



Literacy Aotearoa
Choice Change Freedom

*Response to the Draft Tertiary Education Strategy 2014 -
2019*

Introduction

For the past 30 years, Literacy Aotearoa has worked to achieve its mission, to develop, promote and deliver accessible high quality literacy services designed to ensure the peoples of Aotearoa are critically literate and able to realise their full social, cultural and economic potential.

Literacy Aotearoa is a national organisation of adult literacy providers and has been delivering high quality tertiary education for over 30 years. It is a well-established and respected provider of education to learners who require improved literacy, language and numeracy in order to realise their full potential. Literacy Aotearoa attracts students from all backgrounds and provides targeted education at no direct cost to its learners.

All programmes delivered by 45 member providers (Ngā Poupou) are student-centred and individually tailored to match the needs of each learner. Literacy Aotearoa is looking at ways to expand its provision so that New Zealand can enjoy the social, cultural and economic benefits of more critically literate, confident and able adults and families. Programmes are developed to focus on learners' needs, and are consistent with government priorities for tertiary education and training. Literacy Aotearoa has a strong record of delivering education that is dynamic and responsive to business, community and employer needs.

Literacy Aotearoa is unique because of its commitment to building literacy in individuals so that they can benefit from the increased education and employment prospects that higher levels of literacy and numeracy create. Additionally, Literacy Aotearoa is a significant provider of literacy teaching qualifications, which produce the specialist literacy, language and numeracy teachers that New Zealand requires.

The Draft Tertiary Education Strategy

Overview

Literacy Aotearoa appreciates the opportunity to respond to the draft Tertiary Education Strategy. As a network of literacy providers it welcomes the continued recognition and inclusion of literacy, language and numeracy as a key driver for the tertiary education sector. As an organisation with a strong commitment to adult and community education, and adult literacy and numeracy, Literacy Aotearoa appreciates the recognition of the important role that Adult and Community Education (ACE) providers play, particularly their work with those who have not been well served by the compulsory education system. The Strategy would be enhanced with greater recognition and understanding of the contributions and value of Adult and Community Education sector to the tertiary education sector. It is also pleasing that the contribution to literacy, language and numeracy provision is stressed once again.

Proposed long-term focus

Literacy Aotearoa supports the broad direction of the Strategy, but would like to see a stronger vision for the lives of all New Zealanders. The draft Tertiary Education Strategy sets out the Government's Expectations and Priorities for the Tertiary Education Strategy 2014 -2019 and, as such, is a short to medium-term strategy. This is then expressed within a context of longer-term issues, specifically the desired outcomes for the coming decades. On the basis of the changes that

have occurred in the last 20 years it is difficult to identify with certainty the future demands on people in a similar time frame. But as a country New Zealand needs to prepare its people to deal with that change. There is no certainty that approaches of the past will be appropriate. The Strategy's outcomes refer to international relationships to improve competitiveness, supporting business and innovation and improving outcomes for all, which are also described in solely economic terms. Given that the context is long term, it would be reasonable to expect that this section would enunciate a vision for New Zealanders that seeks to prepare people to be creative so that they turn future change into opportunities. Such priorities would seek to attain well-being for all its people, reduce inequality, increase health and sustainable development.

There are dangers in providing education that is heavily focused on serving the the needs of today. Such an outlook can lock people into skills and learning that will be irrelevant in 10 to 20 years' time. The Strategy needs to promote education that is flexible, creative and responsive so that people are equipped to adapt to the changes.

This response addresses the matters we wish to raise, under the headings as they appear in the draft Tertiary Education Strategy 2014 – 2019.

Build international relationships that contribute to improved competitiveness

With regard to the building of international relationships, we would support greater collaboration and links with international research projects. We note that the development of these relationships is also intended to create opportunities to provide overseas students with education in New Zealand. Literacy Aotearoa would caution that this approach needs to be carefully balanced. New Zealanders should not be disadvantaged by overseas students and denied access to courses, in particular those that are considered important for the development of New Zealand as a country.

