggle addressing students' social difficulties and at the same time trying to teach at a vocational level, as they had been employed to do. In a number of instances, some vocational tutors preferred that extra funding be allocated to other staff to address literacy, rather than the vocational tutors themselves being trained further in literacy support. The tutors agreed that the provision of a learning support centre, specialist literacy support, and/or the clinical social work service would be viable solutions.

Other tutor support needs raised included the importance of having a life outside work, and having access to some form of outlet or relief from work stress. This could take the form of talking things over with family members or colleagues, or a more formal support/supervision system with provider management. Many tutors indicated that they felt well-supported in this way at work, and felt lucky in this. It was seen as important to take note of and celebrate any small achievements made by students to maintain job satisfaction.

Changes suggested by tutors to improve adult literacy provision

One specialist tutor described the sector as diverse, noting that continued active and critical reflection by those working in the field is required. Literacy tutors need to be supported to have more of a political voice to permit them to share their insights more effectively in the development of adult literacy training in the community. There was also a need for funding to be targeted more to identified needs, for example, providers find it difficult to offer employment preparation programmes successfully when they are not funded to include workplace support of students. Changes to the contracting process are also suggested as competition for funding continues to inhibit collaboration between providers.

Nevertheless, some vocational tutors saw themselves as not being able to make the kind of progress they wanted to in their vocational teaching work, by also having to address literacy and numeracy. Again some vocational tutors were of the view that good quality functional literacy should be achieved effectively within the primary education system, though this may require more primary level teachers. Further, vocational tutors stress that the numeracy/

literacy work that they undertake within their courses should not be seen just as an added extra, but should be recognised as a critical success factor in its own right. Other suggestions to improve the provision of adult literacy were increased funding to support students who are in the process of moving on to tertiary study, and provision of a structured mentoring system for students.

Conclusions

Some perceptual differences exist between tutors who are literacy specialists and those who teach vocational subject areas. Vocational tutors see a strong link between literacy and employment, but the pressures upon them to succeed in vocational teaching primarily, reduces their capacity to assist with students' literacy.

Attempts are made by providers to connect literacy skills with enhancing employability in the minds of students, but for some students employment is either not of concern, or the need to learn these skills is overlooked. Other students leave literacy training providers/vocational training providers upon receiving employment, therefore not completing their course. Tutors state that literacy abilities can actually regress without the support provided by the course, but employers, while open to training opportunities for employees (as mentioned above) are not necessarily financially able to cover the costs of not only the course, but also the time required off work for the employee.

Tutors in both specialist and vocational programmes also noted the impact of personal issues of students on their ability to attend and learn, and the tutor's ability to teach. These personal and social issues were also mentioned by the secondary school teachers, with both groups advocating a holistic approach to working with these students. Funding for this, which would assist with enhancing learning processes for these students, is needed. Further, funded formal support and supervision services are required for tutors who provide support for these students.

Aligned to this increased need for funding, is the requirement that adult literacy provision must be recognised as a professional specialist field. For this to occur, pay scales, career progressions, supervision arrangements, long-term contracts, and consistent professional development opportunities need to be developed and rolled out across the sector.

Finally, as noted by both the employers and the secondary school teachers, adult literacy practitioners concur with the multiple literacies definition of literacy. In their discussions of what is needed within a 'preparation for employment' programme, adult literacy practitioners outlined the life skills, communication skills, workplace skills, and functional literacy skills mentioned by the prior two groups.

Properly resourced for collaborative opportunities (by addressing those issues outlined in this report), secondary schools, employer agencies, and adult literacy provider agencies could work effectively together to address literacy issues amongst those in Wanganui and the surrounding region.

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Appendix A

Interviews with secondary schools - question areas

Background questions

Personal definitions of literacy

Definitions of literacy used within the school (e.g. policy and curriculum documents)

Can you briefly describe your roles and responsibilities within the school in relation to literacy?

Identification of students with literacy difficulties

Approximate percentage of roll with difficulties

How are these students identified? Assessment methods used within the school? Information obtained from elsewhere?

Levels and types of support offered by the school

What types of learning support/hours available?

Who gives this learning support?

Do you have any comments about the professional development/training needs of staff?

Is support given individually or in groups?

What resources do you use? (Established programmes or support packages, tools, school-developed resources?)

Which of these do you find useful, and where can improvements be made?

Are you aware of any student issues that present barriers to their learning? (E.g. personal, social problems). Do you ever have any involvement in the non-literacy needs of your students?

Perceived links between literacy and employment

Perceptions of staff:

Does having a low level of literacy impact on the future life of the student?

What do you see as the impact on future employment opportunities for those who experience literacy difficulties at school?

Can you describe work experience opportunities, career counselling available within the school? How are literacy difficulties dealt with in these situations?

Perceptions of students

What links, if any, do students see between their own literacy skills and their future employment?

Are there any differences between the perceptions of students with literacy difficulties and those without?

School links with literacy providers and/or alternative education providers

Are you aware of any local literacy providers/ alternative education providers?

Please describe any involvement you have with them on behalf of students or the school

Our recent interviews with literacy providers showed that they are interested in collaborating with local secondary schools? Would this school find it valuable to work with providers? Why or why not?

Are there any barriers to collaboration, in your view? What are these?

If collaboration is not currently happening, what would help this process?

