



Reach of the Workplace Literacy and Numeracy
Fund in 2020 and the impact of
the Employer-led strand

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide information about the reach of the Workplace Literacy and Numeracy (WLN) Fund in 2020. This includes information on the numbers of employees, workplaces, and regions. The report describes changes to the literacy and numeracy practices of employees, along with the wellbeing, social, and economic outcomes that happen for them during programmes. It also describes changes that happen in workplaces.

This report uses data education providers and employers supplied to the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), including:

- quantitative data from 21 Tertiary Education Organisations (TEOs) - 19 Private Training Establishments (PTEs) and two Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITPs), submitted to the TEC in February 2021. These TEOs ran 1371 programmes in 2020 with 4014 employees funded through the TEO-led strand.
- quantitative and qualitative data from 29 employers. The number of employers dropped in 2020 as a result of programmes being deferred or extended due to COVID-19. These employers ran programmes for 1264 employees in 2020 and submitted final reports prior to the end of March 2021.
- findings from research on technology-enabled learning in workplaces in 2020.

This report follows six previous studies¹ on the WLN Fund and where possible comparisons are made to the findings from previous reports.

Key point summary

- During 2020, and likely caused by COVID-19, 1214 fewer employees accessed WLN programmes than in 2019 (a drop of around 19 percent).
- As with previous years' programmes there is evidence of:
 - employees' literacy and numeracy practices improving when they use them at work, for example, speaking in meetings, filling out forms, writing reports, and weighing and measuring
 - some wellbeing and social outcomes for employees, but less evidence of economic outcomes for them
 - employers valuing the knowledge and skills employees have developed and the resulting changes seen in workplaces.

¹ Alkema, A. (2015). *Maximising the benefits of the workplace literacy fund*. Wellington: Tertiary Education Commission; Alkema, A. (2016). *Workplace literacy fund: Employer-led outcomes report 2013-2015*. Wellington: Industry Training Federation; Alkema, A. (2017). *Reach and impact of the workplace literacy and numeracy fund 2015/2016*. Wellington: Industry Training Federation. (Unpublished Report); Skills Highway. (2018). *Reach of workplace literacy and numeracy fund 2018 and impact of the employer-led strand*. Wellington: Industry Training Federation; Alkema, A., & Murray, N. (2019). *Reach of workplace literacy and numeracy fund 2019 and impact of employer-led strand*. Wellington: Industry Training Federation. Alkema, A., & Murray, N. (2020). *Reach of workplace literacy and numeracy fund 2019 and impact of employer-led strand*. Wellington: Tertiary Education Commission.

- Similar to previous years it is not possible to ascertain improvements in literacy and numeracy proficiency as insufficient data are supplied on statistically significant gain. However, gain is not expected from a 40-hour programme.
- As a result of switching to online learning, employees have developed their digital skills and digital literacy along with their literacy and numeracy skills.

Future considerations

- The COVID-19 environment is still with us in 2021, therefore thought needs to be given to:
 - continuing to engage and support employers to run programmes for their employees
 - supporting delivery methods that incorporate blended teaching and learning approaches (online combined with face-to-face).
- Waikato is a region that continues to have very little delivery and more needs to be known about this.
- Delivery appears to mainly driven by supply, with providers having to promote the funding to employers. Consideration needs to be given as to how to better inform employers about the fund and therefore drive demand.
- For larger programmes run in the TEO-led strand consideration needs to be given to fuller reporting requirements similar to that required in EWLN.

Purpose and allocation of the WLN fund

According to the Funding Determination the purposes of the WLN Fund are to:

- increase the literacy and numeracy skills of employees, and
- contribute to workplace productivity through the provision and evaluation of literacy and numeracy learning in a workplace context.²

Programmes run through this fund look to develop the knowledge and skills of workers with lower skills in literacy and numeracy so they are better able to do their current jobs and better placed to pursue qualifications or higher-level roles. Since 2017, all learners are eligible to receive between 25 and 80 hours of tuition.

The WLN Fund is around \$26 million a year. It has two strands.

- Strand One, TEO-led: whereby 21 TEOs are allocated 80 percent of the total fund 'on plan'.³

² From *Determination of design of Funding Mechanism: Literacy and Numeracy Provision*. Accessed at <https://www.tec.govt.nz/assets/Funding-mechanisms/s159L-LN-2020-Final-Funding-mechanism-letter.pdf>

³ The number of learners vary across TEOs from 2-996. Six providers delivered programmes to between 329-966 employees; six delivered to between 65-182 employees; and eight delivered to between 22-58 employees, and one to two employees.

- Strand Two, Employer-led (EVLN): whereby funding is contestable and available through applications from employers. Note this latter allocation can vary on a yearly basis depending on the availability of funding.

Why learn in workplaces

Learning in workplaces and in work time removes time barriers for people with low skills who lead busy lives with work and families and have little time for learning (OECD, 2019). For employees, training in work time also, “removes access barriers, provides a safe, whānau-like learning environment, and builds on the knowledge and skills they already have as workers” (Kerehoma, Alkema, Murray & Ripley, 2019, p. 7).⁴

The OECD (2018) points to the importance of instilling the concept of lifelong learning and upskilling workers with low skills given increasing automation and the changing skill needs in workplaces.⁵ These workers are “caught in a low-skills trap” (OECD, 2019 p. 3), with few opportunities for training and require the barriers to training to be removed.⁶

Supporting adults with low skills to upskill and reskill is imperative for a future of work that is both more productive and inclusive. It helps individuals to increase their employability and ultimately their social inclusion. From an employer perspective, a skilled workforce makes it easier to develop and introduce new technologies and work organisation practices, thereby boosting productivity and growth in the economy as a whole (OECD, 2019, p. 3).

By the numbers: Reach of the WLN fund

This section of the report describes who takes part in the programmes and the industries and regions that participate.

Size of programmes

During the period under consideration there were 1264 employees in 29 companies (compared to 34 in 2019) who received funding through the EVLN strand. Programmes varied in size with delivery to between 18-106⁷ employees with a median of 30 and an average of 43. They received on average 45 hours of tuition.

There were 4014 employees in TEO-led programmes (compared to 5086 in 2019) who received on average 36 hours of tuition. These employees came from approximately 1371 companies, with programmes being delivered to between one to 115 employees. Seventy-seven percent (1019) of programmes are delivered to single individuals in companies. This is a five percent increase from

⁴ Kerehoma, C., Alkema, A., Murray, N., Ripley, L. (2019). *Hīnātore: Empowering Māori and Pacific people through workplace learning*. Wellington: Ako Aotearoa.

⁵ OECD (2018). *Global skills trends, training needs and lifelong learning strategies for the future of work*. Report prepared by the ILO and OECD for the G20 Employment Working Group. Accessed 25 May 2021 at https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---inst/documents/publication/wcms_646038.pdf

⁶ OECD. (2019). *Getting skills right: engaging low-skilled adults in learning*. Accessed 7 April 2021 at <http://www.oecd.org/employment/emp/engaging-low-skilled-adults-2019.pdf>

⁷ While EVLN programmes are funded for 20 employees, four employers during this time period were not able to meet this requirement.

2019 and 2018. It is not clear from the data whether these employees self-refer or are referred by their employer. Fifty-four of them are recorded as self-employed. TEOs in the not-for profit sector catered to 83 percent of these individual employees. A further 146 programmes were delivered to between two to five employees in companies. This represents around a four percent decrease in programmes of this size from the 2017-2019 period.

The percentage of TEO-led programmes delivered to larger numbers in companies has held at three percent for 2019 and 2020. In 2020, TEOs ran programmes in 36 companies for between 20 to 99 employees. Another programme ran for 115 employees. This maintains the increase in programme size seen in 2019 over the size of programmes in 2017 and 2018. Again, as was proposed in last year's report, as this number continues to increase the TEC might like to consider more comprehensive reporting for these larger programmes than what is supplied through the current template.