Support businesses and innovation through development of relevant skills and research

We also see the importance of engagement with businesses. However we note that there are two components to the provision of relevant education that can lead to people accessing employment opportunities. Noted economist Paul Dalziel, in a presentation to the Industry Training Federation Literacy Forum 2010¹ noted that on the one hand employers will need to have a reasonable expectation of profitability to increase their workforce. On the other hand potential tertiary education students will also need to see opportunities for employment if they are to invest in tertiary education.

Literacy Aotearoa would suggest that alongside the focus on innovation and business growth, there need to be opportunities for those who will not enter the workforce or undertake further study after completing their learning programmes. This is dealt with more fully in the section below.

¹ Dalziel, P (2010) Skills in the economy and skill development for industry. A presentation to the NZ Labour Market and

Improve outcomes for all

Given that this section is about long-term goals, we would expect a broader approach to outcomes. Literacy Aotearoa works with people who are marginalised, especially those who could be identified as being members of the priority groups identified in the TEC Implementation Strategy². Our research³ shows the importance of engaging with learners in the 'learning to learn' components of their programme. It is through this stage that learners begin to understand that they have the capacity to develop new skills, which in turn opens up wider horizons for them. The motivation for many of our learners is to learn how to assist their children with their school work and become involved with the school community. If children are to have the education that this country requires in its broadest sense, then their parents and caregivers need the opportunity to develop their literacy and numeracy to a level which gives them confidence to undertake the significant role of supporting their children's education. Whilst the objective, as presented in the Strategy appears inclusive, it will marginalise those whose goals will not be related to paid employment but whose roles are nevertheless highly necessary for future generations and those who are unable to fully care for themselves.

Recommendation

1. That this goal be broadened so that it includes outcomes that address the learning required for health and well-being in the daily lives of all people in New Zealand.

Strategic Priorities

Benefits (or "outcomes") of tertiary education

There are concerns with the outcomes here as they refer only to business growth and increased employment. Such a process marginalises those who for personal reasons do not go on to employment and/or further education. It fails to recognise the reasons that lead people to decide to focus directly on the needs of their children, relatives or whānau members – among other scenarios.

Maori educational success and related strategies

Literacy Aotearoa welcomes the draft Strategy's statement of the status of Māori in this country. The Tertiary Education Strategy places emphasis on outcomes that are designed to enable Māori to be better prepared to participate in employment and the economy. Whilst this statement, on the face of it, seems laudable there are significant questions that it raises. These refer to education and how it is determined by Māori. With regard to preparation to participate in employment and the

² Tertiary Education Commission, (2012) Implementation Strategy, Wellington.

³ Literacy Aotearoa, (2013) Literacy Language and Numeracy for Maori adults and their whanau. A report for Te Puni Kōkiri. Auckland.

Literacy Aotearoa (2013) Adult literacy provision and early childhood achievement, a report for the Ministry of Education. Auckland.

economy, consideration includes the extent to which Māori learners and their whānau determine and are involved in assessment processes and so define what constitutes success. Literacy Aotearoa would expect that there be support for education for Māori to be available in Te Reo for learners and whānau.

Research⁴ carried out by Literacy Aotearoa shows that programmes which link Te Reo Māori and tikanga with learning activities and outcomes result in significant progress for Māori learners and their whānau.

Strategic priorities

Although the priorities are dealt with under six separate headings, Literacy Aotearoa would argue that they are all interrelated, so that the focus on one priority has implications for the others. For example the demographics of Māori and Pasifika communities show that there is a significant proportion of the population under 25. So addressing the issues of youth at risk will therefore also require attention to issues of education and training for Māori and Pasifika. The Strategy gives the impression that the priorities are distinct but they are interconnected, to the extent that the deliverables of each priority impact on the deliverables of the others.

Priority 1 Delivering skills for industry

Literacy Aotearoa recognises the need for the tertiary education system to provide people with the education that will assist them in attaining meaningful employment. It is of concern that the Strategy's focus is restricted to high-level education provided by universities and polytechnics, when there is a large proportion of the workforce whose literacy is below level 3 on the Adult Literacy and Life Skills survey. These potential learners would not be able to access a university or polytechnic. The inference is that people already in the workforce also need skill development. Literacy Aotearoa works with learners who seek to enhance their current employment. Over 50% of Literacy Aotearoa learners have no school qualifications and are likely to be unemployed. A significant proportion of these learners are involved in a 'learning to learn' programme as a step to achieving their learning goals. The draft Strategy does not recognise these outcomes, which make a significant impact on learners' ability to move into courses that lead to higher qualifications.

