



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga

Engagement is key
*The Literacy and Numeracy for Adults
Assessment Tool – experiences of
implementation*

This series covers research on teaching and learning in literacy, language and numeracy and analyses of international surveys on adult literacy and numeracy.

Authors

Jacqui Haggland
Ahikiwi Research and Consulting
For the Ministry of Education

David Earle
Chief Research Analyst
Ministry of Education

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1 SUMMARY

The Literacy and Numeracy for Adults Assessment Tool (the Assessment Tool) was developed to provide reliable information on learners' reading, writing, numeracy and vocabulary skills against the *Learning Progressions for Adult Literacy and Numeracy*. The Tool was piloted in 2010 and rolled out to all tertiary education organisations in 2011. This is the first time that a diagnostic learning assessment tool has been rolled out and mandated across the New Zealand tertiary education system.

There is interest in both the results coming out of the Assessment Tool and the experiences of implementation. This report presents the findings of a small scale piece of qualitative research with nine providers delivering programmes to young people. The purpose of this research is to understand the experiences of implementing the Assessment Tool. This report supplements the quantitative analysis of first results from the Assessment Tool reported in Lane (2012).

The research addressed two key questions:

- What was the experience of organisations and educators in implementing the Assessment Tool and using it to support teaching and learning?
- What needs to be taken into account from these experiences in analysing the data available from the Assessment Tool?

1.1 Key findings

The interviews confirmed that successful implementation is more than just setting up learners to complete the assessments. It needs to be part of wider organisational engagement with developing the literacy and numeracy skills of learners. It requires:

- Educators who understand the importance of literacy and numeracy and have the skills to be able to embed relevant tasks and activities into the vocational training they deliver
- Educators who also understand the use of assessment for learning and value the use of assessment information for diagnostic purposes and tracking whether their efforts are having an impact
- Learners who are engaged in the learning process, understand why the assessment matters and can make sense of the results for themselves.
- Organisations that have the resources and processes to support educators in using the Assessment Tool in a timely manner.

A consistent issue raised by all organisations was the challenge of engaging learners with the assessment process. This was a particular concern with the end-of-programme assessments. Learners have often had negative prior experiences of assessment. Younger learners found the questions did not always relate to their life experience. They needed to understand the purpose and benefit of the assessments for their own learning and development. The assessment is seen as something they do for the educator, it doesn't contribute to their grades and they can find it difficult to fit into their own understanding of their skills and learning. If they are not convinced and engaged with the process then the results may under-represent their full potential.

The key message for data analysis from this research is that the Assessment Tool is administered within a 'real world' context. Organisations and educators have flexibility about which assessments to use with which groups of learners and when to assess. Assessments are undertaken in a range of different circumstances. The level of engagement of educators and learners with the Assessment Tool can be variable. All of these factors need to be considered in

drawing conclusions from the data. The Assessment Tool results should be regarded as one source of information alongside others in understanding learner outcomes.

1.2 The research

The research was undertaken with providers offering fees-free places within the Youth Guarantee programme in 2011. An online survey was conducted with all 35 providers who offered these places. Nine providers were selected for follow up case studies. Focus groups were also conducted with three groups of learners from two large providers. The commentary on data analysis was added after the research was completed.

1.3 Literacy and Numeracy for Adults

Improving the literacy, language and numeracy skills of adults is a government strategic priority. Current policy emphasises embedding literacy and numeracy provision within level one to three vocational education. The *Learning Progressions for Adult Literacy and Numeracy* (Tertiary Education Commission, 2008a) provide a resource for teaching adults by describing the learning that adults require to develop their skills.

The need for a common assessment tool for adult literacy and numeracy was identified in the first Adult Literacy Strategy in 2001 (Office of the Minister of Education, 2001). Following exploratory work by the Ministry of Education, the Tertiary Education Commission commissioned the Literacy and Numeracy for Adults Assessment Tool in 2008 for implementation in 2010.

The primary purpose of the Assessment Tool is to support educators and learners in their teaching and learning of reading, writing, numeracy and vocabulary. It provides information on where the learner's skills sit against the Learning Progressions. Learners can be reassessed on the Tool to track their progress. The Tool can be run online, using a computer adaptive approach, or the assessments can be printed out. In 2011, a shorter version of the online tool was introduced, called the snapshot.

In general, the TEC expects that assessments will be undertaken with all learners in embedded and intensive provision as a condition of funding. The detailed requirements for each funding area vary. In 2011, 210,000 assessments were undertaken involving 77,000 learners (Lane, 2012).

1.4 Youth Guarantee

Youth Guarantee is a lead policy of Government. It provides new opportunities for 16 and 17 year olds to achieve education success and progress into further education, training and employment. One elements of the programme is fees-free tertiary places. Around 3,500 learners participated in Youth Guarantee fees-free places in 2011. Some organisations ran specific programmes for these learners, and others spread the places across existing programmes.

Youth Guarantee places were used as focus for this research because young people under 20 were a significant group of learners assessed in 2011 and the places had the most intensive use of the Tool (Lane, 2012).

1.5 Getting underway: choosing an assessment

Organisations and educators first need to choose which assessment strands (reading, writing, numeracy and/or vocabulary) to use with which learners. In doing so, they generally considered

the learning demands of their course. In some organisations, educators made the decision; in others, it was organisation-wide.

Most organisations involved in this research assessed both reading and numeracy. The writing and vocabulary assessments were not used as much. Marking the writing assessment is time-consuming. However, the experience of marking can help educators understand more about writing and how this can inform their teaching.

There are several types of assessment available – full on-line adaptive, the shorter snapshot and non-adaptive for printing. Most organisations used the full adaptive and/or snapshot assessments. The use of the snapshot assessment has increased. Some organisations have continued to use their own vocationally contextualised assessments as well.

1.6 Getting underway: making it happen

In most organisations, both organisation administrators and educators administered the Assessment Tool. The most common place for holding assessments was a computer lab. Most organisations supervised learners while they were assessed. Organisations often had problems with Internet access offsite or at remote campuses. Not all learners were comfortable using an online tool; however, this was less of an issue with younger learners.

Most organisations gave the initial assessment three to four weeks after the beginning of the course. Organisations wanted educators to have information about their learners' skills early in the course. They also wanted learners to be fully enrolled and establish a relationship with their educator before doing the assessment.

Educators needed support in the initial stage of using the Tool. Educators usually responded well when they had seen the reports generated by the Assessment Tool, and linked them to what they knew about embedding literacy and numeracy.

There was great variation both between and within organisations in what information was given to learners about the assessment before they took it. Most of the information dealt with how educators would use the assessment results to improve their teaching. Little of it focused on what learners might get from the assessment for themselves. Some organisations had developed guidelines and other resources to support their educators in informing learners.

A number of learners had had negative experiences with education and/or assessment. Younger learners found the questions did not always relate to their life experience. Educators needed to help them to feel comfortable with the assessment process. Having the educator stay in the room during the assessment was important to setting the learners at ease.

1.7 Informing learning and teaching

Many of the educators and organisation administrators interviewed in the research understood the benefits of the Assessment Tool for identifying learners' literacy and numeracy skills. They also recognised there was further room for improvement in the way they used the information to develop their teaching practice.

Some educators referred learners with low results to learning support specialists. Others made use of *Pathways Awarua*, an online learning system aligned with the progressions framework (Tertiary Education Commission, 2012a). Some used knowledge of learners' skill levels to group them together for activities.

Educators understood it was important to provide learners with feedback on their results. Practices for doing this varied. Most learners in Youth Guarantee seem to have very little idea about the learning progression steps and what they mean. There is also confusion between the steps and the NZQF levels. This can make it difficult to present the results in a way that is meaningful and engaging to learners.

The Learning Progression Step Profiles were proving a useful tool for structuring feedback to learners and explaining what the steps mean, and what is required to get to the next step. Some organisations were using results to inform individual learning plans, particularly those with specific Youth Guarantee programmes.

1.8 Getting underway (again): progress assessments

Concerns about lack of learner engagement in the end-of-course assessments have led to widespread rethinking of the process. Many organisations have changed the timing to ensure the assessment is completed before learners begin their formal course assessments. End-of-course assessments were usually held three to four weeks before the end of the course. Some organisations have begun using the snapshot at the end of the course. It was felt that having a shorter assessment could improve learner engagement at this stage.

At the time of the research, some educators saw the end-of-course assessment as mostly a compliance activity. Learners did not see the value of doing another assessment, particularly when it does not contribute to their grades. The use of the assessment data to inform further development of teaching practice varied. Some learners did not receive feedback on their end-of-course assessment.

On the other hand, some organisations were developing resources to better inform learners about the purpose of the Assessment Tool and how they could use the information to improve their skills to achieve their future goals. This was seen as one way of improving learner engagement with the end-of-course assessment process.

1.9 Learner voice

Overall learners displayed mixed feelings towards the Assessment Tool. While some found the items interesting, others commented that they were too long and there were too many of them. Individuals responded to the Assessment Tool in different ways depending on their literacy and numeracy skills, comfort with computers and previous experience with education and assessment.

1.10 Turning it into practice

Organisations involved in this research were working towards a sustainable approach for implementing the Assessment Tool. Most were moving towards a more educator-led approach. A number had taken steps to make educators more familiar with the processes of the Assessment Tool. All had recognised the importance of providing ongoing professional development. Most of the organisations saw the need to do further work to ensure that the results of the assessments were used to inform teaching and learning.

1.11 Implications for data analysis

In analysing data from the Tool, analysts need to take into account the 'real world' circumstances and choices that inform and shape the data.

Although there are funding requirements on organisations to use the Tool with their learners, organisations and educators can still make choices about which assessment strands they use with which courses and which groups of learners. This means that the results of one assessment strand are not necessarily representative of all learners in an organisation or course. For example, numeracy results may only relate to learners in courses with high numeracy demands.

Educators and organisations can also choose which type of assessment (full or snapshot) to use with each group of learners, including different types of assessments at the beginning and end of a course; for example, a full assessment at the start and a snapshot at the end.

Organisations and educators have flexibility in the circumstances and timing of the assessments at the beginning and end of courses. Some courses may have mid-course assessment results.

The degree of engagement of educators and learners with the Assessment Tool has been variable. Low engagement can result in scores that are lower than the full potential of the learner. Objective research has yet to be undertaken on the full extent of ‘engagement effect.’

It is possible that changes in assessment scores between the beginning and end of a programme could reflect a change in learner engagement, rather than an actual change in skill levels. Evidence of learner gain from the assessment scores needs to be considered alongside other information, including the length of participation, course pass rates and changes in learners’ literacy and numeracy practices to get a full picture of learner outcomes.

It should not be assumed that the use of the Assessment Tool in itself is a sufficient indicator of the presence of embedded literacy and numeracy provision. The link between assessment and teaching practice has been quite variable.

2 INTRODUCTION

The Literacy and Numeracy for Adults Assessment Tool (the Assessment Tool) was developed to provide reliable information on the reading, writing, numeracy and vocabulary skills of adults. The Assessment Tool measures skills against the *Learning Progressions for Adult Literacy and Numeracy* (Tertiary Education Commission, 2008a). The primary purpose of the Assessment Tool is to support educators and learners in their teaching and learning (National Centre of Literacy and Numeracy for Adults, 2012a). Information from the Assessment Tool can inform the development of programmes to strengthen the learners' literacy and numeracy skills. The Assessment Tool can be used to track learner progress over time and to report on progress of groups of learners within organisations.

This is the first time that a diagnostic learning assessment tool has been rolled out and mandated across the New Zealand tertiary education system. The Assessment Tool was first available for trial use in February 2010. The first full year of implementation was 2011. The TEC requires the Assessment Tool to be used in all of its funded literacy and numeracy provision, including where literacy and numeracy teaching is embedded within wider programmes.