Ethnicity

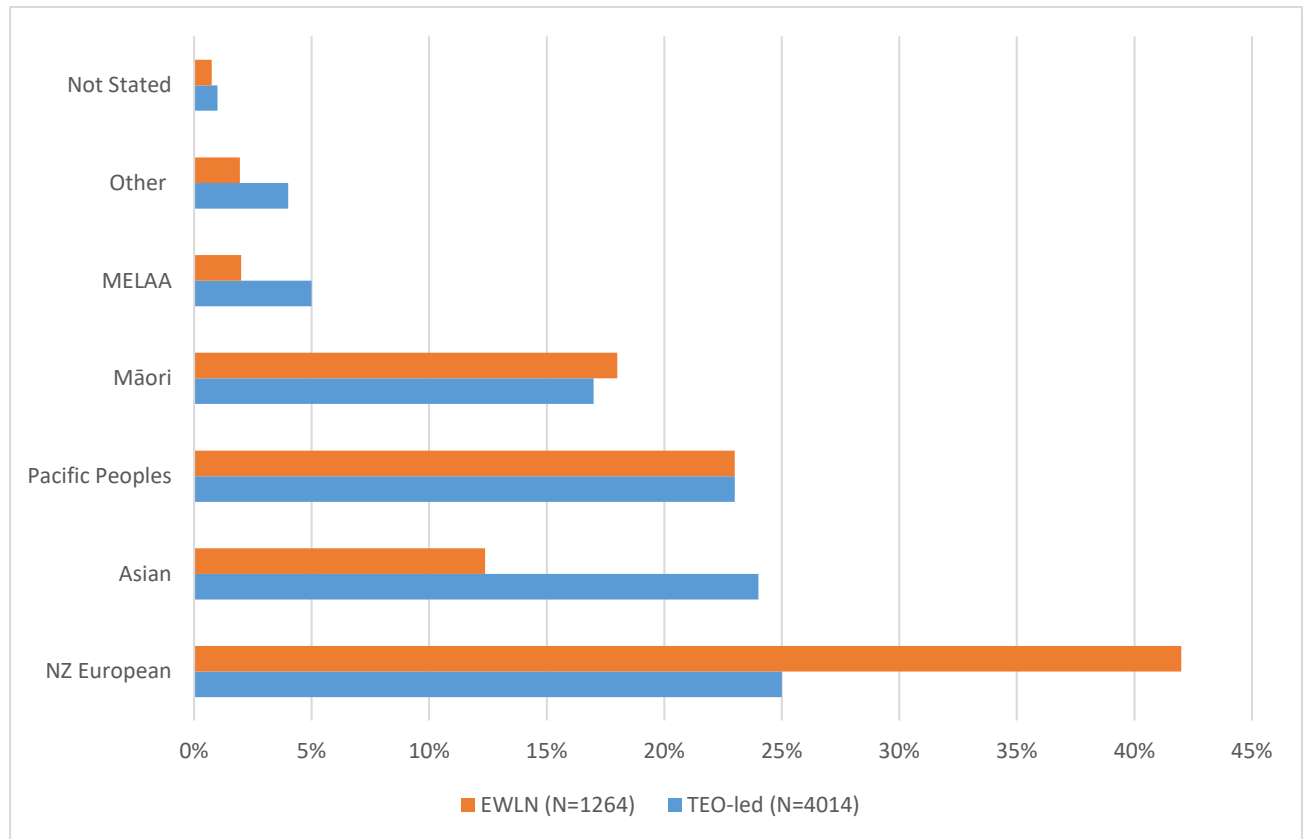
As Figure One below shows, in EWLN programmes, NZ European made up the largest group of employees at 45 percent (534), followed by Māori at 19 percent (223) and by Pacific Peoples at 18 percent (211). For NZ Europeans this represents an increase of 10 percent over programmes run in 2019 and for Pacific Peoples and Māori it is a decrease of seven and five percent respectively.

In TEO-led programmes the pattern of delivery in 2020 is similar to 2019, with fairly even distribution across NZ European (995), Asian (965), and Pacific Peoples (937). Seventeen percent (696) are Māori employees, similar to the 2019 result. This holds the slight increase in participation of Māori employees from 2018.

As with 2017–2019 there is a greater percentage of Asian employees in the TEO-led strand than in EWLN strand. Two specialist language providers, who do not deliver in the EWLN strand, delivered to 42 percent of these Asian employees. In addition, as with 2018 and 2019, there is a higher percentage of NZ European employees in the EWLN strand. For 2020, this is driven by three of the four larger programmes which had high numbers of NZ Europeans. The extent to which this might have contributed to the decrease in delivery to Pacific Peoples and Māori in the EWLN strand is unclear, but it will be worth monitoring this in 2021.

Combined the TEO-led and EWLN ethnicity data show that overall Māori employees make up 18 percent of the total delivery (20 percent in 2019) and Pacific Peoples 23 percent (24 percent in 2019). In comparison delivery in the Intensive Literacy and Numeracy (ILN) Fund reached 2783 (down from just over 3,300 people in 2019). In the ILN fund, 41 percent were Māori (similar to 2019), 18 percent were Pacific Peoples (similar to 2019), and 10 percent were Asian (down from 13 percent in 2019).

Figure One: Ethnicity Comparison 2020 Programmes



Other demographic data

Migrants make up 41 percent of employees in TEO-led programmes, and three percent are former refugees.⁸ These are similar to 2019 proportions. People born overseas make up 30 percent of Aotearoa New Zealand’s workforce (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2020)⁹ but the high percentage of migrants in WLN programmes can probably be expected given the OECD’s Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) results. These show those born overseas and who have English as a second language have lower literacy, numeracy, and problem solving skills than those born in Aotearoa New Zealand or overseas who have English as a first language (Ministry of Education & Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, 2016a).¹⁰

In terms of gender, 53 percent of employees in TEO-led programmes identify as female. In EWLN 46 percent of employees identify as female (up from 40 percent in 2019). Overall the gender data are similar to 2017-2019.

⁸ Very few employers reported migrant data so it is not included in this analysis.

⁹ New Zealand Productivity Commission. (2020). *Training New Zealand’s workforce: Technological change and the future of work*. Draft Report 3. Wellington: Author.