Student follow-up

Are there any follow-up processes in place within your school to track what students do when they leave? (E.g. courses attended, employment?) Formal or informal processes?

Does any follow-up occur for students who leave early? (Due to literacy difficulties or other reasons?) Are there any opportunities to link them in to other options? Can they return to school at a later date? (E.g. students who have spent time in alternative education programmes – are there any ways of getting them back into mainstream schooling?)

Are these processes necessary? What would they be like if you could design them?

Is there anything else about literacy & employment, or local providers that you would like to raise today?

Appendix B

Interviews with employers – question areas

Background questions

How many employees do you have and can you give a basic breakdown of your staffing? (E.g. managers, workers, apprentices etc).

Please briefly describe how you provide staff development/training to your employees

As an employer, what are the basic requirements of a potential employee? Is this the same for all levels of staffing?

Personal and organisational definitions of literacy

Can you describe what you mean by literacy? What does literacy mean for your organisation? (Do they concur? If not, why do they differ? Which one does the employer use in practice in their workplace?). How important is it to you?

Recruiting

As an employer, what is the basic literacy level you would consider when considering a new employee?

What are your perceptions of the average literacy level of people who do apply for work with your company?

Do you have any comments about the needs of young people coming from school to employment?

As an employer, what do you think of programmes, such as STAR and GATEWAY that young people may have worked through prior to applying for work?

What impact if any have these programmes had in your business?

Previous research has suggested that these programmes are one way in which to address a gap in training for students leaving school who wish to move straight into employment. Do you think they are addressing this gap? How could it be improved?

Is your business involved/or would like to be involved in these programmes? Why/Why not?

Identification of staff with literacy difficulties

Do you use any checks regarding literacy (or numeracy) when employing, e.g. application forms etc?

Approximate percentage of employees with difficulties. Are there any differences in numbers with literacy difficulties across different types of roles? (Prompts: would there be any in management roles as opposed to general employee roles? Across age groups?)

How is this measured or identified?

Barriers to literacy

Can you identify any factors which lead to literacy problems?

What are the barriers to increasing literacy for employees with difficulties or for people you may choose not to employ?

Perceived links between literacy and employment

Perceptions of employer:

Does having a low level of literacy impact on the work of your employees? (Interviewer prompts: impact on communication; productivity; safety; career development?) If so, how do you address it?

What do you see as the impact on future employment opportunities for those who experience literacy difficulties at school?

Perceptions of employees:

What links, if any, do employees see between their own literacy skills and their ability to do their job/maintain their employability? Do they recognise a need for improving their literacy?

In your opinion, is there a discrepancy between self-belief and employer-belief? If there is a difference in perception, what do you think it is due to?

Levels and types of support offered by the workplace

What do you see as the role of employers in assisting their staff to deal with literacy issues?

In your opinion, does literacy support fit within your staff development/training programme?

If it does not, ask how it differs from other aspects of staff development, for that employer?

If yes, ask the following:

What level or types of literacy support are available to employees (if any)?

Who gives this support?

Do you have any comments about the professional development needs of staff who may be required to give this support?

Employer links with local literacy providers

If a staff member or prospective employee required support with literacy, what would happen?

If you saw a need to address it, where would you go or what would you do?

Have you ever looked for assistance with this? If so, where/who/how/what happened/why did that happen?

Are you aware of any local literacy providers/ alternative education providers? How did you find out about them? Would it be of benefit to you to know more about them?

Please describe any involvement you have with them on behalf of employees

In your view, what were the positives/negatives of such involvement?

Are there any barriers to collaboration, in your view? What are these?

If collaboration is not currently happening, what would help this process?

Some providers offer workplace literacy training. Would you consider providing this opportunity for your employees?

Is there anything else about literacy & employment, or local providers that you would like to raise today?

Appendix C

Practitioner focus group questions

1. Literacy and Employment

In your view, are there links between literacy and employment? What are they?

- How do you address these links within your teaching/programmes? To what extent do you focus on this within your teaching?
- How do you discuss the links with your students? (Using words such as 'literacy' or 'communication skills'?)
- What do your students want (or need) in terms of employment? Is there a link between this and joining the course? (Do they see literacy as an important step towards gaining employment?)

Do you think that your students see links between (their own) literacy and employment? What are their goals? (I.e. to gain work etc). Are students' goals realistic?

- To what extent are they motivated to get work?
- To what extent do they want to work towards a 'dream' job as opposed to whatever comes along?

How much do students continue to work on their literacy skills once they obtain employment?

- How do they do this and how can they be encouraged to do this? How do they make progress in their jobs?
- How do you think progress in their jobs could be improved (what sorts of things could change within the courses to ensure a more well-developed worker?)

What do you see as essential to a programme that would prepare people for employment?

Additional questions for vocational/subject tutors

When asked to integrate literacy into your teaching, what did that mean to you? How do you define literacy?

2. Professional development and other support needs

- To what extent are you as practitioners/tutors able to achieve what you want to (for your students?)
- Where do you want to be in the future? (in terms of career path)

What are your other support needs?

- Information
- Professional recognition/value. Can you identify one thing that can be done to affirm this?
- Qualifications
- Pay
- Working conditions
- Impact of other work requirements (e.g. paperwork)
- What do you like best about your work as a literacy educator?

- What do you like least about it?
- If you had the power to make one significant change to anything which would make a real difference to adult literacy in NZ, what would it be?
- What significant change would make a real difference to your role?

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