There is interest in understanding the results coming out from the assessment tool and how this information can be used to monitor literacy and numeracy provision across the tertiary education system. The Ministry of Education is responsible for monitoring and evaluating literacy, language and numeracy provision. The purpose of monitoring and evaluation is to strengthen the evidence on the literacy, language and numeracy skills that learners gain from programmes and interventions, the educational and employment outcomes that they subsequently achieve and the cost effectiveness of different approaches for various groups of learners.

Key to the success of this monitoring and evaluation work programme is understanding how to make best use of the data from the Assessment Tool to provide valid and meaningful information on the skills of learners across the education system. Data from the Assessment Tool can potentially provide core information in broader data sets of learner participation, retention and achievement in a wider range of educational programmes and settings.

2.1 The research

This is a small scale piece of qualitative research, which was undertaken with nine providers delivering programmes to young people. The purpose of the research was to understand the approaches being taken to implementing the Assessment Tool. It addressed two key questions:

1. What has been the experience of organisations and educators in implementing the Assessment Tool and using it to support teaching and learning?

The Assessment Tool on its own will not strengthen literacy and numeracy skills; it relies on educators using the results to inform their teaching practice. This research explored both the practical aspects of using the Assessment Tool and the use of the results to inform teaching and learning.

2. What needs to be taken into account from these experiences in analysing the data resulting from the Assessment Tool?

The data from the Assessment Tool is created within a context of teaching and learning. This research aims to identify “on the ground” factors that need to be taken into account in understanding the Assessment Tool results.

The Youth Guarantee fees-free places were chosen as the sample for this research for several reasons. There is significant government policy interest in these programmes. The government has set a target of increasing the proportion of 18-year-olds who attain the National Certificate in Educational Achievement (NCEA) Level 2 or equivalent as part of its Better Public Services programme (The Ministry of Education, 2012a). The fees-free places play a significant role in supporting 16 and 17 year olds who have left school to reengage in education and work towards achieving NCEA level 2 or equivalent. Addressing their literacy and numeracy needs is a critical step in their learning.

In 2011, around 30 per cent of learners assessed using the Assessment Tool were aged 16 to 19. As a result there was interest in the experiences of using it with young people. Youth Guarantee fees-free places also had more intensive use of the Tool in 2011 than other level 1 to 3 provision. In 2011, 76 per cent of Youth Guarantee learners were assessed compared with only 25 per cent of level 1 to 3 learners in other provision (Lane, 2012).

2.2 Methodology

The interviews for this research, the analysis of the information and the main part of the report writing, were undertaken by Jacqui Haggland. David Earle was responsible for final editing of the report and the commentary on the implications for data analysis.

The first step in the research was an online survey of all 35 providers who offered fees-free Youth Guarantee places in 2011. The survey was sent to the person in each provider who was responsible for undertaking the assessments for their Youth Guarantee programme. In some cases this was an educator, in others a programme administrator. All 35 providers completed and returned the survey.

The results of this survey were used to select nine providers to participate in extended case studies. The organisations were selected to represent a range of organisation size, location and approaches to implementing the Assessment Tool. The case studies involved site visits to each provider and interviews with administrators, team leaders and educators. Learners were interviewed at two providers, as discussed below.

Of the 35 providers that had Youth Guarantee places in 2011, 18 were ITPs, 16 were PTEs and one was a Wānanga. The nine organisations included in the case studies have been categorised into three groups: large ITPs/Wānanga, small ITPs and PTEs. This allows anonymity for the organisations involved while allowing comparison between groups.

From 2012, the Youth Training programme was to be merged with the fees-free Youth Guarantee places. Where possible, providers that have both types of provision were asked to provide information about the similarities and differences in their experiences with the two learner groups. Generally organisations reported little difference between the two learner groups in terms of skills and engagement with education. However, organisations took somewhat different approaches with the two groups to meet the funding requirements.

Each organisation interviewed took a slightly different approach to implementing the Assessment Tool and to Youth Guarantee places. Each approach was affected by organisational needs and policies, the group of learners, the programmes available, and what educators knew about teaching literacy and numeracy. The philosophies and values of the provider organisation also affected the approaches.

2.3 What the learners think

Focus groups were conducted with three groups of learners from two large providers. At one organisation all of the learners were in Youth Guarantee places. At the other they were a mix of Youth Guarantee placements and a few 18 to 20-year-old learners who were enrolled in programmes that included Youth Guarantee learners. The learners were approached by the organisations to be involved in the focus groups and participation was voluntary. A total of 16 learners were involved across the three focus groups.

The focus groups are not large enough to provide any generalisations of what learners think of the Assessment Tool. However, it does provide an insight into learners' reactions to the Assessment Tool and to the approach to embedding (where they were aware of it) taken by their organisation. Their feedback is included throughout the research and highlighted in Section 9, Learner voice.

2.4 Limitations of this research

A limit of this research is that it was undertaken during the early implementation of the Assessment Tool. While most organisations had been using the Tool for at least 12 months, organisations continue to make changes in how they implement it. Due to the timing of the research, it was not possible to look at end-of-programme assessments and what progress learners achieved.

The research would have benefited from observing learners undertaking assessments to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences with the tool. However, this was not appropriate. In part this was because of timing. It was also important that learners did not feel that they were being watched while they completed assessments.

In the large organisations, team leaders who support educators using the Tool were mostly interviewed, rather than the educators themselves. This was mainly because it was difficult to schedule interviews with educators due to their teaching commitments. While this provided an overview of approaches and experiences, it did not allow for a more in-depth understanding of what educators are experiencing.

It would also have been good to re-interview educators after they had completed their end-of-programme assessments to identify what changes had been made and whether these changes helped learners engage with end-of-programme assessments. This was not possible within the time frame of the research.

2.5 Structure of this report

The sections of this report follow a sequence that is most likely to represent that taken by organisations implementing the Assessment Tool. Each section includes key findings for data analysis and teaching and learning, if it is appropriate.

The report begins by describing the Learning Progressions, the Assessment Tool, and the Youth Guarantee programme. From there it looks at how organisations made decisions about using the Assessment Tool, including:

- Choosing assessments
- Undertaking initial assessments
- Using assessments to inform teaching and learning
- Undertaking progress assessments

Feedback from learner focus groups is integrated where relevant throughout the report. The report also includes a section providing an insight into learner experiences of the Assessment Tool. The report then considers how sustainable different approaches are in the long term, something that was recognised by many people interviewed as an issue that needs to be addressed sooner rather than later.

3 LITERACY AND NUMERACY FOR ADULTS

The 2006 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey found that 14 per cent of the population aged 16 to 65 had low literacy. At best, they may be comfortable reading and understanding simple documents. A further 29 per cent had sufficient literacy to cope with everyday basic information, but would have difficulty dealing with new or challenging material. Only just over half of the adult population were assessed as having the level of literacy deemed necessary to “understand and use information contained in the increasingly difficult texts and tasks that characterise the emerging knowledge society and information economy”(Satherley, Lawes, & Sok, 2008; Statistics Canada & Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2005).

In response to these, and similar earlier findings in the 1996 International Adult Literacy Survey, the Government has made literacy, language and numeracy a strategic priority within tertiary education. The 2010-2015 Tertiary Education Strategy includes a priority to “improve literacy, language and numeracy skills outcomes from levels one to three study” The approach taken is to embed literacy, language and numeracy provision within lower-level vocational education, including work-based education, with the view to improving progression to further study and employment outcomes (Office of the Minister for Tertiary Education, 2010).

The Tertiary Education Commission has focussed on developing provider capability to deliver quality literacy and numeracy provision. This has included the development of a professional and qualified teacher workforce, developing the capability of providers to embed literacy and numeracy across existing programmes and implementation of a Literacy and Numeracy for Adults Assessment Tool (Tertiary Education Commission, 2008b, 2010, 2012b).

3.1 The Learning Progressions

The *Learning Progressions for Adult Literacy and Numeracy* (Tertiary Education Commission, 2008a) are teaching resources which describe the main strands of learning that adults require to develop their skills. The progressions cover:

- Listening with understanding
- Speaking to communicate
- Reading with understanding
- Writing to communicate
- Making sense of number to solve problems
- Reasoning statistically
- Measuring and interpreting shape and space.

Each progression describes a set of steps, with each step representing a significant learning development as learners build their expertise. These steps are not evenly spaced. Some shifts require more learning than others. Learners move at different paces through these steps as they practice and consolidate their skills.

Each progression was developed to describe the typical range of learning undertaken by an adult learner in that strand. This means that the relative difficulty levels of the steps are not aligned across the progressions. Also, the progressions start and end at different levels of competency. For example, the reading progression assumes most adults will have basic reading skills, whereas the numeracy progression includes the development of basic number knowledge.

The progressions provide a guide for educators. If an educator knows where a particular learner “fits” on any one progression, they are provided with an indication of what the learner will need

to learn next in order to develop their skills in that area. Similarly, the progressions can be used to identify areas of learning that may have been missed, when a learner is struggling with a particular concept or aspect of learning (Tertiary Education Commission, 2008a, 2008c).

While the Learning Progressions for Adult Literacy describe the steps that most adult New Zealanders take towards competency in literacy, there are some adults who do not have sufficient initial skills and knowledge to begin learning to read and write. Many of these learners have English as an additional language. For these learners, a resource called *Starting Points* was produced. This resource supports educators to work with learners on the basic skills of reading and writing in English (Tertiary Education Commission, 2008d).

3.2 The Literacy and Numeracy for Adults Assessment Tool

The need for an assessment system for adult literacy and numeracy was recognised in the first Adult Literacy Strategy in 2001 (Office of the Minister of Education, 2001). In 2005, the Ministry of Education commissioned the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) to undertake work on the principles of assessing adult literacy and numeracy (New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2006).

In 2006, the TEC started work to develop a tool that could be used across programmes to identify a learner's literacy and numeracy skills in a way designed to inform teaching and learning. After looking at tools available in New Zealand and overseas, the TEC decided to invest in the development of a new assessment tool. The goal was to develop an assessment tool which provided reports mapped to the Learning Progressions.

In 2008, the TEC contracted NZCER to lead a consortium involving NZCER, the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) and Fronde Systems Ltd to develop the tool. During the development a reference group of subject-matter experts provided advice and guidance.

To ensure robustness, each of the 2000 assessment items were trialled with approximately 150 learners. In total, approximately 18,000 learners from a range of level 1 to 3 programmes were involved in the trialling process. The Assessment Tool items were selected from contexts that are meaningful for most adult learners. These included, amongst others, work, home and family, education and training and community. Priority was given to items that had a work context and material that was New Zealand specific. The items were trialled in a range of TEOs to check that learners could engage with them. The learners and educators in the trials were asked specifically to give feedback on the contexts used in the items. Further items were later developed to include more specific Māori and Pasifika contexts (National Centre of Literacy and Numeracy for Adults, 2012b FAQ 5).

The Assessment Tool provides assessments across selected reading, writing and numeracy strands of the Learning Progressions. The results of these assessments are mapped to the steps in the progressions. A vocabulary assessment is also provided to help understand if a lack of vocabulary may be a limiting factor for learners' development. This is not mapped to the Learning Progressions.

Table 1 shows which types of assessments are available in each strand. Adaptive assessments are designed to select the next set of questions presented to the learner based on the answers already given. The Assessment Tool is able to dynamically adjust the questions the learner is given. This usually avoids assessment items that are too difficult or too easy overall for the specific learner. In non-adaptive assessments, all the questions are set at the beginning of the assessment. Non-adaptive assessments can be taken on paper or on a computer.