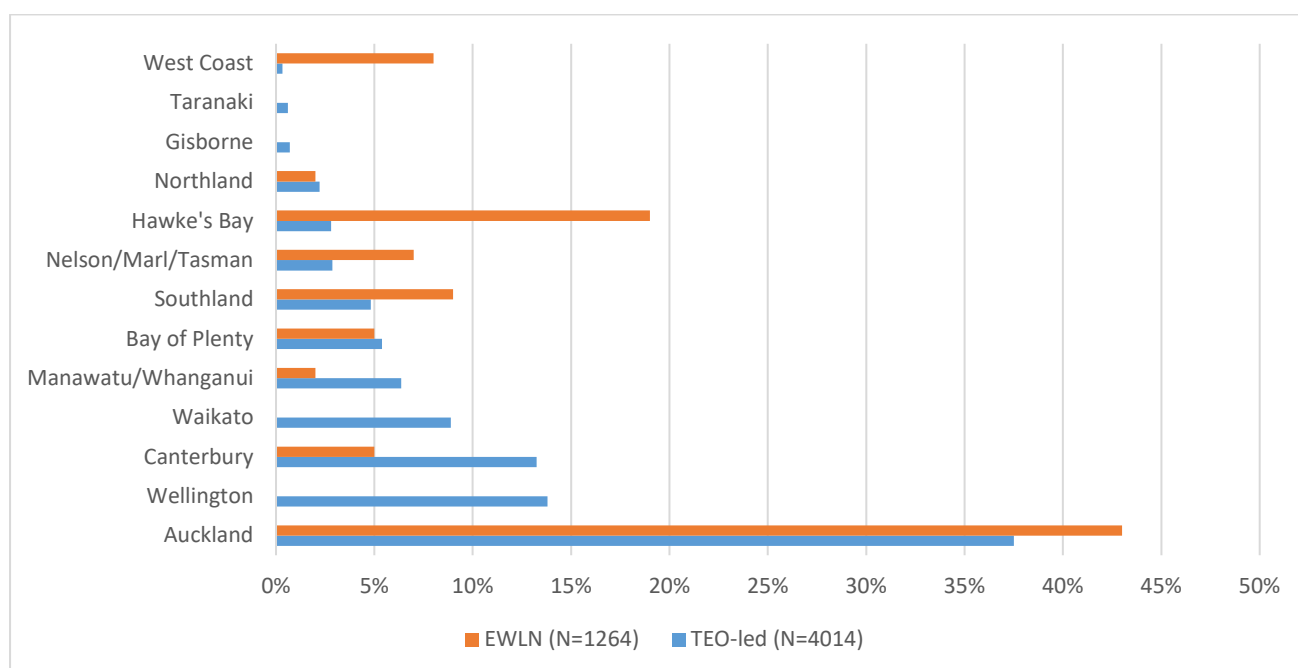
¹⁰ Ministry of Education & Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment. (2016a). *Skills in New Zealand and around the world: Survey of adult skills (PIAAC)*. Wellington: Author.

Regional comparison

Just under 40 percent of the delivery is taking place in Auckland, which is similar to 2017-2019. However, there have been differences in some of the regional data since 2019. There is no EWLN delivery in Waikato or Wellington. The reasons for this are not clear, but need to be examined further as the Waikato region has had limited or no delivery for several years. There is considerable EWLN delivery in the Hawke's Bay, and two programmes on the West Coast account for the increase there.

The regional analysis of the PIAAC data shows people in South and East Auckland have the lowest literacy levels (Earle, 2019),¹¹ followed by Waikato, West Auckland, and Northland. The Ministry of Education has a regional and local profile tool that can be used to further investigate these results.¹²

Figure Two: Regional Comparison 2020 Programmes



Industry comparison

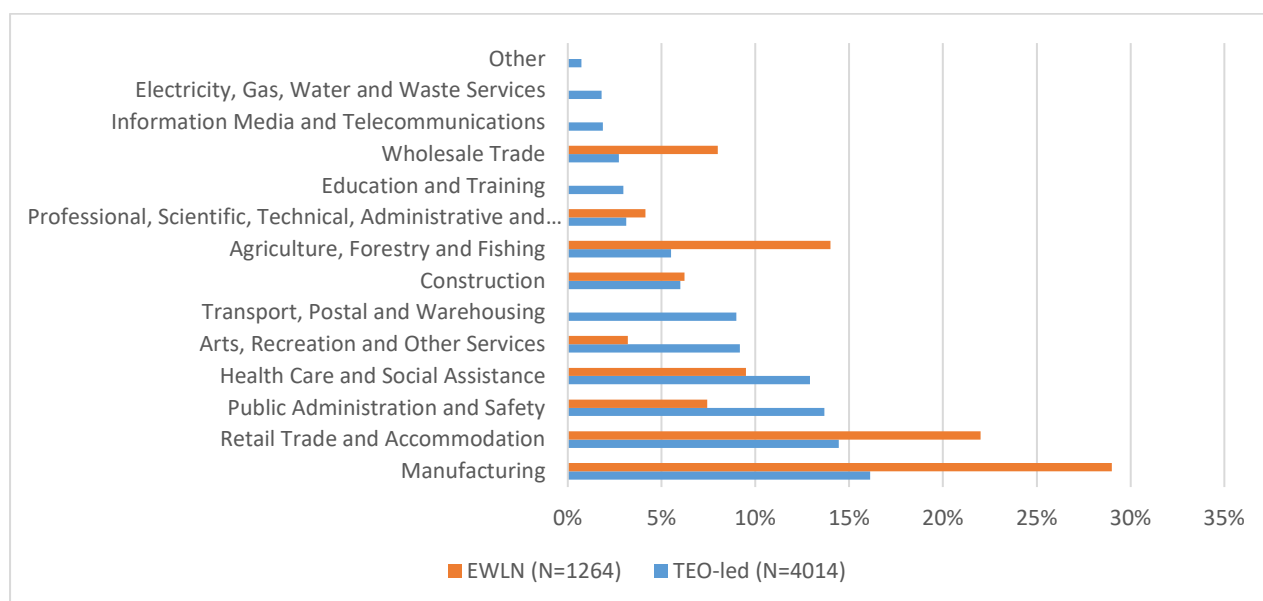
The changes to the industry pattern that occurred between 2017–2019, which saw an increase in delivery in manufacturing and retail trade and accommodation, have held in 2020. In terms of the latter much of the delivery continues to be in supermarkets. The drop in delivery to the healthcare sector continues, as does the drop in delivery in the construction sector. Again, it is unclear why this has happened. Anecdotal evidence in relation to the healthcare sector suggests employers have difficulty releasing staff in enough numbers for providers to deliver viable group training.

¹¹ Earle, D. (2019). *Survey of adult skills: Regional and local profiles*. Accessed 16 April 2020 at

https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/survey_of_adult_skills/piaac-regional-profiles

¹² This can be found at: https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/survey_of_adult_skills/piaac-regional-profiles

Figure Three: Industry Comparison 2020 Programmes



Conclusions about the numbers

Overall, what the data show are that in 2020 WLN programmes continue to reach the ‘right’ employees. This means the groups identified in PIAAC as having low literacy and numeracy skills (Ministry of Education & Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, 2016a). It also means programmes are reaching employees in industries identified in PIAAC as having employees with low literacy and numeracy skills (Ministry of Education & Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, 2016b).¹³

In terms of regional reach, it is expected most of the delivery would occur in Auckland given the size of the population, but as in previous years the Waikato region needs attention. More needs to be known about why this region continues to have employers who are not accessing the WLN fund.

In terms of an overall comment about reach, a point to note is that programmes are, on the whole, driven by supply – providers have funding in the TEO-led strand or support employers to apply for funding in the EWLN strand. This contributes to where programmes are run. How to raise employer demand is something that continues to be grappled with and needs further exploration.

¹³ Ministry of Education & Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment. (2016b). *Skills at work: Survey of adult skills (PIAAC)*. Wellington: Author.

Value and impact of EWLN programmes

This section describes the outcomes from the EWLN programmes. It is based on narrative data from 29 employers on what has happened in their workplaces and for their employees who attended programmes. Additional information is from research on technology-enabled learning conducted in the latter half of 2020.¹⁴ TEO-led providers are not required to submit narrative data so it is not possible to describe the outcomes from their programmes or the extent to which similar outcomes have been achieved. This is, especially true at the company level where over 1000 employees were the only person in their company to receive training.

EWLN programmes – a workforce development focus

EWLN programmes are tailored to the needs of individual employees and their workplaces. They are taken up by employers who want to grow their own and can be seen as what the OECD (2019, p. 9) describes as “interesting and relevant learning opportunities.” The programmes are not sold to employees as literacy and numeracy programmes. Rather they are marketed as workforce development programmes with names such as, “Brighter Futures”, “Our People. Our Way”, “Unleash the Potential”, “Safer People”, “Be Brave”, and “Step up to Lead”.

Programme design

As with previous years, programmes continue to be designed with input from employers along with some task analyses (what people do in their jobs) undertaken by providers. While providers often run repeat programmes or programmes in different branches or franchises of larger companies, some talk about the importance of ongoing needs analysis and not assuming employees are the same as they are on other sites.