As we mentioned earlier in this response there are two components to matching the skills of people with the needs of employers. In the first instance economic conditions need to be such that businesses can expect an increase in profitability and so have an incentive to employ more staff. On the other hand there needs to be sufficient jobs so that potential employees have an incentive to invest in developing skills. To engage with both business and learners is one aspect of the matching of skills and employment but employers also need to give clear signals regarding the skills they require of their employees.⁵

⁴ Literacy Aotearoa op. cit.

⁵ Dalziel, P (2010) Skills in the economy and skill development for industry. A presentation to the NZ Labour Market and Skill Forum. Industry Training Federation. Wellington.

The recent PIAAC report OECD Skill Outlook 2013⁶ makes the following comment:

*In the case of underskilling, public policies can help identify workers with low levels of information processing skills and offer incentives to both employees and employers to invest in skills development to meet the requirements of the job. When the skills available aren't adequately used, better management practices can make a difference.*⁷

The report goes on to suggest that underskilling, under use of skills and unemployment can also reflect lack of information and transparency. This can arise because people have skills that are not related to their field of work. Another factor may be geographical constraints. This can occur particularly in rural areas where there are fewer opportunities and resources to develop the necessary skills, unless provided by the employer. The OECD report suggests that incentives are needed to reduce the barriers to mobility. Issues like this are exacerbated in tight economic times such as we have experienced over recent years. The Strategy could provide clarity around these issues.

Recommendation

1. That the indicators of success include reference to learners' progress in personal well-being, and that of their whānau or family and communities, as well as employment gains and economic growth.

Priority 2 Getting at risk young people into a career

Literacy Aotearoa supports this initiative in general. The focus of this priority are those young people not in employment, education or training, as well as those who are in low-skilled jobs. In 2012 Literacy Aotearoa worked with 2,340 learners under the age of 25 (29% of all learners). The majority had no school qualifications and many were unemployed. As mentioned earlier, 'learning to learn' was a significant part of their tuition, with the result that learners came to realise that they did indeed have skills. Then as their confidence grew, they saw horizons for themselves, their whānau and family which they had previously considered beyond their reach. This bears out the following comments made in the PIAAC report 2013:

The combination of poor initial education and lack of opportunities to further improve one's proficiency has the potential to evolve into a vicious cycle in which poor proficiency leads to fewer opportunities to further develop proficiency and vice versa.

Programmes such as those with young learners (above) have the potential to reverse the trends identified by the OECD report. Such programmes provide the first stage outcomes that equip people to turn to training to develop some of the skills looked for in the TES.

⁶ OECD (2013), OECD skills outlook 2013: First results from the survey of adult skills, OECD Publishing. Accessed at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264204256-en>

⁷ OECD op cit p. 23

The first indicator of success in the draft strategy document is very general and sets no measurable reduction in those young people at risk who are not engaged in work or further education.

The successful achievement of this priority is dependent on factors outside education. For example, as the section on the international context on page 3 of the draft TES states, the international economic climate is still very delicate. Consequently it cannot be assumed that the current levels of progress in the New Zealand economy will be sustained. In the event of a downturn there will be further loss of jobs and, as the PIAAC report points out, there will be many potential learners who will become disillusioned and left behind, lose confidence and have difficulty engaging in formal education.

Recommendation

1. That the TES give recognition to the importance of 'learning to learn' as part of an inclusive process so that all New Zealanders develop skills to engage in lifelong learning and so be equipped to address societal changes as they occur.

Priority 3 Boosting achievement of Māori and Pasifika

Literacy Aotearoa supports this priority and particularly urges that the provision be culturally responsive. We would recommend that the statement in the last but one paragraph on page 12 which refers to cultural responsiveness be introduced at the beginning of the section rather than at the end.