Table 1

Assessment types available by strand

	Full online adaptive	Snapshot (adaptive)	Non-adaptive	Non-adaptive for printing
Numeracy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Reading	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Writing	No	No	No	Yes
Vocabulary	Yes	No	No	No

Based on Tertiary Education Commission (2011a)

Following feedback from across the sector, snapshot assessments in reading and numeracy were introduced in February 2011. Snapshot is a shorter adaptive assessment aimed at using a minimum number of items to make an estimate of a learner's skill level. Snapshot uses the same assessment items as the adaptive assessments (National Centre of Literacy and Numeracy for Adults, 2012c). At the time of this research, the snapshot assessment was only available as an online adaptive assessment. In October 2012, a print version of the snapshot was released. This is particularly useful for working with learners in locations where they do not have ready access to computers. More detail about the different assessment types is provided in the glossary.

In 2011, TEC introduced the requirement that all funded learners whose courses include literacy and numeracy be assessed using the Assessment Tool or the Starting Points Assessment Guide¹. Providers are expected to use the reports to inform and improve their teaching.

In 2010, the first year the Assessment Tool was available, around 46,000 assessments were undertaken. In 2011, this number increased to over 210,000 assessments involving over 77,000 learners. In 2011, the Tool was used by most tertiary education organisations offering level 1 to 3 provision, as well as a range of community and workplace provision (Lane, 2012).

¹ Adult Community Education programmes are exempt from this requirement.

4 YOUTH GUARANTEE

The Youth Guarantee is a lead policy programme of the Government. It provides new opportunities for 16 and 17 year olds to achieve education success, and to progress into further education, training or employment. The goal of Youth Guarantee is that all young people will achieve NCEA Level 2, which is seen as the minimum qualification for success in today's world (The Ministry of Education, 2012b).

Youth Guarantee provision takes many forms, including Trades Academies, Service Academies, Tertiary High School and in-school programmes. The providers in this research offered fees-free places for 16 and 17 year olds to study in tertiary education programmes.

In 2011, there were 3,500 full-time Youth Guarantee fees-free places at 35 institutes of technology and polytechnics (ITPs), wānanga and private training establishments (PTEs) around New Zealand. These places allowed young people who have left school to study a range of vocational courses. The courses must include embedded literacy and numeracy (The Ministry of Education, 2012c). The funding for these places includes provision for pastoral care services for learners. Pastoral care may include a range of services tailored towards the needs, including cultural needs, of the individual learner (Tertiary Education Commission, 2012b).

Some organisations that received Youth Guarantee funding already included embedded literacy and numeracy in all their level 1 to 3 provision as they had participated in professional development in literacy and numeracy since 2007. Others had only just begun. In 2011, the TEOs were new to both Youth Guarantee and the Assessment Tool, since both were introduced in 2010.

4.1 Learner profile

All learners on the Youth Guarantee fees-free places must be aged 16 or 17. During 2011, around 3,500 learners engaged in the programmes. Fifty-seven per cent of these learners were male, and around half were European, 30% Māori and 16% Pasifika.

Youth Training is a larger programme, which was amalgamated with Youth Guarantee fees-free places in 2012. In 2011, there were around 9,000 learners mostly aged 16 to 17 years in Youth Training, of whom 56% were male. Just over a third were European, nearly half were Māori and 14% were Pasifika.

Both programmes target young people who have not succeeded at school. As a result, the learners on the Youth Guarantee and Youth Training programmes are likely to be assessed with lower literacy and numeracy skills than people of the same age in other level 1 to 3 programmes.

Figure 1 shows that 5% of Youth Guarantee learners and 9% of Youth Training learners² were assessed at Step 1 on the reading progressions in their first assessment. This represents only basic reading skills. About a further two thirds were assessed as having skills at Steps 2 and 3. These figures compare with only 2% of 16 to 19 year olds in other level 1-3 programmes being assessed at Step 1 and around half being assessed at Steps 2 and 3.

² The identification of Youth Training learners was through data from the Single Data Return and excludes provision in some private training establishments.

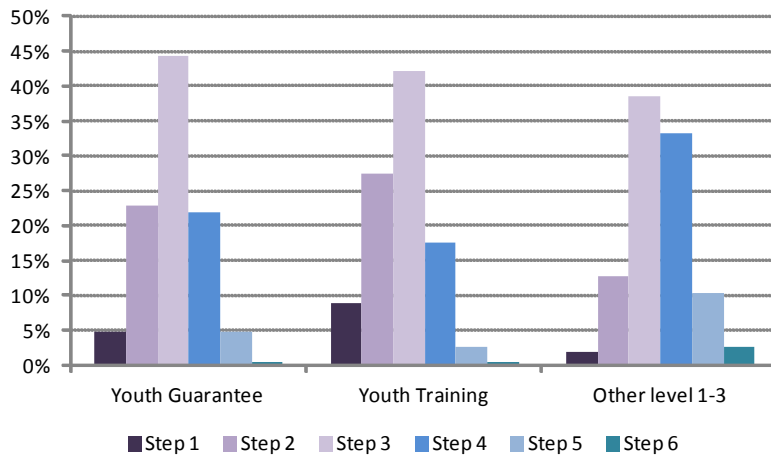


Figure 1
Reading assessment scores of Youth Guarantee, Youth Training and other level 1-3 16-17 year old learners

Figure 2 shows that 11% of Youth Guarantee learners and 17% of Youth Training learners were assessed at Steps 1 and 2 of the numeracy progressions in their first assessment. This represents being able to conduct simple numeric and mathematical tasks. More than half of learners assessed in numeracy across both funding streams were assessed at having skills at Steps 3 and 4. These figures compare with only 7% of 16 and 19 year olds in other level 1 to 3 programmes being assessed at Steps 1 and 2 and just under half being assessed at Steps 3 and 4.

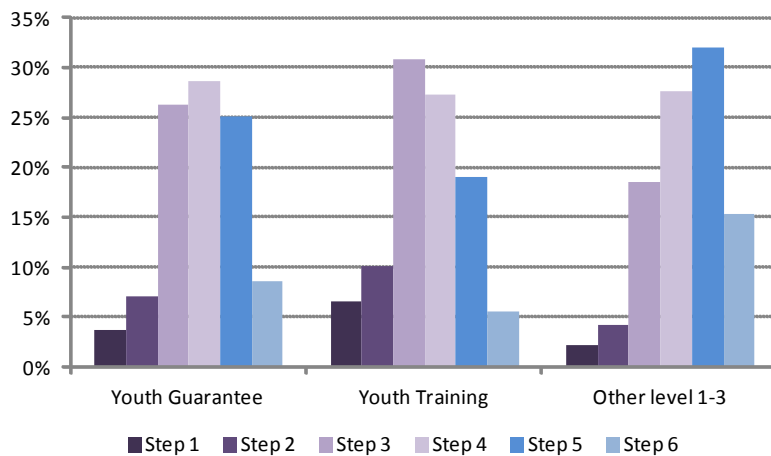


Figure 2
Numeracy assessment scores of Youth Guarantee, Youth Training and other level 1-3 16-17 year old learners

4.2 Approaches

TEOs that are allocated Youth Guarantee places are responsible for determining how they will meet learners' educational and pastoral needs. The TEOs included in this research adopted different approaches, including:

- specific Youth Guarantee programmes
- Youth Guarantee learners spread through other programmes
- Youth Guarantee learners in both specific Youth Guarantee programmes and other programmes.

Each approach has benefits and risks. The individuals interviewed were keen to meet the literacy and numeracy needs of these learners. Mainstream education had not worked for these learners in the past, so new and different approaches were considered to help them to achieve in a tertiary environment and move onto higher-level education, training and/or employment.

Three of the nine TEOs in the case studies allowed Youth Guarantee learners to only enrol in programmes that had been specifically developed for them. Of the other six TEOs, three had developed a programme specifically for Youth Guarantee but gave learners the option whether or not to undertake this programme. Two other TEOs developed a half-year programme for Youth Guarantee learners before stair casing them to other programmes at levels 1 to 3. The other organisation enrolled learners in a broad selection of already-established programmes.

The learner focus groups conducted at two large ITPs/Wānanga included a question regarding why they enrolled in the Youth Guarantee programme at that organisation. All of these learners were in programmes that had been specifically developed for Youth Guarantee. The learners had a range of views as to why they participated as illustrated by the following quotes:

I just didn't know what to do with my life, that's all.

I was too lazy to walk to school.

I had nothing better to do. *(Two learners said this.)*

The tutor came to see me made it sound really cool.

I wasn't really getting anywhere in school so I thought this would be better.

We went to the same school so we both thought we'd come here.

Their answers reflect the focus of one of the organisations on deliberately attracting young people who had disengaged from education. Learners from other organisations may have given other answers.

5 GETTING UNDERWAY: CHOOSING AN ASSESSMENT

KEY FINDINGS

FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

Organisations and educators first need to choose which assessment strands (reading, writing, numeracy and/or vocabulary) to use with which learners. In doing so, they generally considered the learning demands of their courses. In some organisations, educators made the decision; in others, it was organisation-wide.

Most organisations involved in this research assessed both reading and numeracy. The writing and vocabulary assessments were not used as much. Marking the writing assessment is time-consuming. However, the experience of marking can help educators understand more about writing and how this can inform their teaching. The vocabulary assessment is most appropriate for learners with very low reading skills.

There are several types of assessment available – full on-line, the shorter snapshot and non-adaptive for printing. Most organisations used the full adaptive and/or snapshot assessments. The use of the snapshot has increased since its introduction in February 2011. Some organisations have continued to use their own vocationally contextualised assessments alongside the Assessment Tool.

FOR DATA ANALYSIS

The results of the assessments are not necessarily representative of all learners in an organisation, programme or course. This is because organisations and educators can choose which assessment strands to apply to which courses and which groups of learners.

Organisations and educators can also choose which type of assessment to use with each course or group of learners. There are differences in the standard errors and measurement ranges associated with each type. In analysing assessment results across groups, the possible effect of different types of assessment should be considered.

The first step in using the Assessment Tool is to decide which assessments to use. As discussed in section 3.2, the Tool provides assessments in four strands (numeracy, reading, writing and vocabulary) and three different types of assessment (full-adaptive, snapshot and non-adaptive³). This section looks at how educators made these decisions.

5.1 Assessment strands

In 2011, the TEC required TEOs to assess learners on either reading or numeracy at the beginning and end of their programme (Tertiary Education Commission, 2011b). Many organisations completed more than the minimum requirement for a variety of reasons.

Table 2 shows that while the number of assessments completed in reading and numeracy was similar, the numbers were much lower for writing and vocabulary.

³ The non-adaptive assessments can be printed or on-line. Nearly all non-adaptive assessments have been printed.

Table 2

Number of learners assessed by strand at Youth Guarantee and Youth Training providers 2011

	Numeracy	Reading	Writing	Vocabulary
Youth Guarantee	2,280	2,301	558	163
Youth Training	1,277	1,282	533	552
Other level 1–3	5,946	5,778	1,125	454

Some organisations let the educators decide which strands to assess, based on course content. A team leader in a large ITP/Wānanga explained it this way:

Although in all courses there is reading and numeracy so it would be up to the tutor to decide which is more important, so far they've all done both.

In other TEOs, an organisation-wide decision was made as to which strand/s to assess. Another large ITP/Wānanga recognised that ideally both reading and numeracy would be assessed.

We've done the reading [organisation] wide because after our mapping of our programmes we've found that reading is the highest demand ... If you're got time for numeracy that's great, but for 2012 we're looking to roll out numeracy organisation-wide.

Members of the National Centre of Literacy and Numeracy for Adults (the National Centre) team, who are responsible for educator professional development in literacy and numeracy, indicated that they generally recommend that educators assess both reading and numeracy. They felt this allows educators to understand the range of learners' literacy and numeracy skills and in particular whether one is influencing the other.