Given programmes are intended to increase the literacy and numeracy skills of employees, the workplace context, along with the needs of employees, drives the literacy and numeracy content which is integrated into what is taught. This approach works in adult learning environments where employees become engaged with learning once they recognise its relevance and application to their work and home lives. It is what Kerehoma et al., (2019, p. 15) describe as “learning with a purpose”.

Programme content

Programmes focus on what employees need to know and be able to do in order to do their jobs more effectively and efficiently. This includes some technical skills related to, for example, health and safety, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), company forms, and digital technology. In the COVID-19 environment the latter has become increasingly important with employees needing to know how to use technology to learn. For some this was a struggle and a challenge.

¹⁴ Alkema, A. (2020). *Technology-enabled learning in the foundation education sector*. Wellington: Tertiary Education Commission. Accessed 3 March 2021 at <https://www.skillshighway.govt.nz/resources/research>

However, the combination of employer support, providers' adjustments to delivery, and employees' growing sense of self-efficacy as digital learners meant employees acquired digital skills at the same time as the knowledge and skills delivered in the programme.

I was sceptical about learning via Zoom – but the uptake and positivity was so good. It kind of just happened. We didn't need to do much more than set it up (Alkema, 2020, p. 5).¹⁵

Companies also continue to be very interested in developing employees' employability skills such as communication (oral and written), problem-solving, and teamwork. Some programmes also include wider life-related learning aspects such as healthier living and improving financial behaviours.

This programme has helped me to value myself and do a lot of self-appreciation. My wellbeing is for me the key to becoming a better manager for my department. Being healthy reflects my performance at work. (Employee: Retail, Trade and Accommodation)

Programmes equip people to do their current jobs better, as well as upskilling them to cope with the future workplace demands and changing labour market needs. They also provide employees with knowledge and skills they can transfer into their wider whānau and community lives.

This programme really help me in reduce waste in my household and workplace. New ideas coming up to help in my everyday life. In the workplace it will help me to solve problems, think out of the box and provide customers exactly what they want and when they want. (Employee: Retail, Trade and Accommodation)

I was thrilled when one of the team stayed behind on Wednesday to seek assistance with changing his Samoan driver licence to a New Zealand one. I set him up with his Pathways Awarua login and password, where I gave him the first tasks to do with the driver's licence. This is now his homework task to report back next week. I was glad he had the confidence to do this and to have the conversation with me on his own!! (Tutor: Manufacturing)

Some programmes provide the opportunity for employees to study for micro-credentials or Level 2 and 3 qualifications.

... a shift to a Level 3 New Zealand Certificate in Business (Introduction to Team Leadership) through Competenz [had] not been the original intention for the programme. The driving force behind going down the formal qualifications pathway was the desire by employees to have qualifications, rather than just a certificate of acknowledgement that is traditionally awarded on completion of workplace literacy and numeracy programmes (Alkema, 2020, p. 51).

From employers' perspectives these programmes also help employees to more successfully adopt new technologies or new ways of working, especially when digital skills development is part of the programme. This has been particularly the case in 2020 when many employees learnt about technology and adjusted to using it to learn.

¹⁵ Alkema, A. (2020). *Technology-enabled learning in the foundation education sector*. Wellington: Tertiary Education Commission. Accessed 3 March 2021 at <https://www.skillshighway.govt.nz/resources/research>

Programme delivery

Programmes are delivered to groups of between six to 10 employees. Most take an ako approach to teaching which is underpinned by reciprocal relationships recognising that educators and employees bring knowledge to the teaching/learning space. Tuakana-teina (expert-novice) relationships shift and evolve as programmes progress. Out of this sharing comes new knowledge and understanding. (Kerehoma et al., 2019). Here, teaching and learning is an “active and collaborative process of seeking information, making sense of it, and sharing it” (Taylor & Trumppower, 2021, p. 7).¹⁶

Wellbeing, social, and economic outcomes

The importance of considering a range of outcomes

Looking at a wider range of outcomes for employees in WLN programmes has been underway over the last two years since Alkema and Murray (2019) outlined the case for reporting on wellbeing, social, and economic outcomes.¹⁷ This approach is also used here, along with considering the value of these outcomes for individual employees and their employers/workplaces. This approach includes some of the thinking in the Treasury’s Living Standards Framework (LSF) around social and human capital, along with the wellbeing domains of knowledge and skills, jobs and earning, social connections, and subjective wellbeing (The Treasury, 2019).¹⁸

The need to think about a range of outcomes from adult literacy programmes is confirmed in recent research from Canada that places adult learning within the framework of lifelong learning. Here Taylor and Trumppower (2021) talk about the need to take into account a broad range of outcomes that occur in various forms and are cumulative. “Examples of such outcomes range from the discovery of new learning opportunities to the development of social networks” (p. 5). These researchers also note that the outcomes from programmes that funders seek are often those associated with skills development or mastery of a programme of learning, as is the case with the WLN fund.

The rudiment of this funding policy reflects how successful outcomes of workplace literacy programs extend beyond literacy and specific work-related technical skills to include social consequences. For the most part, during mandatory cyclical reviews of this funding program, it was found that the lives of adult learners had changed across the various delivery models. These changes included improvement of individual workplace skills but extended into their lives at home and in the community. (2021, p. 8)

¹⁶ Taylor, M. & Trumppower, D. (2021). A portrait of the adult learner: Pluralistic interpretations of literacy learning outcomes over the years. *Adult Literacy Education*. Winter 2021.

¹⁷ Detailed information on what is encompassed in these outcomes can be found in this report.

¹⁸ The Treasury. (2019). *Our future, our people: The living standards framework: Dashboard update*. Wellington: Author.

Wellbeing outcomes from EWLN programmes

Wellbeing outcomes accrue for employees during the time of programmes. It is an iterative 'to and fro' process as learning new skills and knowledge enhances wellbeing. And in turn this new sense of wellbeing enhances employees' ability along with the belief they have about their capacity to learn.

For this report, as with previous reports, wellbeing is what the LSF refers to as subjective wellbeing. This includes confidence, self-efficacy, self-esteem, trust, hope for the future, cultural identity, and resilience that occur when learners develop new knowledge and skills (Alkema & McDonald, 2018).¹⁹ It also includes thinking from Vorhaus et al. (2011) who included concepts of self-assurance, happiness, more assertive behaviour, and independence into their list of wellbeing outcomes.²⁰ All of these contribute to how people feel about themselves and the extent to which they are generally satisfied with their lives and able to participate more fully in all aspects of it.

Confidence

As with previous years, the most reported wellbeing outcome is confidence. Confidence happens as employees learn new knowledge and skills and for some, recognise for the first time they have the capacity and capability to do this. This is valued by both employees and employers. For employers it means employees are willing to try new things (have a developing sense of self-efficacy and agency) and contribute more at work. Employers feel confident that their employees have increased their skills and can work more independently. They also recognise the contribution employees can make to solving workplace issues, especially in programmes that include projects on business improvements.

For employees confidence is valued because feeling more confident about themselves and their ability leads them to contribute differently in their work, home and community. Employees believe they have knowledge and skills worth sharing and are prepared to actively participate.

[We see] increased confidence leading to people being able to speak up at work (78% said they were more confident) and also confidence to use technology more at work and at home. It was particularly good to see one learner embrace receiving a smart phone for work and be comfortable using it for the first time. (Employer: Construction)

The staff has shown confidence in using tablets laptops, learning to use technology as some have never used before and have relied on their families to help them, now they can show their families what they learn from the [X] programme. (Employer: Manufacturing)

The opportunity for learners to present their project innovation to senior management not only builds confidence but also provides an opportunity for them to use their voice to recommend change within the company. It has been great to see so many project innovations being implemented across the business units where they apply. (Employer: Manufacturing)

¹⁹ Alkema, A., & McDonald, H. (2018). *Outcomes for foundation level learners: A report to the Tertiary Education Commission on outcomes, indicators and measures for adult literacy and numeracy learners*. Unpublished Report to the Tertiary Education Commission.

