

Getting the most from workplace literacy and numeracy programmes

Literacy and numeracy programmes help workers with the reading, writing, maths and communication skills they need for their jobs. Boosting these skills has benefits for everyone: better productivity for management, greater job satisfaction for workers, and savings in time and effort for supervisors.

Here are some of the changes supervisors noticed after employees completed literacy and numeracy programmes.

They were more able to:

- complete workplace forms
- support others (such as apprentices)
- use English language skills
- communicate with clients
- complete documents and records
- take on extra responsibility
- have greater job satisfaction.

Here's what workplace supervisors can do to help.

IDEAS FOR SUPERVISORS

Get involved

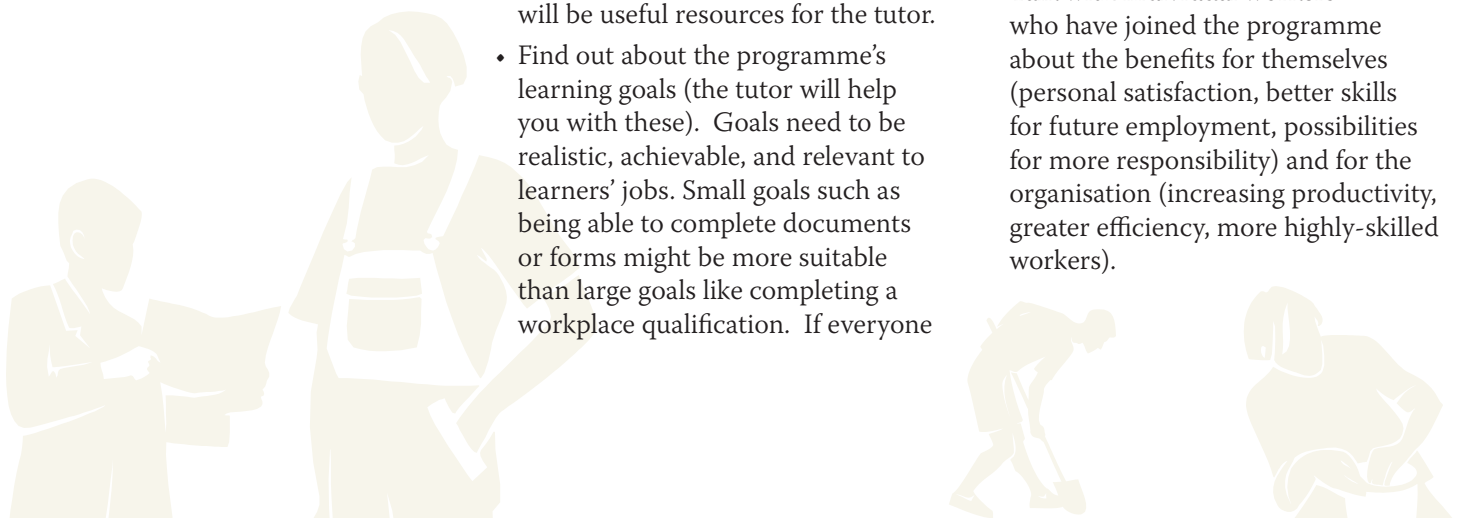
- Join in the programme planning. What are the main reading, writing, communicating or maths skills needed for your workplace? These might include understanding documents, communicating with clients, listening to and giving instructions, using a computer, keeping records, working with measurements, writing case notes, filling in forms. What do your workers need help with? The tutor may be able to build these skills into the programme.
- Invite the tutor to visit your workplace and experience some of the workers' tasks first-hand. Learning is more likely to be used if it's based on real-life tasks. Can you provide copies of work procedures, manuals, forms, or reports? These will be useful resources for the tutor.
- Find out about the programme's learning goals (the tutor will help you with these). Goals need to be realistic, achievable, and relevant to learners' jobs. Small goals such as being able to complete documents or forms might be more suitable than large goals like completing a workplace qualification. If everyone

is clear about the goals, it is easier to monitor progress and celebrate achievements.