Writing and vocabulary assessments

One ITP decided not to assess reading in 2011 due to feedback from educators during their pilot in 2010:

... that the reading was far too long. The students turn off and then they randomly choose ... So we felt that the reading was not motivating for our students and the numeracy and writing seemed the obvious ones to do. The writing because they could do it without booking a computer room ...

However, the writing assessment requires more time and effort on the educators' part in marking and entering results into the Assessment Tool. This has caused delays as educators struggle to find the time to do the marking. Educators are not able to use the information to inform their teaching until assessments are marked and entered into the Assessment Tool, which generates the report.

The marking of the writing assessments can be beneficial in and of itself. Some organisations have found the act of marking the writing assessments useful for educators as it can help them understand what makes up good writing. This in turn helps with them develop their programmes and teaching and marking of other written assessments in their courses. The National Centre has developed a module on teaching writing which includes professional development on marking the writing assessments (National Centre of Literacy and Numeracy for Adults, 2012d).

The ITP that did not assess reading has since decided that the introduction of the snapshot assessment addresses their concerns and a change of approach may be required for 2012. As an educator in that organisation explained, "I'm thinking we know how to mark writing now against the categories from the tool thanks to its design. Personally I'm thinking that way, go back to numeracy and reading, with the snapshot for reading."

The vocabulary assessment is most appropriate for learners with very low reading skills, specifically those working at Starting Points or at the lower Steps of the Learning Progressions. It is not being used as much as the other assessments. However, it is being used with Youth Guarantee learners in some organisations where they want to gather as much diagnostic information as possible.

A literacy educator in a PTE talked about using the vocabulary assessment with their ESOL learners.

When we get ESOL students come in I do a vocab assessment on them because they tend to get very low reading results. I need to know whether or not they have a verbal or reading understanding. I also do it with... anyone that is at Step 1. I'm finding it quite useful because it directs me to whether or not they actually don't know what that word means or whether it is a reading [decoding] problem, so it is actually quite a useful assessment.

5.2 Assessment types

Table 3 shows the percentages of each type of assessment that providers used for each funding stream. A higher percentage of Youth Training learners than Youth Guarantee learners completed non-adaptive assessments. This may reflect the facilities available to Youth Training providers. Assessment type across other level 1 to 3 provision was similar to that of Youth Guarantee.

Table 3

Proportion of assessments by strand and type at Youth Guarantee and Youth Training providers

	Adaptive	Snapshot	Non-adaptive (printed and online)
Youth Guarantee			
Reading	83%	14%	3%
Numeracy	83%	15%	2%
Youth Training			
Reading	84%	5%	11%
Numeracy	85%	5%	10%
Other level 1–3 (16 to 18 year olds)			
Reading	76%	19%	5%
Numeracy	76%	20%	4%

While most organisations were using the full adaptive or snapshot assessments for reading and numeracy with their Youth Guarantee learners, some used the non-adaptive for printing assessments when they had difficulties getting learners access to the Internet.

Snapshot or full adaptive

The snapshot assessment was not available at the beginning of 2011; so many organisations have only used the full adaptive assessments. However, some have discussed using the snapshot at the end of the programme for identifying progress. An organisation administrator in a small ITP explains:

We're happy for the shorter one to be used at the [end of the course] but we do like the longer one to be used at the beginning... There is some relief I think when you say there is the snapshot because it takes that much less time.

In some institutions individual faculties have decided to continue to use the full assessment to ensure that educators have as much information about the learners' skills as possible to inform their teaching practice. The organisation administrator in a small ITP explained:

Trades like the full numeracy because it matters to them they need their students to be very numerate, in fact they need their students to be Step 5 or 6. I think they will want to continue with the full numeracy.

Other organisations are considering using the snapshot assessments at the beginning and end of their programmes.

We've done the snapshot and I'm looking at the results and how they compare with the full assessment. At the moment there doesn't seem to be any difference. It looks as though we get a similar spread, so we don't feel that we're doing anyone a disservice by having the shorter assessments.

Educators also like the snapshot assessment because they feel that learners are more likely to engage for the full length of the assessment. As an educator in a large ITP/Wānanga explained, "I like the new snapshot which is cool. When it first came out there was 30 questions and that was a big drag for the students, but the snapshot is awesome."

Non-adaptive for printing assessments

The non-adaptive for printing assessment have generally been used when there is no Internet access for learners to complete assessments online. In some cases, they are used where the educator thinks the learners may not have sufficient computer skills. Very few organisations used non-adaptive or non-adaptive for printing assessments with their Youth Guarantee learners. However, they have been used with other learner groups.

5.3 Vocationally contextualised assessments

A number of organisations had developed their own vocationally contextualised assessments. These often pre-dated the introduction of the Assessment Tool. At the time of the research there was considerable debate about the relative merits of a generic tool such as the Assessment Tool versus assessments tailored to specific vocational contexts.

Many educators raised the issue of the context of, or perceived lack of context for, the items within the Assessment Tool. They asked how it could be considered 'contextualised' when the questions do not directly relate to the content of the vocational courses they teach. In 2010, Gill Thomas and Sue Douglas presented a webinar on this issue (Douglas & Thomas, 2010). It explained:

Specialised assessments are contextualised assessments that are specific to a particular course and would be developed and used in the context of the qualification that the learners are completing. The contexts used in the Assessment Tool are more generic, but are still intended to be meaningful to an adult (National Centre of Literacy and Numeracy for Adults, 2012e FAQ 6).

One organisation continued to use their own contextualised assessments alongside the Assessment Tool to identify whether they were measuring the same thing. A senior manager explained the reasons behind this research and their initial findings.

We used vocationally contextualised assessments so we could make a comparison between the Assessment Tool and a more discipline-based approach...by simply changing the content of the reading to reflect the discipline we weren't getting much

difference in results. We realised that we had to change the construct of the questions as well. This has some quite big implications.

This analysis was part of a wider project looking at assessment of literacy and numeracy in level 1 to 3 provision. Their research is ongoing.

One educator explained why they felt the Assessment Tool reports would be more useful if the items were more explicitly contextualised to the individual vocational areas.

We wish the Assessment Tool was more contextualised because the strength of those contextualised diagnostics is that we could continue with similar texts for teaching in the first few weeks of the course. Similar text genres, types and use it as more of a teaching tool in that way because it's so clearly linked to the discipline, the terminology.

In that particular organisation the vocationally contextualised assessments are now being used prior to enrolment. "The students come for interviews to be selected onto their programmes; we still used the contextualised literacy diagnostic as a screening or placement tool."

One educator in an ITP explained that they are using their own vocationally contextualised assessments as "stepping stones so they realise they're picking up new words and we managed to access some word bank resources, and they're listing down new words in their books."

5.4 Implications for data analysis

The results of the assessments are not necessarily representative of all learners in an organisation, programme or course. This is because organisations and educators can choose which assessment strands to use with which courses and which groups of learners. For example, the numeracy results may only relate to learners engaged in programmes that require specific numeracy skills. These learners could have different numeracy skills to learners in other courses. Similarly the writing assessment may only be used with learners who are thought to have particular needs in this area. Again, their skills may be different from other learners. This means that caution needs to be taken in generalising the results of each strand to the wider programme or organisation, particularly when only a small proportion of learners have been assessed.

Organisations and educators can also choose which type of assessment to use with each course or group of learners. Each assessment type uses the same items and has been tested for consistency and validity. However, there are differences in the standard errors and measurement ranges associated with each type. The full adaptive assessment measures across the full range of the progressions and potentially has the smallest standard errors. The snapshot can either measure across the full range or be set to determine if a learner is above or below a pre-set threshold. It potentially has a larger standard error than the full adaptive. The non-adaptive for print tests are produced for predetermined difficulty ranges. Where learners fall outside of these ranges, the standard errors can be large.

It is valid to compare and summarise results of learners who were assessed using different types of assessment. However, caution should be exercised to check for any effects that the different types of assessments might have on the results. For instance, in comparing differences between groups, it would be wise to check if there were significant differences in the types of assessment used for each group. And if so, it would be worth checking the extent to which this could provide an alternative explanation of the differences in results.

6 GETTING UNDERWAY: MAKING IT HAPPEN

KEY FINDINGS

FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

In most organisations, both organisation administrators and educators administered the Assessment Tool. The most common place for holding assessments was a computer lab. Most organisations supervised learners while they were assessed. Organisations often had problems with Internet access offsite or at remote campuses. Not all learners were comfortable using an online tool; however, this was less of an issue with younger learners.

Most organisations gave the initial assessment three to four weeks after the beginning of the course. Organisations wanted educators to have information about their learners' skills early in the course. They also wanted to ensure that learners were fully enrolled and establish a relationship with their educator before doing the assessments.

Educators needed support in the initial stage of using the Tool. Educators usually responded well when they had seen the reports generated by the Assessment Tool, and linked them to what they knew about teaching literacy and numeracy.

There was great variation both between and within organisations in what information was given to learners about the assessment before they took it. Most of the information dealt with how educators would use the assessment results to improve their teaching. Little of it focussed on what learners might get from the assessment for themselves. Some organisations had developed guidelines and other resources to support their educators in informing learners.

A number of learners had had negative experiences with education and/or assessment. Younger learners found the questions did not always relate to their life experience. Educators needed to help them to feel comfortable with the assessment process. Having the educator stay in the room during the assessment process was important to setting the learners at ease.

FOR DATA ANALYSIS

Organisations and educators have flexibility in the circumstances and timing of the assessments. This needs to be taken into account in interpreting results. In particular, the amount of time elapsed since the start of the course should be considered in comparing skills of learners.

The degree of engagement of educators and learners with the Assessment Tool has been variable. Low engagement can result in scores that are lower than the full potential of the learner. Objective research has yet to be undertaken on the 'engagement effect' with the Tool.

As well as deciding which assessment to use, there are a number of other things that need to be addressed to get assessments under way. This chapter looks at the logistics of using the online tool, the timing of the first assessment and engaging educators and learners in the process.

6.1 Logistics of using an online tool

The logistics of setting up assessments is important. It can affect when learners complete assessments and in turn, when educators can use results to inform their teaching practice. Using

an online assessment tool was a major change of approach for many organisations and educators.

Though educators reported that the tool was generally easy to use, it was not uncommon for them to see their first use of the Assessment Tool as a compliance exercise. It was often taken over by logistical issues like uploading learner details, learners accessing the Internet and educators gaining Education Sector Authentication and Authorisation (ESAA) logins.

Who administers assessments for Youth Guarantee learners?

In the initial survey, organisations were asked whether assessments were administered by organisational administrators, educators or a mixture of both. Fifty-nine per cent of organisations responded with a mixture of both, 21% with only educators and 21% with only organisational administrators.

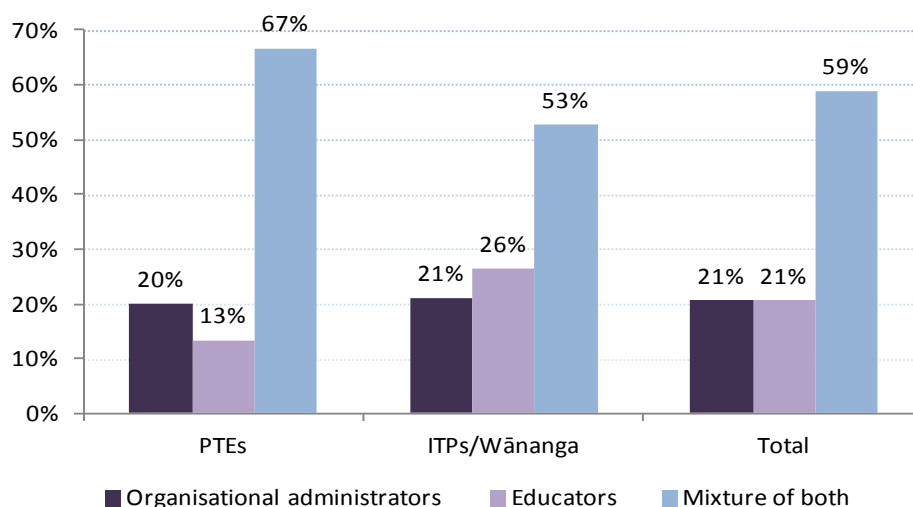


Figure 3
Who administers assessments?