²⁰ Vorhaus, J., Litster, J., Frearson, M., & Johnson, S. (2011). *Review of Research and Evaluation on Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills: RESEARCH PAPER NUMBER 61*. London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

Employees also have the confidence to ask for help when required. This in turn can contribute to workplace productivity.

Before I wasn't really sure on how to ask for help when I was confused with paperwork [recipe sheet] After I built my confident in always making sure to ask for help if I'm struggling or even have a slight doubt about what I need to do. (Employee: Manufacturing)

Health and safety

Physical health and safety (H&S) is part of wellbeing. Learning about H&S terminology, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and reporting of near misses, hazards and incidents continues to be an important component of programmes. For workplaces this can result in less lost time injuries, and an increase in reporting.

Overall this means employees take more responsibility for their and others' H&S. For example, one company in Retail Trade and Accommodation reported a 22 percent decrease in incidents that cause harm to staff and customers. Other companies (Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing; and Manufacturing) reported employees were starting to recognise they were integral to health and safety in the workplace, and as a result they were participating more in H&S conversations and projects. This outcome is also seen in the comments below.

When the learners realised they can take responsibility to identify safety steps in a process for their own safety, and that it is not just up to the business to "write this stuff down", they began to accept their role in delivering to the business outcomes. This shift in thinking was further demonstrated when one learner realised that these SOPs could be used to help with training a new employee and that knowing the safety first would be part of an induction prior to operating the plant. (Employer: Consortium)

I have to decide if it is safe to operate or to adjust how I operate it based on safety because I don't want to hurt anyone. (Employee: Consortium)

Wellbeing became particularly important during COVID-19 as people struggled with disruption to their lives. One employer highlights how what had been learnt during training helped employees through this time.

... Of particular note was how the training equipped participants with resilience and confidence to manage themselves through the lockdown Covid-19 period. [Our company] was an essential service and as such, staff were having to apply caution and safety practices that would keep themselves safe at work and with their families. ... (Employer: Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing)

Mental health

A difference noted in this year's employers' reports compared to previous years is the focus on mental health. Here employees recognise the need to look after their mates and have courageous and open conversations.

Mental health and wellbeing was included in the later stages of the programme. The reaction when we spoke about the 'five ways to wellbeing' was almost 100% positive. Many of the group spoke about friends who had committed suicide and were open and honest about how we all need to look after our mental health. (Employer: Manufacturing)

There was a focus on mental health, this meant that staff learnt to talk about issues and trust their colleagues for support, this improved the mental health across the organisation, which in turn improved health and safety. (Employer: Retail Trade and Accommodation)

Belonging through digital inclusion

An outcome from COVID-19 has been the development of a sense of digital inclusion that happened as employees switched to learning online. They were learning about the knowledge and skills required for work at the same time as learning how to do this in a digital environment. For many this was their first engagement with the online learning environment.

One of the unforeseen outcomes from case studies in this research is the sense of social inclusion that has come from developing digital skills. For example, learners in workplaces have been given access to workplace systems that they have not previously had, they have email addresses, and they are now using technology outside of work (Alkema, 2020, p. 9).

As three employees from one manufacturing programme commented:

Very helpful especially this lockdown period with the online training keep your brain focus on something rather than pressure with the situation that we are in at the moment.

It suit my time, and I'm in my comfortable place. And safe from covid 19.

Bring the team together no matter where you are Zoom can still bring the classroom into your home.

This sense of belonging at work also extends to being better able to connect with whānau and feel digitally included, especially with younger family members.

Here, family members often helped learners with the technology, but learners also shared learning with family who, on occasions, joined learning sessions. While this was helped by lockdown and "kids hanging off the ceilings" which was challenging for some, it helped learners feel they are now part of a digital environment (Alkema, 2020, p. 9).

Social outcomes from EWLN

Social outcomes are intertwined with wellbeing outcomes. As people develop confidence and knowledge they feel better able to make connections with others at work and in the community.

Communicating at work

In EWLN programmes, improvements in social outcomes happen with the deliberate teaching of communication skills and techniques, along with teaching about team work. For those with English as an additional language increasing social participation happens with the development of English language skills.

I reckon that's it aye, thinking about what you're going to say first, and remove the emotion, stick to the behaviour and impact. (Employee: Manufacturing)

One of the learners explained that when she started the sessions, she said people viewed her as a bully, and that really upset her. She described that at the heart of it, she wants everyone to be okay and happy at work and fix things. She keeps so much unsaid that it all just comes out sometimes. As a result of the WLN training, she is currently working on applying the communicative techniques that were covered and seeing where she is at in any communicative situation, and give herself time think about how to approach her response. (Employer: Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing)

While I've been on the training programme I achieved learning about communication skills, specially English is my second language. (Employee: Healthcare and Social Assistance)

The value to the business is when staff communicate better it can result in a more engaged workforce willing to participate more at work. They also build more constructive relationships. While good communication is important internally, it is also important for external facing businesses where communication with customers or clients is part of what is required at work.

I can control my emotions now, I speak to staff with respect, I listen to them more. My communication with staff at the beginning I rated my ability to do this at: 2, now I rate it as at: 8. My staff have improved their work, before I had to tell them so many times before they listened, now it's only once or twice. Before I got angry all the time, they didn't care and didn't listen. Now it's a really big change, because I can communicate with them and gain their respect. (Employee: Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing)

All of the site managers have reported seeing increased confidence by leaders to communicate with staff, up, down, and across the business. Over half of site managers have seen more confident supervisors with an awareness of tools for leadership and a greater engagement with staff morale. (Employer: Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing)

The one thing more than anything else I have learnt that will help me at work is about customer service, specifically listening, showing empathy when there are issues and making sure I put it right. I am more aware of customers expectations. (Employee: Retail Trade and Accommodation)

In retail, healthcare, and security industries the external focus is important. Those working in the security industry have particular challenges given that they are not always working with people who want to co-operate with them. Therefore they have had a programme that focussed on assertive communication techniques acknowledging that, "the courteous approach gets co-operation faster".

Participating at work

As with previous years, the most noted social outcome is participation at work – in tool box meetings, H&S activities, engaging with supervisors and managers on the shop floor, and actively contributing to problem-solving. The latter has often been in relation to business improvement projects that are part of the learning programme. Here employees research a workplace issue and propose solutions for it.

Team leaders report that staff are speaking up more in their stand-up meetings with more suggestions for continuous improvement and waste minimisation being made. This is an excellent result. (Employer: Manufacturing)

It was great to see learners very engaged in their projects and embracing the opportunity to try to rectify issues in the workplace by using their valuable insights. All of the projects that were presented will be implemented in the company in some way. (Employer: Manufacturing)

More important is the personal growth that has resulted from employees participating in the WLN programme. We see this in the way that employees are more readily participating in their teams, in the health and safety projects, and in articulating themselves with greater clarity. These improvements are especially evident in the time that employees take to manage their behaviour more constructively. (Employer: Manufacturing)

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Social connection and networks have widened in programmes run in the COVID-19 environment. The move to online classrooms meant that in some companies, employees from different sites were able to join sessions together. This broadened the understanding employees have about what happens in other sites across the country. It also made the delivery of programmes to geographically dispersed sites more viable given the small numbers at some of these.

Delivering online made this possible with the added bonus that people from across regions were able to connect together in online classrooms using Microsoft Teams. ... (Alkema, 2020, p. 51).

In addition to connection between employees, a somewhat unexpected outcome of the move to workplace online learning, was the sense of digital and social inclusion felt by employees. For example, in one company, prior to COVID-19 computers were mainly used by office staff. Being given email addresses and log-ons to, for example, Microsoft Teams, gave employees a greater sense of belonging in the business and they began to use the language of the business, “We’re in a Teams meeting”.