- If there's an introductory session, join in. This is a great way to show that you (and the organisation) value the programme. It'll also help you get an overview of the programme and signal that you're a key member of the learning team.
- Once the programme has finished, provide some feedback to management and/or to the tutor. What was good about the programme? What differences have you noticed in the learners? How could the programme be improved? What sort of follow-on would be useful?

Make learning a priority

- Promote a positive attitude to the learning programme. Talk with your team about the programme, the advantages of taking part, and why the organisation thinks it's important. Help learners understand that joining the programme is an opportunity to develop valuable new skills, rather than an additional task or a reflection on their ability.
- Talk with individual workers who have joined the programme about the benefits for themselves (personal satisfaction, better skills for future employment, possibilities for more responsibility) and for the organisation (increasing productivity, greater efficiency, more highly-skilled workers).



- It's essential that learners attend the programme regularly. Work with the tutor to find the best times for learning sessions. During busy periods, the tutor may be able to offer flexible sessions so learners can catch up on anything they miss.
- Organise rosters, provide cover or delegate tasks to make it easy for your workers to attend the learning sessions.
- If there's space available, set up a learning area. Having a comfortable space with room for resources like dictionaries, posters, magazines and books makes it easier for learning to happen.

Build a strong learning team

- Have regular, short catch-up meetings with the tutor. These are a great way of planning how classroom learning can be used and practised on the job. You can also provide feedback to the tutor about ways learners are using new skills or taking initiative in the workplace. If you can't catch up in person, ask the tutor for a short monthly update on what the learners have been doing and how you can support them.
- Make the tutor welcome in your workplace – for example, by inviting them to join you for morning or afternoon tea. This will help foster the relationships that will support effective learning.
- Set up a buddy system, where learners can work alongside more experienced colleagues as they put their new skills into practice. For example, if they are learning to use a computer to write hand-over notes, can they work alongside a team-mate and write a set of notes together?
- Make sure your team knows it's okay for them to ask questions when they don't understand something, and encourage workmates to help each other out when learning new skills.

Show how to do this by doing it yourself.

- Ask your workers how their learning is going. Show them you're interested in their progress, both in and out of work.

Practise, practise, practise

- Help learners use their new reading, writing, communication or maths skills at work as soon as possible – it's more difficult the longer you leave it.
- With the programme tutor, plan ways to help learners practise their new skills. If they are learning how to write emails, make sure they can practise this as part of their normal work (let them work alongside a more experienced work-mate at first, so they can talk about their learning and get some support).
- If learners are working on communicating in English, make sure they have opportunities to practise talking to others. For example, draw them into social conversations at morning tea or smoko. Give lots of encouragement and positive feedback.
- Make computers available for practice in off-duty time, if any are available.

Celebrate success

- Be on the lookout for learners trying out new skills at work. They may talk more with work-mates, join in at meetings, ask more questions, use workplace forms, or take more initiative. Take the time to offer a compliment, give encouragement and provide positive feedback. Interest and support from managers and colleagues is a great motivator.

- When you give feedback, make it positive and encouraging, and give it one-to-one. Help learners talk about their learning, how far they have come, and how the learning has helped them at work and at home.
- Help learners to build on new skills as they develop them, by working out ways they can take on more responsibility. For example, if they have learnt how to take and record measurements, can they teach others how to do this?
- Learners with very low levels of literacy and/or English language will need many hours of tuition and practice to make improvements. Don't expect instant results. Celebrate each small success.

Use plain English

- Take a look at the documents that are used in your workplace, like policies, manuals, instructions and forms. Could they be written more simply, without losing the meaning? Making documents more user-friendly will benefit everyone. The programme tutor can help you make forms, workbooks or other materials easier to read.

The ideas in this brochure were drawn together by Jan Eyre of NZCER, from a project for the Department of Labour on the transfer of skills from literacy and numeracy programmes to the workplace.