In some cases, organisation administrators were responsible for one aspect of administering the Assessment Tool, such as setting up the assessments within the Tool, and educators were responsible for another aspect, such as supervising learners taking the assessment or talking with the learner about their report. In other cases, different approaches were used at different campuses and/or by different departments.

ESAA access for educators

ESAA, an identity and access management system developed by the Ministry of Education, allows organisation administrators and educators to access the Assessment Tool. Any educator or administrator who works with the Assessment Tool must have an ESAA login.

Some organisations reported that completing the ESAA process could take some time at the beginning of the year. An organisation administrator in a large ITP/Wānanga said, “Then it was about 3 weeks at the beginning of the year before they would get their login back.” It was generally expected that 2012 should be easier as fewer educators in each organisation require new ESAA logins.

While the reports generated by the Assessment Tool can be printed and therefore accessed offline, it was generally felt that ESAA access to the Assessment Tool was a worthwhile process. As an organisation administrator in a large ITP/Wānanga explained, “we think that’s

easier for people...as not every teacher needs to assess but they do need to have access to the data.”

However, in many organisations not all educators have ESAA access to the Assessment Tool. Sometimes this is purely logistical: “we’ve still got some staff that I think have put it in the too hard basket to get their login organised.” In other organisations this was an active decision – for instance, in some cases only full-time educators have ESAA access: “we know we’re not going to capture every part-time lecturer....But our full-time staff, or even anyone over 0.5, I think we’re tracking pretty well”.

Linking to student management systems

To use the Assessment Tool, organisations must input educator and learner details. All the organisations interviewed for this research held this data within their Student Management System (SMS). Reports from organisation administrators indicate that some SMSs appeared to work better with the Assessment Tool than others⁴.

Organisation administrators said it was important to develop good relationships with the TEO enrolments people if they did not have someone with access to the SMS within their team.

Where have learners completed assessments?

In the initial survey, organisations were asked whether learners completed assessments in computer laboratories, regular classrooms or other locations. The most common venue for assessments at all organisations was computer labs (see Figure 4); however, this was heavily dominated by the ITPs and Wānanga. The totals add to more than 100% as organisations were able to select more than one response.

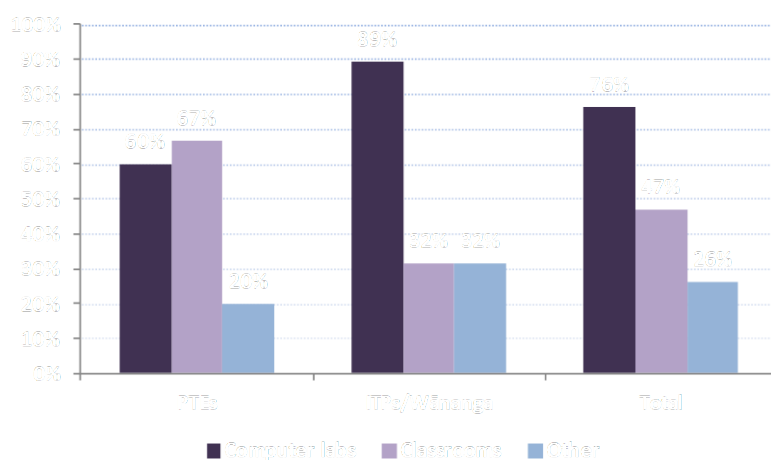


Figure 4
Where learners completed assessments

The PTE sector was more likely to use regular classrooms for assessments. This may reflect the facilities that they have available. For the PTE sector, ‘other’ venues for assessment included:

- public library
- literacy centre
- separate classrooms.

⁴ Since late 2011, SMS vendors have developed modules to assist with administration and assessment data. These include features to support bulk upload and importing learner gain reports back into the SMS for further analysis and tracking.

For the ITP and Wānanga sectors, 'other' venues included:

- Marae
- workshops
- dedicated laptops
- office space for catch-up assessments
- Student Hub
- Learning Commons computers.

Organisations were also asked if learners were supervised while taking assessments. Nearly all organisations (91%) said they were. PTEs were more likely to let some learners complete assessments unsupervised, 13% as opposed to 5% for ITPs and Wānanga.

Learner access to the Internet

This can be a real issue for learners who are offsite or on remote campuses with limited access to the Internet. Speed of Internet at certain times of the day can also slow the assessment process. A large ITP/Wānanga organisation discovered:

The really interesting one, and we need to put this into some sort of policy, don't test between 11.30am and 1.30pm. Because there is a computer lab down there with 100 computers and as soon as lunchtime hits everyone is downloading YouTube videos and the bandwidth goes to custard. One of those things that you never think of but can have such a major impact.

Many organisations reported that learners would spend time looking at other websites while they were supposed to be completing assessments. Some organisations felt that it was an issue that needed to be addressed, whereas others felt it was a reflection of youth culture. An organisation administrator in a large ITP/Wānanga was not overly concerned about the distraction.

The only thing we know is that they're really good at the doing the Assessment Tool with three screens open at the same time on YouTube and Facebook, checking their emails. They coped really well with doing all of that at the same time; it just takes them slightly longer.

By contrast a small ITP had taken steps to stop this behaviour.

However, I noticed that the learners had tabs open to Facebook and other things so trying to keep them focused on the Assessment Tool, even though we were walking around supervising them. That's where the idea came that if we were going offsite and taking our own laptops what would we do, so I got them locked down so the only site that will open on them is the Assessment Tool.

Learner comfort with computers

Another issue was that some learners are not comfortable using computers; however, this was less of an issue with younger learners, who have grown up with computers at school, if not at home. The learners who were interviewed from a large ITP/Wānanga demonstrated a broad variety of experience in computer use and comfort.

Computers are not really my type of thing.

Nah, I can't be bothered typing I don't like typing ah, it's hard as.

I like computers I'm a good touch typer.

I don't mind using computers.

I'm on them every day.

This understanding is supported by findings from the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills (ALL) survey: 16–19 year olds are more likely to regularly use a computer at home. However, nearly 30% of this group uses computers at home for less than five hours per month, so not all young people are familiar with computers (Lane, 2011).

6.2 Timing of assessments

Organisations saw the timing of initial assessments as critical. Educators needed to have the assessment information as early as possible so it could be used to inform and shape their teaching. However, they needed to wait until learners were fully enrolled. Many organisations wanted to ensure that learners were comfortable with the learning environment and had developed a relationship with educators so that they felt at ease with the assessment process.⁵

The initial survey asked how soon after the beginning of the course or the programme the organisation began assessing learners. For most organisations it was within 3 to 4 weeks of courses beginning.

Comments provided by respondents showed that deciding factors in the timing of initial assessments included course length (the shorter the course, the sooner the assessment) and educator discretion. The timing of assessments was similar across the three provider types (Figure 5).

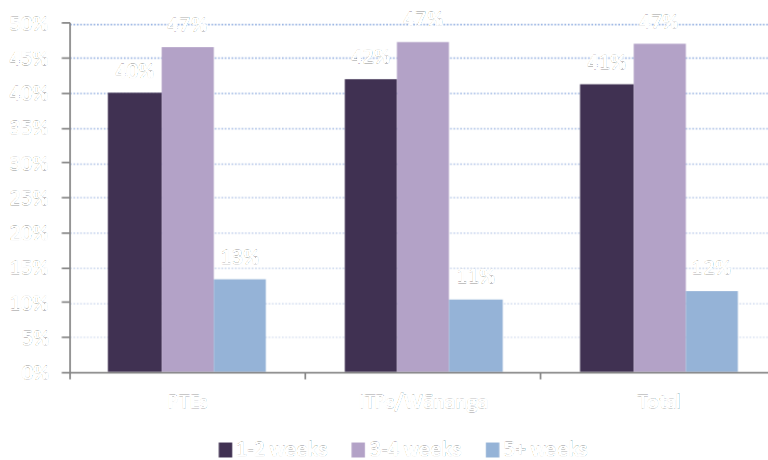


Figure 5
Timing of initial assessments

One of the key purposes of initial assessment is to allow educators to “use information from assessment to make decisions about next steps for learning” (Tertiary Education Commission, 2012b). To support learners in the literacy and numeracy aspects embedded in their vocational education and training, educators must be able to access this information as early as possible. As the organisation administrator in a PTE explained, “we made a decision that they needed to be assessed fairly quickly so the tutor was aware of where they are at, and if there are any big needs.”

⁵ Other research on the Youth Guarantee initiative indicated that a good relationship occurred when educators were “approachable, encouraging, friendly, available and supportive” (Unitec Institute of Technology, 2011, p. 13).

Learners' details, including their NSN, are entered into the Assessment Tool *before* they can complete assessments online. In large organisations, the best approach to entering learner details into the Assessment Tool is through a bulk upload from their SMS. This can lead to delays because organisations wait for most of their learners to be fully enrolled before beginning the upload process.

One large ITP/Wānanga made the active decision to wait until the early withdrawal period was over before assessing learners. As the organisation administrator explained, they “wanted to make sure it...didn't look like we were prejudicing anybody, so the assessed learners are actually our core students”.

Similarly, in a small ITP the organisation administrator explained:

We try to do it in the first three weeks of when the course started. Our Youth Guarantee is a mission to get them all done. They start then they stop they haven't got all their details for enrolment so we've had rolling intakes and it has been a mission to try and do that.

Different approaches have been used to allow learners to be included in the initial assessment process. A team leader in a large ITP/Wānanga explained her solution.

When I go to administer them I take a writing one with me, because there will always be students in the room that can't log on because they haven't paid their fees or whatever so they get to do the writing one. Then once they're loaded onto the tool I can add them to it. So that's been very useful. It's interesting because when everyone else is online doing the Assessment Tool and this poor kid is doing the writing they go 'but I want to do that!'⁶

In most organisations learners are assessed in both reading and numeracy, so in this situation those assessments will still have to be completed at a later date.

Many organisations were concerned about learner test anxiety, particularly for the Youth Guarantee learners. Educators were aware that many had negative experiences with mainstream education and assessment processes. They felt that a key way of addressing this concern was through building strong relationships between the educators and the learners that were based on trust and respect. As one organisation administrator in a PTE explained, “I would never expect a programme to run the assessment within the first week. Possibly not the first two weeks; bonding period as a group and that's what I'd hope they'd use that time for.” This issue is discussed further in Section 6.5, Learner engagement.

6.3 Educator engagement

The introduction of an online Assessment Tool was a major change of approach for many organisations and educators. Educator engagement with the Assessment Tool was widely seen as something that could have a major impact on learner engagement with the assessment process. Where learners had built a relationship with their educator and their educator communicated the value of the Assessment Tool, this could improve their engagement.

Organisations involved in this research agreed that it was important to support educators in the initial stages of implementation. Organisation administrators and literacy and numeracy specialists wanted to help their educators to move beyond the logistics of implementing the Assessment Tool to seeing the educational benefits of the information it provides. As one administrator explained:

⁶ As long as the student details are uploaded into the Assessment Tool and connected with the non-adaptive assessment within eight weeks from its creation, a report can be generated.

Once everyone has got the functional side then we need to get to the educational side, because otherwise people will see it simply as a compliance tool rather than an educational tool. Until we can prove to our teachers and learners that this is giving relevant information that we can act on, that is the only real buy-in we'll get.