As with previous years, there is value for employees and employers. Employees get the opportunity to learn and practise new skills and develop an increased sense of connectedness and engagement with work and whānau. Employers see this and recognise the role they have played in developing their employees’ more active participation at work.

Economic outcomes from EWLN

Kis and Windisch (2019) note the importance of learning at work in order to support labour market outcomes for employees and enable them to cope with workplaces of the future. This learning includes technical and wider employability skills. But these authors also add that for labour market outcomes to accrue the training needs to be, “of high quality and relate closely to the skills needed by employers” (p. 67).²¹

Education pathways

From the data supplied by employers it is not possible to determine economic outcomes for individuals in terms of wage increases, or if increases can be expected as a result of a 40-hour learning programme. Rather these programmes equip employees with the knowledge and skills to move on to qualifications or get the types of skills that allow them to progress to higher paid positions.

A trend from 2019 and 2020 is an increased number of programmes that support employees to gain micro-credentials, to pathway to Level 2 qualifications, or to undertake Level 2 and 3 qualifications as part of the EWLN programmes. For example in a programme in the Professional, Scientific, Technical, Administrative and Support Services sector employees completed a Level 2 New Zealand Certificate in Laundry Processing; in a security company, employees completed the Level 2 New Zealand Certificate in Security; in a construction company, employees achieved a micro-credential that the company sees as a pathway to further formal qualifications.

Where qualifications are not part of a programme, providers often have conversations with employers about pathways to qualifications. For example, in a construction programme the employer is looking to progress employees to full qualifications at Levels 2 and 3, and where this is not appropriate, to micro-credentials. This supports the idea that in the current economic climate, employers are very keen to develop their staff.

Promotions

Promotions are one way in which economic outcomes can accrue. In a security company the employer noted 10 employees were promoted to supervisory positions. In one retail company, five staff got internal promotions and five left for other jobs they saw as promotions. In another retail company the employer noted an increase in internal promotions and also noted staff had not previously applied for these roles. In a manufacturing company goal setting and career development pathways have been set up for employees.

²¹ Kis, V. & Windisch, H. (2018). Making skills transparent: Recognising vocational skills acquired through workbased learning. *OECD Education Working Papers*. No. 180, OECD Publishing, Paris.

Driver licencing

In some programmes employees have the opportunity to develop their skills sufficiently so they can get other formal pieces of paper. This was the case with an employee being taught reading and comprehension skills to help get her driver's licence; and in another company one employee got their licence and one was ready to sit it.

I've haven't actually done my drivers licence test yet, however, I feel confident that I could do it now. I have had a difficult few weeks financially, so am still saving up the money for the test. (Employee: Professional, Scientific, Technical, Administrative and Support Services)

Managing finances

As with previous years when financial literacy is included in programmes, employees learn about how to manage their money, both for the present and the future, such as understanding more about KiwiSaver. They have learnt what it takes to make savings plans, consolidate debt, manage their budgets and plan for the future. For some this removes the stress associated with managing their money and for others it has enabled them to think critically about how they manage and use the money they earn.

Staff now understand KiwiSaver and the benefits that being a part of this can bring especially in terms of buying a first home. Often staff pay into KiwiSaver but have no idea where their money is or what fund it is in. During the ... programme everyone found out where their money is and what kind of fund it is. Staff are now aware that this can make the difference of hundreds of thousands of dollars to a retirement income. ... (Employer: Arts, Recreation and Other Services)

Financial literacy was a key skill learnt by the team that included using KiwiSaver calculators, creating budgets, researching information about being a first home buyer and effective management of bills. (Employer: Manufacturing)

Employees have also been able to take this learning home and it makes a difference to their whānau lives.

Many learners also applied what they were learning about themselves in their home life, with one of the learners describing how the goal setting session empowered him to save, to take his family on a one week holiday to Rotorua – “never was able to do that before now”. (Employer: Manufacturing)

Changes in workplaces

As with employees, getting to the extent to which there are economic outcomes for employers is not possible. Employers mention changed workplace behaviour from which improved economic outcomes might be construed, but it is not possible to say either whether this happens, the extent to which it happens, whether changes can be attributed to the workplace learning programme, and the extent to which there is an increase in productivity and profitability. However, employers report:

- improvements in health and safety in terms of the quantity of reports received and the quality and accuracy of them

- improved accuracy in compliance reporting (for example, one company was able to move their food safety audits from a six to a nine monthly cycle)
- improved engagement and communication when employees interface with customers. For example, one employer reported an eight percent reduction in customer complaints.

We are seeing an increase of accurate completion in forms. This is evident through our weekly paperwork audits, done by our Compliance Coordinator. We are noticing corrective actions are being taken, in a more timely manner, and for the most part – before the paperwork gets to us. This is a direct impact of greater understanding and ‘buy in’ to the importance of Food Safety. (Employer: Retail Trade and Accommodation)

In another example of waste minimisation and cost reduction implemented as a result of filming SOPs, the supervising team leader identified the overuse of packaging materials. This was immediately corrected and became incidental learning for all teams. Waste minimisation aligns with the organisation’s sustainability goal (economic, social and environmental) to “leave the community and industry in a better place”. ... (Employer: Manufacturing)

Prior to attending the LEAN projects programme a supervisor from the bakery department would send weekly wastage updates to me via email. They would say ‘threw out about 24 pies on Monday, about 30 on Tuesday’ and so on. Since the programme she is now sending emails with a breakdown of the total wastage, the total cost, and reports what the average for the year will be. This is a huge improvement and the results have shown a reduction in waste across the department. (Employer: Retail, Trade and Accommodation)

Literacy and numeracy outcomes

Rather than focus on the wide range of literacy and numeracy skills, this year’s report looks at numeracy and digital skills and digital literacy, given that technology became the medium for delivery in much of 2020. The 2020 report noted that with the arrival of COVID-19, online delivery should be allowed for in the funding model. With the disruptions to programmes, particularly in the Auckland region, online delivery became a necessity.

A challenge on this course has been dealing with the disruptions caused by Covid 19 ... It was challenging to bring training online during the different level restrictions, especially during the last two Auckland Alert level 3 lockdowns as the business was heavily impacted by staff shortages during those times ... [And] it was challenging for the majority of learners because of lower levels of digital literacy. However, the increase in digital skills and confidence have been great to witness. (Employer: Manufacturing)

Literacy and numeracy proficiency

One of the intents of the fund is to increase employees' literacy and numeracy skills. At a formal level assessment is through the Literacy and Numeracy for Adults Assessment Tool (LNAAT). As with previous years, it is not possible to determine statistically significant gain as not all employers report on this. Where this is reported, the numbers who this gain are very small. This is to be expected given the number of hours of delivery in the programmes and the timeframe within which they are delivered. What the data do show is that employees on these programmes have skills at the lower end of the Adult Learning Progressions. As in previous years, these skills mainly fall between Steps 2–4, with the majority being at Steps 2–3. These skill levels are in the parameters of the learner eligibility criteria of the WLN fund.

Literacy and numeracy practices

While it is not possible to see proficiency increases, what is observed during programmes, and seen in evidence from employers, is the change in engagement with literacy and numeracy practices. Practices are what people do with their literacy and numeracy skills in life, learning, and work - in face-to-face situations and through engaging with paper-based and digital media. In other words, this is about how adults use their skills, how their knowledge is enacted in the world (Gal, Grotlüschen, Tout, & Kaiser, 2020).²² Adults engage in a range of literacy and numeracy practices, at a range of frequencies, in a range of contexts, for a range of purposes. Their capacity to engage in these practices is influenced and shaped by their personal attributes, their skills and knowledge, and the agency they have (or feel they have) in a given situation (Coben & Alkema, 2017).²³

Why practices are important

Practices are important because of the connection between levels of proficiency and how often people use their literacy and numeracy skills. Those with higher levels of proficiency use their skills more often. And, in turn, those who use their skills more often get more proficient over time.