Literacy Aotearoa research⁸ suggests that TEOs need to work with Māori communities to identify and establish outcomes relevant for Māori, develop practices that involve Te Reo and tikanga in the provision of programmes. In this way the programmes support and validate learners' aspirations. Such an approach has significant impact on the ways that TEOs provide their services. Consequently we are concerned that the statement that TEOs engage Māori as Māori within tertiary education is only made in the indicators of success. There needs to be more coverage than a sentence in the indicators of success. It is important that the TES provides more analysis and comment about what this means for Government and the tertiary education sector.

On the basis of the data from ALLs there will be a significant number of Māori learners who will participate in literacy, language and numeracy programmes. The comments made about the response in the section concerned with improving adult literacy and numeracy also apply to this section.

Recommendation

1. That the TES clarifies Government understanding of 'learning as Māori' in the text of Priority 3.

⁸ Literacy Aotearoa op. cit

Pasifika

Literacy Aotearoa supports the intention of focusing on increased engagement in learning and education. However the comments made concerning relevance to the needs of Māori apply as well for Pasifika. Programmes need to be culturally appropriate and developed by involving Pasifika communities, families and learners at all stages in the development and implementation of tertiary education programmes.

On the basis of the data from ALLs there will be a significant number of Pasifika learners who will participate in literacy, language and numeracy programmes. The comments made about this response in the section concerned with improving adult literacy and numeracy also apply to this section.

Priority 4 Improving adult literacy and numeracy

Literacy Aotearoa supports the inclusion of this priority. It reflects the importance of reducing the number of people in New Zealand for whom literacy and numeracy are barriers to achieving learning and life goals. We commend the comments in the second paragraph on page 14 as it begins to consider the impact of literacy needs on the lives of individuals, their whānau or family as well as on communities.

The experience of Literacy Aotearoa in over 30 years of providing its programmes is that adult literacy is transformative for the lives of people, their whānau or family and their communities. It impacts more broadly than in merely acquiring the skills for employment. To more accurately reflect the value of the investment in adult literacy, language and numeracy the indicators of success should include outcomes that reflect greater involvement in their children's education, improved health, improved relationships. To achieve this will require work on the development of effective measures to record such gains.

The priority refers to "a diverse and flexible range of foundation skills that reflect learners' different needs". Whilst recognising the diversity of people's differing learning goals and aspirations, the experience and research of Literacy Aotearoa suggests that the flexibility in the delivery of the learning programmes and the personal circumstances of the learner also need to be addressed. For many learners who come to Literacy Aotearoa providers, such things as transport, timing of courses, child care, and family circumstances constitute some of the barriers to engaging with programmes and to student retention. To respond to such diverse needs can also put significant strain on the resources of the providers concerned and this therefore needs to be recognised in the funding of programmes.

The Adult Literacy and Life Skills survey (ALL) 2006 in New Zealand showed that over a million people were not at a level to be able to participate fully in a society like New Zealand. Given this estimate of the need it is surprising that the indicators of success do not include some numerical targets.

Recommendations

1. That the indicators of success should reflect gains in the range of outcomes in the second paragraph rather than focus simply on employment.

2. That the indicators of success include some numerical outcomes and allocate funding to achieve them.
3. That the TES provide for the development of assessment processes that address the outcomes for everyday practices of learners, their whānau, family and communities.

Priority 5 Strengthening research based institutions

Literacy Aotearoa in general agrees that there is a need for research to ensure that the tertiary education system is fit for purpose. However we would also stress that the research should include and support the action reflection research that is accessible also to researchers outside of universities and polytechnics.

Recommendation

1. That there is an increase in the level of research carried out by providers who are not universities or polytechnics.

Priority 6 Growing international linkages

Literacy Aotearoa sees benefit in supporting and building on existing relationships. These include support for ASPBAE and UNESCO and linkages across the whole tertiary education sector, including the Adult and Community Sector. There is also considerable benefit in developing strong research collaboration with overseas researchers and practitioners. We are also aware of the open source international programmes that offer free online programmes, for example Coursera. These online programmes are attracting considerable attention especially as they are moving towards the development of accreditation for some of these programmes. This could have notable impact on the way that learners wish to engage with their learning provider. The tertiary education sector needs to develop the capacity and flexibility to meet these challenges.