At another organisation a literacy team leader reported that educators are engaging with the Assessment Tool when they see beyond the things they have to do to use it to the educational information it provides. "The tool has been a big machine; it's been a big job and not without its frustrations but the spin-off for me is that it's started teams of staff talking about their teaching practice." A faculty team leader in the same organisation emphasised the importance of helping educators to understand that the Assessment Tool would provide information that would help the teaching and learning process.

Where educators have seen the reports generated by the Assessment Tool and linked them to what they know about literacy and numeracy and the Learning Progressions framework, they have generally responded well and are now more enthusiastic about using the tool. Organisations have taken many steps to help educators engage with the Assessment Tool and move beyond viewing it as a compliance process to viewing it as an educational tool.

When we got the reports back for reading and talked about where the learners needed help, a lot of the tutors knew what to do and had good teaching practice around reading, so they didn't need any more specialised PD in that, but the numeracy was particular for their course and what resources were available and how they could make that work for them.

Organisation administrators said that if an educator is in the room when learners are completing assessments, they engage more with the Assessment Tool. One case makes this very clear.

You've got your variety of tutors and variety of students and you've got some areas where tutors sit down and they discuss with the students what's happening and this is really important. And you've got others who have left the tool and that will be the babysitter and they don't stay thinking "I can go away and do my planning while they're doing the assessment" and very quickly I realised that this is just a no-no and we must stop them doing this... as a tutor observing their behaviours while they're sitting an assessment is so important because you've got students who actually do get stressed with it and you've got students who get bored quickly, can't concentrate.

A faculty team leader in a large ITP/Wānanga talked about the differences in engagement between the educators who have bought into literacy and numeracy and those who haven't.

I think the ones that buy into it are really using it and know that they can access results and use it to support their teaching. The problem is with the ones that don't buy into it and that's not a problem with the tool, that's a problem with them.

6.4 Information given to learners before the assessment

There was variation in approaches used to explain the assessments to learners between and within organisations, and this area was under continual development. Some educators took the time to explain the purpose of the assessment, while others rushed and provided little information or encouragement to learners. As an organisation administrator in a PTE explained:

How can we ensure we use a more consistent approach? So that every student is hearing the same thing and that they've got as much opportunity to ask questions before they sit the assessment so that they fully understand why they're doing it.

Most information given to learners promoted the use of the Assessment Tool to inform and develop teaching and learning programmes. An educator in a small ITP outlined what they tell their learners: “It’s important for us as a educator that we understand the student. I emphasise that if you can do the assessment then it gives us a basic indication if you do need any help or assistance we can offer it.” While this approach is appropriate before the initial assessment, many educators recognised that it does not provide enough of a lead-in for end-of-programme assessments. Options for addressing this concern are included in Section 8, progress assessments.

The learner focus groups were asked what they were told about the Assessment Tool. While some learners said they couldn’t remember, those that did recall gave similar messages.

We didn’t get told what they’d be used for. We just got told that they’d be confidential.

We just got told it was a guide to see if teachers needed to change their ways to compensate for certain people.

We got told that it was to see what level we were on with our numeracy and literacy and what we needed to be improved on.

They gave no reason; they said it wasn’t going to be anything important.

We were asking what the test was for. They just keep saying that some teachers want to know if you’re good at literacy for the future.

Just that we had to do a literacy and numeracy test. We have to do it, that’s all.

6.5 Learner engagement

Every educator and manager who was interviewed for the research emphasised the importance of getting learners to engage with the assessment process. There are a variety of factors already discussed that can affect learner engagement:

- the timing of the assessment alongside other beginning-of-programme requirements
- the logistics of using an online tool
- the information they receive about the purpose and use of the Assessment Tool information.

However, even if all of these factors are adequately addressed some learners may not engage with the assessment process. This section looks at additional factors that may influence their engagement.

Some learners come to tertiary education with negative experiences of school and this is usually coupled with feelings of failure in assessment, which can lead to test anxiety. An educator in a PTE commented on the impact of learners’ prior education experiences on their attitude to tertiary education, “A lot of them come in very, not dismayed but quite a negative attitude towards learning probably because of their experiences at school.” This can affect their engagement with the Assessment Tool.

This can be a particular issue when numeracy is introduced. Some educators reported that learners had additional anxiety around the numeracy assessment, “I don’t like maths” or “do I have to do the maths”.

Learners in the Youth Guarantee age group often felt the assessment questions do not relate to them, that they are more suitable for older learners with more life experience. For some learners this, coupled with what they saw as large amounts of text in the reading assessments, put them off engaging with the assessment questions. As an organisation administrator in a large ITP/Wānanga explained:

I think sometimes they see this huge amount of text, the majority of which is totally irrelevant to what they're doing and that puts them off, changes their attitude which can then affect their willingness to participate in the tool and therefore their result in the tool.

A couple of organisations reported that learners can feel uncomfortable when someone else comes in to administer the assessment. In these situations they are more likely to feel like they're being 'tested'. This can place undue stress on the learners or make them less likely to actively engage with the assessment process.

A Youth Guarantee coordinator in a small ITP explained their reaction.

Youth Guarantee students have to learn to build trust with someone before they're forthcoming. They might have started to do that with their tutors but then someone comes in and tries to interact and get them to do something and they might not make an effort or bother to listen or get involved or they'll just shortcut the whole process by just clicking enter the whole way through.

An organisation administrator in a large ITP/Wānanga reported the impact of having the educators in the room.

It helps them relax when their kaiako [tutor] is in the room. They know them, as opposed to anyone just coming in. If I was to come in without them, it would look and feel like a test, but with the kaiako there and they know them individually.

While learners reported not being able to remember much about their initial assessment, they did recall if someone other than their educator took them through the assessment. The tone of their comments demonstrated that they felt a little uncomfortable being taken through the assessment by someone other than their educator.

They didn't do it with us this other lady did.

They just had to stand outside.

6.6 Implications for data analysis

The interviews show that engagement with the Assessment Tool has varied across educators and learners. Some educators have viewed it as a compliance requirement rather than an opportunity to inform their teaching. Some learners have had poor experiences of education and found the assessment process daunting. The evidence from the interviews suggests that educator and learner engagement with the Assessment Tool can have an effect on the results.

If learners are not engaged or do not understand the purpose of the assessment, they can put less effort into it and can get a score that is below their full potential. Differences in motivation need to be considered as one of the possible explanations for differences in results. Objective research has yet to be undertaken on the extent of the 'engagement effect' on results. It may be possible to pick up some indicators of low engagement from assessment timing data and standard errors – for example, learners who complete unusually quickly with a high standard error.

The Assessment Tool is used in ‘real world’ situations, and unlike research surveys, is not administered under consistent and controlled conditions. Organisations and educators have considerable choice around the location and timing of assessments, as well as how assessments are supervised. This may have some effects on the results.

For example, it would be reasonable to expect that the results of assessments undertaken in the first week of a programme to be lower on average than assessments undertaken 4 weeks after the programme had started. Learners assessed at the latter date would, on average, have better engagement with both the Tool and the learning environment. They may also have started to redevelop some of their ‘rusty’ skills.

At this stage, the extent of these timing and administrative effects is unknown. Further research is needed to quantify the extent to which they make a difference. Meanwhile, these differences should be taken into account in comparing results where possible.

For learners with lower levels of engagement, whether they undertake a computer-adaptive or a printed assessment may make some difference to their results. The computer-adaptive approach is designed to ensure that learners are directed to items that they are able to answer correctly and then gradually increases the difficulty. This may increase motivation for some learners. On the other hand, some educators report learners being put off by having to read large amounts of material on screen and just clicking through the questions. Further research is needed to understand whether learners are engaged or disengaged by the different types of assessments.

7 INFORMING LEARNING AND TEACHING

KEY FINDINGS

FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

Many of the educators and organisation administrators interviewed in this research understood the benefits of the Assessment Tool for identifying learners' literacy and numeracy skills. They also recognised there was room for improvement in the way they were using information to develop their teaching practice.

Some educators referred learners with low results to learning support specialists. Others made use of *Pathways Awarua*, an online learning tool. Some used knowledge of learners' skill levels to group them together for activities.

Educators understood it was important to provide learners with feedback on their results. Practices for doing this varied. Most learners in Youth Guarantee seem to have very little idea about the learning progression steps and what they mean. There is also confusion between the steps and the NZQF levels. This can make it difficult to present the results in a way that is meaningful and engaging to learners.

The Learning Progression Step Profiles were proving a useful tool for structuring feedback to learners and explaining what the steps mean, and what is required to get to the next step. Some organisations were using results to inform individual learning plans, particularly those with specific Youth Guarantee programmes.

FOR DATA ANALYSIS

It should not be assumed that the use of the Assessment Tool in itself is a sufficient indicator of the presence of embedded literacy and numeracy provision. The link between assessment and teaching practice is still quite variable.

Data analysts should be aware of the potential for there to be results from mid-course assessments, and consider what importance to attach to these.

The Assessment Tool is to provide information to support teaching and learning. This section addresses ways educators used the Assessment Tool results to inform their teaching.

7.1 Educator engagement with the reports

The Assessment Tool has provided opportunities for educators to talk more openly with learners about literacy and numeracy. An organisation administrator in a PTE commented, “we need to talk to the students much more openly and be much more frank than maybe we had been in the past”.

Many organisation administrators recognised that the use of Assessment Tool reports to inform teaching and learning was an area that needed further work. As a team leader in a large ITP/Wānanga said, now that educators are “becoming more independent with accessing the information, the step now is using that information, but that’s a professional development thing that we’re working on.”

Where educators have not participated in professional development on using the Learning Progressions or how to interpret the Assessment Tool results, they needed to be supported by

other educators with this expertise to get the best use out of the Assessment Tool results. A literacy educator in a large ITP/Wānanga explained how she did this: “I’d go around with the lecturer and explain the student’s results to them as they finish. They get the report but they don’t know what it means.” Some organisations were looking at how they could implement further professional development in literacy and numeracy for their educators.

Other TEOs reported that some educators had engaged with the Assessment Tool reports and that this could be seen as a positive step. A senior manager in a large ITP/Wānanga commented that “it creates the conversations around the learning and teaching that we want to create with our staff.” A literacy specialist in the same organisation went on to say, “...we can start using it to discuss teaching and learning and what staff will do once they’ve seen the results and how that can impact on their teaching. Looking at strategies.”

7.2 How educators use individual and group reports

Many educators who were interviewed were beginning to consider how they would use the information the Assessment Tool provides to inform their teaching practice. Educators were asked how they had used the Assessment Tool results to inform their teaching. While many recognised that they were at the beginning of actively using the Assessment Tool results, they had begun to consider how they could best meet their learners’ needs.

One of the outcomes of implementing the Assessment Tool was that educators are now more aware of the learners that enter their programmes with good literacy and numeracy skills as well as those that need support in this area. Reports of educators looking at ways to extend more capable learners were common – and well-received, as sometimes learner disengagement in the classroom could be due to not feeling challenged.

A couple of educators talked explicitly about referring learners who achieved low results on the Assessment Tool to their organisation’s Learning Support unit as the main approach to improving their literacy and/or numeracy skills. However, not all learners visited the Learning Support service and this might be attributed to stigma regarding needing additional support.

We have put people through to Learning Support but that comes down to people’s attitudes too...We’ve got the [Assessment Tool] results which confirm that they are having a bit of trouble with their learning. We can send them to Learning Support but sometimes they just won’t go.

Some organisations have already begun to use Pathways Awarua, an online learning system in reading and numeracy that has been developed to strengthen the literacy and numeracy skills of adults engaged in tertiary education (Tertiary Education Commission, 2012a). One team leader in a large ITP/Wānanga explained how they have integrated Pathways Awarua into their embedded provision.