Interventions focused on increasing adults' uses of skills, their practices – whether at work or outside of work – may have an important role to play in increasing the supply of adult literacy and numeracy skills (Mallows & Litster, 2016, p. 21).²⁴

... literacy proficiencies develop as a by-product of their engagement in everyday reading and writing practices and, reciprocally, that literacy proficiencies affect levels of engagement in reading and writing practices. This suggests that literacy training which increases engagement in meaningful practices might generate proficiency growth (Reder, Gauly, & Lechner, 2020, p. 1).²⁵

²² Gal, I., Grotlüschen, A., Tout, D., & Kaiser, G. (2020). Numeracy, adult education, and vulnerable adults: a critical view of a neglected field. *ZDM Mathematics Education*. Vol 52, 377–394.

²³ Coben, D., & Alkema, A. (2017). The case for measuring adults' numeracy practices. *Journal of Research and Practice for Adult Literacy, Secondary, and Basic Education*. Vol 6 (1), 20-32.

²⁴ Mallows, D., & Litster, J. (2016). *How can we motivate adults to engage in literacy and numeracy learning?* Report to the UK government's Foresight Future of Skills and Lifelong Learning project.

²⁵ Reder, S., Gauly, B., & Lechner, C. (2020). Practice makes perfect: Practice engagement theory and the development of adult literacy and numeracy proficiency. *International Review of Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-020-09830-5>

Changes in practice

Employer reports show it is the application of literacy and numeracy practices that has employees learning, for example, new vocabulary, and about weights and measurements and then using this new knowledge at work. They use skills to fill out forms, read signs, communicate with fellow workers, and understand what maths is used for at work.

... I learn to know how to say things in a positive way to encourage the team. I can identify issues and look for solutions that I have at work. I understand about things that I can control and things that I cannot so I can find a way to work around it. I learn to listen to people when they talk and learn from feedback. (Employee: Manufacturing)

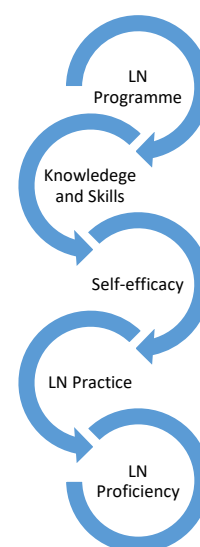
Filling up forms wasn't my thing because there to many big words I didn't understand but now when I join this course it help me big time now I can fill out forms. (Employee: Manufacturing)

While literacy and numeracy proficiency levels are related to social and economic outcomes (Ministry of Education & Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, 2016a; Reder, 2020) research shows there is also a relationship between literacy and numeracy practices and social and economic outcomes (Reder, 2020). As in previous reports, data from employers continue to show they are observing practice change in their employees. This comes about as employees feel valued in the workplace as a result of the opportunity to attend a learning programme, feel more confident in the knowledge and skills they are developing, and when they are afforded the opportunity to practise these.

Measuring practices

However what we do not have in Aotearoa New Zealand is a way to measure practice change. Vorhaus et al., (2011) point to the importance of having a practice measure in order to show, “that increased levels of practice engagement – something that courses produce – lead to increased proficiency” (p. 55). Measuring practices allows for greater understanding of skill demands and skills use at work (Mallows & Litster, 2016); validates and acknowledges gains the learners make during programmes, and helps inform teaching programmes (Coben & Alkema, 2017); and makes direct connections with the practices learners need and use in their everyday lives (Whitten, 2018).²⁶ Measuring practices complements the proficiency measured by the LNAAT.

Figure Four: LN skill development



²⁶ Whitten, D. (2018). *Enhancing and measuring adult literacy and numeracy progress: Exploring practices, outcomes measures, and quality indicators*. Wellington: Ako Aotearoa.

Digital skills and digital literacy

Digital skills (what tools to use and how to use them) and digital literacy (the choices people make about why, when and how to use tools) developed as employees learnt both about and through digital devices and software. These quotes show what happens in workplaces and for individuals.

Staff have increased skills in using digital devices increasing productivity due to this. Staff have more confidence in corresponding in email with professionalism ... Some staff are now able to use the internet, cut and paste, attach files and generally use less time working out how to do these things. (Employer: Arts, Recreation and Other Services)

By using chrome books, different apps i.e., ZOOM for online training, Pathways Awarua, google slides and email gave learners a wide digital scope. Utilizing ZOOM for online training sessions resulted in a massive increase in confidence and effective use of computers by the participants. Some have also started using Zoom in other parts of their life. (Employer: Manufacturing)

Since everything is changing to emails rather than paper bills, it is a good thing that I learnt how to use technology and now I'm able to open emails from the workplace with our pay slips and at home the bills come through emails as well. (Employee: Manufacturing)

Hutchinson, (2016)²⁷ notes the need for employees' to have digital skills given the changing requirements coming with automation in workplaces. This finding is confirmed by what employers are now asking for in workplace literacy and numeracy programmes. While demand for programmes that include digital skills has grown over the last few years, shifting to online delivery in 2020 highlighted the extent which many learners were not equipped with digital skills for learning or work.

Pre-covid, the programme challenges were around ensuring that training is delivered consistently amidst workload demands and shift changes. During the Covid lockdown period, the limitations with which employees were able to engage with digital devices to maintain communication became evident. Consequently, digital literacy has become an area that everyone has identified for improvement. (Employer: Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing)

As a result of having to learn through these tools, employees learnt both digital skills and literacy and numeracy skills. Acquiring digital skills and digital literacy meant they could use these at work and home and this contributed to a greater sense of digital inclusion.

The digital literacy programme utilised several devices the employees used in day to day work. This included telephone devices, laptops or tablets. Most of the time the problem with low levels of digital literacy was that participants were not using devices frequently enough to lock in the learning. Using the devices weekly and completing homework for practice helped staff to gain the confidence to use devices more frequently at home and at work. The more they used them the more they were used efficiently and without errors. (Employer: Arts, Recreation and Other Services)

²⁷ Hutchinson, V., (2016). *Breaking barriers: Research report – using digital technologies for adult literacy teaching, learning and assessment*. Accessed 28 July 2020 at https://epale.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/using_digital_technology_for_adult_literacy.pdf

... in lockdown we used this opportunity to develop digital literacy via the online learning platform. We talked through the process of downloading an app and then logging on ... This also meant that the group could take this information home and share it with their friends, flatmates or family. Particularly during lockdown the online platform enabled the participants to involve their family with several of the tasks particularly those that were focussed on Covid and what it has meant in our lives. (Employer: Manufacturing)

Numeracy

In PIAAC, Aotearoa New Zealand's results in numeracy are lower than those in literacy. Adults with low numeracy skills (Level 1 and below) make up 19 percent of the population with a further 32 percent at Level 2 (Ministry of Education and Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, 2016a). Numeracy is about using maths for everyday life – work, community, study, and family life. Gal et al., (2020, p. 380) state workplace numeracy is a separate area in its own right and involves much more than basic arithmetic skills or competencies used in school-based maths.²⁸ Numeracy at work means workers need a blend of the following skills:

- ability to recognise and identify how and when mathematics is used in the workplace
- an understanding of mathematical concepts, procedures and skills
- an understanding of the kinds of practical tasks they need to perform
- the strategic processes they should be able to use in applying mathematics (Tout, 2020, p. 3).²⁹

It is the application of maths in work-related contexts that makes it challenging to take what is learned in the classroom into the workplace (Gal, et al., 2020). This point is noted by employers when they talk about how employees just out of school, who have reasonable scores in numeracy as attested to by LNAAT, find it hard to transfer this knowledge into the work environment.