When the learner knows what Step they’re at in the Assessment Tool they can go into Pathways Awarua at that Step and it makes it more individualised and targeted for them. They can do the modules that relate to their needs, we can use Pathways Awarua in the classroom, i.e. we’re doing fractions this week so everyone go to this unit in Pathways on fractions. So it can be used as a whole class tool and then learners can go to their Step for more targeted practice.

A faculty leader in a small ITP talked about the different ways of using Assessment Tool results. What the classroom educator needs is different from what is needed for faculty-level decisions.

It will be helpful for [the faculty] to have a profile of our students. But it is much more important for me at the moment for my tutors to know their students and work to that.

While recognising that the high-level profiling data that the Assessment Tool generates will be useful in the future to inform decision making, they accept it is probably too early to be making strategic decisions based on the data gained in the first full year of implementation.

A number of educators referred to using group work with learners of different or similar skill levels to support each other. An educator in a small ITP told me how he had changed the seating plan “pairing people up with other groups. It’s quite surprising how they tend to pull the struggling ones up.” One educator in a PTE had adopted a different approach to try and encourage learners to develop stronger communication skills.

...better to put all the quiet ones together because then someone has to step up and it’s not always the one who is the most vocal and confident stepping up because you’ve got a group where they’re all quiet so it’s given them those skills because then they think “oh, I can do this”. It doesn’t single anyone out; I think quite often working in groups is more beneficial to them.

7.3 Feedback to students

As stated in section 6.5, all educators who were interviewed understood the importance of getting learners to engage with the assessment process. This carried through to the way in which feedback was provided following the assessment.

The Assessment Tool reports show which Step the learner was at on the Learning Progressions and how they did on each question in the assessment, and give some information about the questions (National Centre of Literacy and Numeracy for Adults, 2012f). Few learners were familiar with the Learning Progressions framework. Therefore they often needed to have the reports explained to them. Some learners got confused by the Learning Progressions Steps and the NZQF level of their qualification. It is important for learners to understand the criteria they are assessed against (see e.g. Price, Carroll, O’Donovan, & Rust, 2011). A number of organisations had some concern about the type of feedback being provided to learners following their assessments. For learners to engage with the Assessment Tool, they must be given appropriate information before they begin the assessment, then given feedback on what their results mean for them. There were also reports of learners responding well to positive feedback about their results. This may be the first time they have been encouraged in this way.

One educator in a small ITP reported a change in learner attitude after getting positive feedback on their Assessment Tool result.

One guy scored Step 4 and he finished reasonably quickly, but a few others had gone before him so I knew that in this class that was quite good. So I talked with him about it, “I’m really going to extend you because you’re very capable.” I think it was the first time ever anyone has ever told him that he was intelligent and capable and he’s been amazing. He’d been in quite a lot of trouble with police and kicked out of school and all this stuff. But he’s one of my best students. I think he’s got the right attitude. I think it was being told “you’re intelligent and I’m going to extend you”.

An organisation administrator in a large ITP/Wānanga said that it is difficult to provide feedback to individual learners when assessments are being completed as a part of a large group.

There are so few of us, and so many learners we can’t be there all the time. That’s a real concern for us about that next step. In the beginning we would be in the classroom we

would be giving feedback directly to students asking if they wanted us to print it out and explain what it meant to them. But if you've got 90 students sitting it all at once and there is 1 or 2 of you.

An educator in a PTE explained how they have provided feedback to learners in their Youth Guarantee programme by focusing on the learners' strengths.

I'll say "this may be an area that you and I can work on together" it's not bad. I try to get away from the good/bad thing. Your strengths are here and we can strengthen your skills in this area by doing this with you. It enables them to know, I think they need to know, it helps them with their learning if they know what it is that they need help with.

In some organisations the literacy and numeracy specialists modelled giving feedback to the vocational educators so they could see and hear first-hand the messages that were given and the questions that learners asked. As one organisation administrator explained:

Last semester I went around and spoke to the learners individually with the tutor present to model what we could do and how it would work. I've given them suggestions with what they can do with the reading and asking the students if they want the reports, some are really keen, some just aren't interested. Often the Youth Guarantee aren't really interested, it's usually the older students that are interested.

An educator in a large ITP/Wānanga described the learner response to the Assessment Tool reports.

I explained that there are six levels [sic] and some of them were pretty impatient...once they'd figured out what level they were at some of them were asking what it meant to be at level 2, and...would explain to them on the board...Even though they didn't really know what level 2 or 3 meant, they were encouraging and congratulating each other on their results.

In an effort to understand learner awareness of embedded literacy and numeracy, the learner focus groups were asked whether they were told that there would be things in the course to help them improve reading and writing and maths. Learners were interviewed near the end of their programme, approximately ten months after they originally enrolled.

Yeah, when they came they said that we would achieve basic reading and mathematics skills because most of us don't know the easy steps.

I think we were told, we were told that there would be a few assessments on it and we were told that you learn, well that we would need to know all the plant names and stuff so we needed to learn a whole dictionary of new words basically. So we were told that, we got the course outline which involves calculations as well.

They said that we would improve in our communication, and just be more confident, more confident in ourselves, yeah, that's all I can remember eh?

Resources used to provide feedback

Some organisations reported difficulties in providing feedback immediately following completion of the assessment. These tended to be:

- larger organisations
- organisations that enrolled Youth Guarantee learners across the organisation
- organisations where learners completed assessments in large computer labs.

Some educators are starting to use the Learning Progression Step Profiles developed by the National Centre to explain the progression steps to learners and engage them in the assessment process more deeply (National Centre of Literacy and Numeracy for Adults, 2012g).

An organisation administrator in a small ITP explained the thinking they have gone through to improve learner engagement and how they now use the learner and capability profiles.

... we had a meeting where we came up with an idea of using the student and capability profiles to get the students thinking about what Step they think they're at or if they've already done the assessment making sure they know what Step they were at in the first assessment. Making sure the students have bought into it, and challenge them to think about what they think they have achieved during this course, let's see if you are now at Step 4. Look at the profile, do you think you match that? Trying to create an environment where they understand the results of the tool. So where the student understands where they were at and what they've achieved in the year and encouraging them to put their all in.

An organisation administrator at a small ITP was "waiting for these things [learner and capability profiles] to come out so that educators could give better feedback." One ITP developed an information sheet for their educators about how to use the Step Profiles during initial and progress assessments and how they can inform the feedback learners are given following their assessments.

Use the Learner Profiles and get the students to think about what Step they are currently on before they sit the assessment, so they can compare their results to the original assessment. Repeat this about three-quarters of the way through the programme, ask them where they think they have moved to and get them to resit the assessment then.

Educators generally agreed that learners needed to feel the assessment was something that would help their learning, both now and in the future. Unfortunately some educators felt learners generally did the initial assessment because they were new to the programme and did as they were expected to do. By the time the end-of-programme assessment came along students felt that it was unimportant because it didn't go towards their marks. This is discussed further in Section 8, progress assessments.

7.4 Individual learning plans

The extent to which organisations were using Assessment Tool results to create individual learning plans for their Youth Guarantee learners varied greatly between organisations. Individual learning plans were more commonly used for learners within specific Youth Guarantee programmes or those identified by the Assessment Tool as having high needs.

One large ITP/Wānanga that had not developed individual learning plans for each learner had encouraged educators to have three to five focus learners and "look closely at their results and then try some stuff out, using the Learning Progressions or any other strategies that you have, and use those three focus students as a gauge for how it is going". They felt that this was more manageable for educators than developing individual learning plans for all learners.

Another large ITP/Wānanga that had developed a specific Youth Guarantee programme was actively using the Assessment Tool to generate individual learning plans.

We will take the scores and place them into a tracker for our students; it goes across the progressions but will also look at the individual's social competencies. We're working on that and with alternative education and Youth Guarantee what can inform each

programme, and be able to tailor if there is individual support a learner may need. The ILPs give the [tutors] something to look at and think about what might work with them...it can equip a [tutor] and [learning support] working with that student with some ideas about what might work.

A number of organisations recognise that using the Assessment Tool reports to develop Individual Learning Plans may help educators see the Assessment Tool as an educational resource, rather than a compliance tool. Some educators and organisations see individual learning plans as the ideal. Each organisation needs to consider how they can implement these within their organisational structures and support educators to make the best use of the time they have available.

7.5 Additional assessments

As Youth Guarantee requires learners to study full-time for a full year, some learners have completed three or more assessments in a single strand in a 12-month period. In other programmes of shorter time frames additional assessment is less common.

In the initial survey, organisations were asked if they used the Assessment Tool for additional assessments during the course or programme. The responses to this question were evenly spread when looked at across all organisations, with a third of respondents selecting each option. However, when providers were broken down into PTE and ITP/Wānanga the results were markedly different: the great majority of PTEs said yes, with only a small number saying no; the majority of ITPs/Wānanga said no, with the rest saying 'sometimes' and none saying 'yes' (Figure 6).

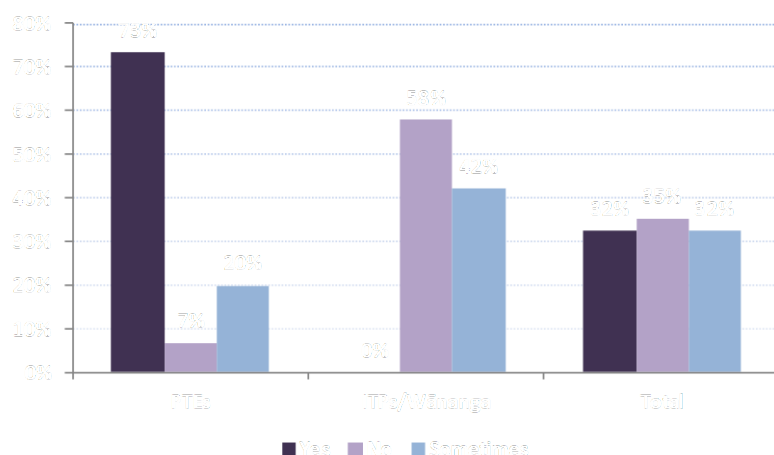


Figure 6
Additional assessments

Most of the nine TEOs included in this research assessed learners using the Assessment Tool at the beginning and end of their programmes. However, a few organisations were using the Assessment Tool, or their own assessments, to identify progress mid-course. One PTE recognised that in piloting the Assessment Tool in 2010 they assessed learners too frequently and this had a negative impact on their engagement with the tool.

Last year...we assessed the people that were there three times, at the beginning then after 10 weeks and again after 20 weeks. They got sick of it. We were over-assessing them, that was too much especially as we were using the full assessment.

In 2011 that organisation reduced the number of assessments for the twenty-week programme to an initial assessment in week three and a progress assessment in week 18. This change was well-received by both educators and learners.

7.6 Implications for data analysis

The link between administering the Assessment Tool and using the results to inform teaching and learning varies across providers, programmes and courses. This is particularly variable at the early stages of adoption of the Tool. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that just because assessments have been undertaken that appropriate teaching and support has necessarily been provided to address learner needs in all cases. In other words, the use of the Assessment Tool in itself is not a sufficient indicator of the presence of embedded literacy and numeracy provision.

Educators can use the Assessment Tool any number of times during a course. The most common practice is to use it just at the start and end. Data analysts should be aware of the potential for there to be more than two assessments per learner per course and consider what importance to attach to the mid-course results.

8 GETTING UNDERWAY (AGAIN): PROGRESS ASSESSMENTS

KEY FINDINGS

FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

Concerns about lack of learner engagement in the end-of-course assessments have led to widespread rethinking of the process. Many organisations have changed the timing to ensure the assessment is completed before learners begin their formal course assessments. End-of-course assessments were usually held three to four weeks before the end of the course. Some organisations have begun using the snapshot at the end of the course. It was felt that having a shorter assessment could improve learner engagement at this stage.