For some, learning about numeracy in the workplace starts with the basics.

I learnt what it was to halve the pizza & learnt how to put it in percentage & decimal place.

I enjoyed the measurement worksheet, we work with these numbers every day.

Alot of learning around measurements, was good having the tape measure here. (Employees: Manufacturing)

I feel upskilled. I learned how to convert weights. It's not that hard aye? (Employee: Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing)

²⁸ The researchers place this alongside alongside, financial, health, digital and civic numeracies (p. 380).

²⁹ Tout, D. (2020). *Issues in the teaching of mathematics: Critical connections between numeracy and mathematics*. State of Victoria (Department of Education and Training). Accessed 23 March 2021 at https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/maths/MTT_Critical_Connections_Between_Numeracy_and_Mathematics.pdf

For others, it is about building on what they already know. For example, one employer noted that 65 percent of employees on the programme said they feel like they understand more numeracy related tasks, such as measuring, percentages and calculations at work. In another company the importance of numeracy was highlighted in the COVID-19 environment. Here contracted employees working in Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ) facilities learnt how to read digital temperature guns, how to set up social distancing pathways and understand the impact of quickly multiplying contamination events.

Gal, et al., (2020) note the connection between financial literacy and numeracy. While financial literacy has been discussed in the wellbeing section above, it is worth noting that numeracy skills underpin peoples' behaviours related to financial decisions and money management.

The challenges of running WLN programmes

Scheduling programmes

In previous years scheduling time for learning within work time was the biggest challenge. In 2020 this was more than compounded by COVID-19 and the need to either reschedule training until it could be done face-to-face or shift training to online. Many employers opted for the latter. This then presented the additional challenge of needing to upskill employees' digital skills along with having technology suitable for learning.

Running programmes in 2020 was also challenging as employers worked out how to continue with production or provide services in a disrupted environment. The case studies in Alkema (2020) explain how this happened. Examples are Metro Performance Glass and Life Health Foods who persevered with online classrooms in the workplace and Counties Power employees who took online classes at home. Employer reports also show how employers and providers worked together to ensure employees could continue with learning.

Digital skills and online delivery

Employees were well served when employers themselves provided technology or when either employers or providers accessed the Technology Access Fund for Learners (TAFL) to buy devices. Nevertheless the limited digital skills of workers at the outset of programmes was challenging with the shift to remote learning.

[The provider] phoned, emailed and zoomed to generate a classroom atmosphere and often chatted with those that needed support while in lockdown. Moving from upfront to digital learning and back again meant that the programme did not have the usual flow and real sense of continuity that would usually happen, as lockdown happened during the middle weeks of training. (Employer: Manufacturing)

COVID hit! Suddenly we were teaching beginner digital literacy classes by Zoom. This was very challenging, but the learners and tutors stayed with it. The tutors felt that in the circumstances it was important that they provide the Zoom facility for people on a social front at least, which turned out to be a good decision: some people lived alone and ours was their main contact for 4 weeks. ... (Employer: Healthcare and Social Services)

Employee eligibility

Eligibility criteria for the programme are also highlighted as a challenge by employers. For some this relates to having employees who are not permanent residents and are therefore not eligible for funding. Here a few resort to work arounds and have non-funded employees in programmes without them being funded. Another eligibility issue that has arisen over the last year relates to younger employees straight from school, who on paper do not meet the criteria, but who are reported as not being able transfer their school learning to the workplace. For example, “applying numeracy skills to stock/inventory management control or applying literacy skills to efficient record keeping. These are basic everyday literacy and numeracy applications in the workplace that young people find difficult to assimilate.” (Employer, Manufacturing)

Successes

As with previous years the challenges are balanced by the successes. These successes are seen in the value employers and employees place on what has been learnt in programmes and how this learning has been transferred into and changed how people work along with what they have been able to take into their personal lives.

Development of digital skills

Transferring to learning online while upskilling employees to learn in this way was the most reported success story. This gave employees the opportunity to continue training and to stay connected to others in ways that were not previously possible. In addition, as noted above, it also contributed to employees’ sense of digital inclusion.

Covid and online engagement meant Interaction and communication from a work perspective helped staff to feel more comfortable ... Engaging those within each of the participants bubble with fun things to do so that everyone got on with each other during lockdown. (Employer: Manufacturing)

Engagement with learning

Another success is employees’ engagement with learning. A few employers noted early reluctance to attend training, but as programmes got underway and employees saw the value of what they were learning for work and their personal lives this attitude changed, as did their attitude to work.

The change in attitude towards training that occurred as a direct result of staff participating in the programme. The programme was valued and supported across the group. Staff have commented on how it has become commonplace to talk about “being below the line and moving yourself above the line” and “working from your circle of control”. (Employer: Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing)

Workplace improvement projects

Finally, and as with previous years, employees' improvement projects have been a success. For example, in one company, the topics covered across the four groups ranged from, "creating an induction video for visitors coming onsite, designing and printing of a Quality control booklet and a range of initiatives focused on highlighting the importance of Health and Safety across the business site" (Employer, Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing). Problem-solving at work gives employees ownership of issues along with a sense of being more valued when their solutions are picked up and implemented by management.

Next steps for employers

For most employers the workplace literacy and numeracy programmes have been the start of a learning and development process. As noted earlier there is an increasing trend for employees to get micro-credentials or to start on level 2 and 3 qualifications and there is an intent to continue with this.

Further training will happen in 2021, including L2 for more people and then NZ Cert in Business (Introduction to Leadership, L3). (Employer: Professional, Scientific, Technical, Administrative and Support Services)

Other next steps include:

- using companies' newly developed career pathways to inform staff training requirements
- further upskilling of staff through internal training and in some cases using the training materials that have developed for EWLN programmes
- further applications to the EWLN fund
- looking to find ways to continue with other training that is now being asked for by employees
- continuing to work on 'new things' that have been developed as part of the programme, for example, induction manuals and processes, SOPs
- having introduced employees to Pathways Awarua and / or public libraries there is the hope individuals will continue with this

We introduced Pathways Awarua at induction and 34 people have engaged with it. We've set up a competition in relation to this and have a poster up outside the staff room promoting it. (Employer, Retail Trade and Accommodation)

Most have signed up to the library and a few have visited with kids and taken out books. We provided access to PA and a 'handful' have engaged in further learning opportunities. (Employer, Manufacturing)

Conclusion

While overall numbers in programmes are down on previous years, as might be expected given the uncertainty brought on by the COVID-19 environment, employers who committed to training programmes have been able to articulate the benefits. The added benefit from the 2020 programmes has been the introduction of technology-enabled learning which has seen employees develop digital skills and knowledge alongside literacy and numeracy skills. Prior to 2020 this form of delivery was not allowed for in the funding conditions. It is hoped that this form of delivery can continue where there is a demand for it.

Learning in workplaces affords employees the opportunity to learn about work in work time and removes barriers they face in terms of accessing learning.

Most adults with low skills lead busy lives with family and work commitments, which leave little time for learning. In fact, shortage of time is the biggest barrier to learning participation for low-skilled adults according to OECD PIAAC data, be this due to work related (22%) or family related reasons (19%). At the same time, adults with low skills have limited bargaining power when asking their employer for time off to participate in training (OECD, 2019, p. 17).

While we still have no quantitative proof of the extent of the difference these programmes make, we have qualitative evidence from employers and employees about what happens during the time of programmes. The findings reported here are the same as those reported in previous years. This is about the wellbeing, social, and economic outcomes for employees and the ways in which these impact on how they think about themselves, how they work, and how they operate in their whānau and community lives. It is also about what happens in workplaces and the value to employers when employees develop and engage with literacy and numeracy practices in the context of their work.