At the time of the research, some educators saw the end-of-course assessment as mostly a compliance activity. Learners did not see the value of doing another assessment, particularly when it does not contribute to their grades. The use of the assessment data to inform further development of teaching practice varied. Some learners did not receive feedback on their end-of-course assessment.

On the other hand, some organisations were developing resources to better inform learners about the purpose of the Assessment Tool and how they could use the information to improve their skills to achieve their future goals. This was seen as one way of improving learner engagement with the end-of-course assessment process.

FOR DATA ANALYSIS

The timing of end-of-course assessments can vary. This needs to be considered as part of data analysis.

Educators can use different types of assessments at the beginning and end of a course, for example, a full assessment at the start and a snapshot at the end. This can have implications for the standard errors and measurement range that need to be taken into account in calculating learner gain.

It is possible that changes in assessment scores between the beginning and end of a course could reflect a change in learner engagement, as well as the actual change in skill levels. Evidence of learner gain from the assessment scores needs to be considered alongside other information such as length of participation and course pass rates to get a full picture of learner outcomes.

Few organisations undertook end-of-course assessment of literacy and numeracy before the introduction of the Assessment Tool. Earlier research into assessment of adults in foundation learning and/or literacy and numeracy programmes showed widespread use of initial/diagnostic assessment. However, assessment of literacy and numeracy skills at the end of the course or programme to demonstrate learning gain was less common (Benseman & Sutton, 2007; New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2006).

8.1 Timing of assessments

In the same way that organisations grappled with issues concerning the timing of initial assessments, the timing of end-of-programme assessments required serious consideration and

planning for organisations. Organisation administrators and educators had to balance giving learners as much opportunity as possible to strengthen their literacy and numeracy with ensuring the assessments did not clash with the formal assessment for their qualifications. Generally programmes that only included Youth Guarantee learners had more flexibility around the timing of end-of-programme assessments.

In the initial survey, organisations were asked at what stage they began their end-of-programme assessment. The most common timing was 3 to 4 weeks before the end of semester. There were obvious differences in approach taken by PTEs and ITPs/Wānanga. PTEs were more likely to assess learners in the last two weeks of the course or programme. (Figure 7).

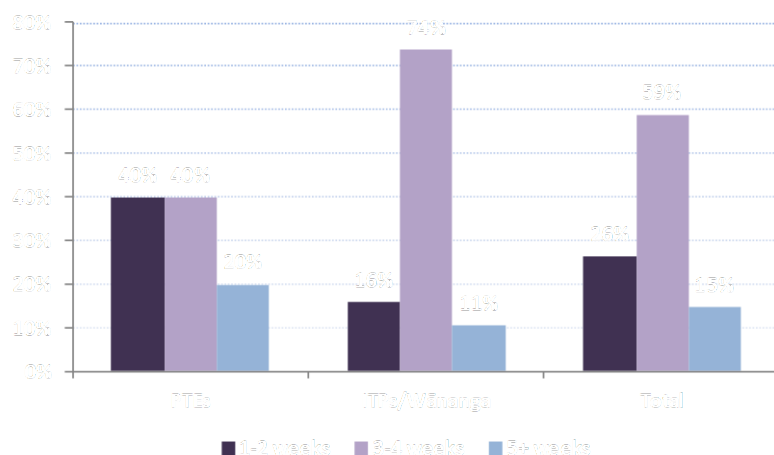


Figure 7
End-of-course assessment timing

Some organisations felt that they had left it too late in the previous year: learners had either already left or were more focused on other assessments. They decided to bring the end-of-programme assessment process forward for 2011 so it would be completed before formal assessments began. An educator in a large ITP/Wānanga told me:

at the end of the course we realised timing of the assessments was really important because the Assessment Tool, plus their summative assessments and assignments due...So we're shifting our assessments earlier before the exams and study all hit and they get tired.

Some of the educators who were interviewed were convinced that the clash of assessments had a negative impact on learners' results in the end-of-programme assessments. This was in part due to a lack of motivation for completing assessments that do not count towards their course. An organisation administrator at a large ITP/Wānanga summed up their concerns and the approach they had decided to take in 2011.

Then we've chosen the post-assessment timeframe so there is enough time to do the analysis and the paperwork that goes with it...The course might not finish until the 16th of December but we want to assess them at the beginning of November to make sure they're still engaged.

8.2 Use of the snapshot assessment

Analysis of 2011 Assessment Tool data has shown that use of the snapshot assessments became more prevalent throughout the year (Lane, 2012). Many organisations had already begun their initial assessment process when the snapshot assessment was released on 7 February 2011.

However, they were more comfortable with this new capability by the time of the interviews for this research in August/September, and most had used it with some groups of learners.

The organisations involved in this research talked about planning to adopt a variety of approaches in 2012, including using snapshot for both initial and end-of-programme assessment for some programmes and retaining the full adaptive for the initial assessment and using snapshot at the end for others.

Educators and learners alike were grateful for snapshot for end-of-programme assessments as it takes less time and learners are more likely to be engaged for the full assessment. An educator in a large ITP/Wānanga commented that some learners were:

...reluctant to do the post-assessment at the end of their six months. However, the new snapshot was much quicker and you could see that the students weren't losing interest as quickly. It'll be interesting for me to see the difference between the results from the original adaptive and the snapshot. I'm looking forward to that but won't see that until the end of the year.

8.3 Educator engagement and feedback to learners

Some organisations saw end-of-programme assessments as a compliance activity rather than using them to deepen understanding of teaching and learning, or to help a learner with their future learning. One large ITP/Wānanga felt that end-of-programme assessments were not required to inform teaching and learning and therefore the detail provided by the adaptive assessments was not necessary. As the literacy and numeracy team leader explained:

The post one is almost a curiosity assessment. The students want to know if they've improved, the teachers might want to know, the TEC certainly want to see it done but it doesn't necessarily inform anything so we're happy for the shorter one to be used then.

Educators themselves didn't always see it as important and felt that it was an exercise of compliance. Few saw its value for educators as something that could be used to make decisions about future course design and delivery. As one organisation administrator in a large ITP/Wānanga explained, "my personal perspective is that post-assessment does feel like a compliance thing. It's hard to see how it aids any teaching and learning..." This attitude helps explain why some learners reported getting little feedback from their educators on their second assessment results. Educators who see it as a compliance task may struggle to engage learners and help them to understand why it is important for them to give the second assessment their full concentration. Educators may see how the information provided by the Assessment Tool reports is useful to inform teaching; however, there appeared to be little understanding of how the learners themselves could use this information.

8.4 Explaining to learners why end-of-programme assessments are important

According to educators, the messages given to learners before they begin the assessment can influence their engagement with the assessment process and therefore their results. Many organisations found it difficult to decide how to 'sell' the end-of-programme assessment to learners. Learners find it more difficult to engage with this assessment as they have little internal motivation, particularly for an assessment that doesn't go towards their qualification. Educators reported that learners could understand how an initial assessment could be used to inform the teaching and learning and therefore could help their learning experience. Educators

felt that the idea that the end-of-programme assessment would benefit the learner was harder to sell.

An educator commented that learners didn't understand the purpose of the second assessment. "Why would this matter to me? There is anecdotal evidence and a lot of teacher concern about that, that students don't take it seriously." A literacy specialist recognised that more effort was needed to encourage learners to try their best when completing the second assessment.

The end result we do tell them it's important, but I don't think we emphasise how important it is. To them we've done the first assessment, we've assessed them, they've got through the course so to them they can't see the relevance of it, it's just an extra.

A number of educators commented that learners want to know if it goes towards their grades. One educator talked about the change in learner attitude when they realised the assessment did not go towards their grades. "Someone will mention 'does this go towards our grades'. There is no point lying to them so we say 'no'. The next question is 'then why are we doing it'?" That educator recognised that they probably weren't adequately prepared to address this question at the time and was keen to develop a set of responses so they would be better prepared in the future.

In another organisation educators have introduced the tool to learners as a gauge of where they are going in the future. An educator in a small ITP had begun planning the messages they would give to learners before they did their end-of-programme assessment.

I was thinking of talking about why we did it in the beginning, what we've learnt throughout the year. What we've been working on in relation to their goals to where they want to be. This is another gauge to see where they're at going into next year.

8.5 Learner engagement

Some learners had lower results on their end-of-programme assessment than their first assessment. This is very unlikely to reflect a loss of skills or knowledge. It can be due to lower engagement with the second assessment. It may also be that both assessments are within the same broad margin of error. Reports of learners not taking the assessment seriously and just clicking anything to get it done quickly were more prevalent for end-of-programme assessments. However, one educator said that the learners she spoke with were disappointed with the end result if it didn't show progress, even when they hadn't really tried. An educator in a large ITP/Wānanga talked about the impact that low engagement can have on the results: "their results were lower than at the beginning and it was a lot to do with affective factors. Lower motivation, tiredness, stress, cognitive overload and that was really noticeable." Educators also need to be able to explain to learners that if their beginning and end results are within the margin of error that this just means they are at the same broad level of ability. In this situation the learner may well be improving within that range and it is just not showing in the way it is measured on the Tool.

There were also a couple of reports of learners refusing to do the second assessment. An educator in a small ITP explains.

The attitude to that second assessment was poor and there were one or two students, including a mature student who refused to. She felt that she didn't need to...So there was not much we could do about that. Other students dipped, to be fair most were in their margin of error but one or two actually did dip. It is attitude we feel.

While some organisations are looking at how they can improve this by changing the timing of the assessments, what the learner is told about reasons for taking the assessment can also affect learner engagement with the assessment process.

Resources used to support end-of-programme assessment

A literacy educator in a PTE had developed certificates for learners whose results in the tool improve by a Step.

If they have improved a Step on the Assessment Tool in their week 18 assessment, I issue a Certificate of Achievement. I designed the certificate; and about 5 out of 20 students would get these certificates. They know that these tests are important and help when they go to the next class.

However, learners could be making more progress within a step than when they move from one step to another. The current approach in professional development is to look at the result as a score with an error range and make comparisons about how much the score and range has shifted over time. The steps are then a helpful way of interpreting what the scores and ranges mean in terms of what learners may or may not be able to do well.

Other organisations have developed resources to support their educators in explaining the purpose of the assessment to learners. An organisation administrator in a small ITP talked about how administrators have responded to feedback from educators.

This other issue came up about students being unmotivated to resit so then we had a meeting with people from trades and services and learning skills area. That was when we came up with this document called “how to sell the tool”.

In this document, the organisation recognised that the best way to engage learners in the end-of-programme assessment is to ensure they get appropriate information about the purpose of the assessments before they complete their initial assessment as this sets them up for the year. The three key messages from this document are:

- be explicit about the literacy and numeracy skills that students need for the course or programme
- pitch the tool to the learners so they get what it does
- explain the Steps on the literacy and numeracy profiles and set them goals for personal improvement.

This is one example of how organisations have begun to look at how they can use the Learning Progression Step profiles to further engage learners in the assessment process by encouraging them to think about their literacy and/or numeracy skills before they complete their assessment.

Since the interviews for this research were conducted, the TEC has developed four videos that promote good practice in talking with learners about the Assessment Tool, including one that is specifically focused on using the Learning Progression Step profiles. When they set goals for personal improvement following the first assessment, the educator and learner can revisit these before the end-of-programme assessment. This can provide motivation for the learner to engage in the assessment process.

8.6 Implications for data analysis

As with the initial assessments, the timing of the end-of-programme assessments can also vary between programmes and courses. There are no set guidelines as to when the assessments need to take place. This is left to the judgement of the educators. Variations in the timing of the

assessments could have an impact on the interpretation of results. So this needs to be examined as part of the data analysis.

Educators can use different types of assessment at the beginning and end of the course. For example, the full adaptive assessment may be used at the start and a snapshot assessment at the end. As discussed in section 5.4, different assessment types have different ranges and standard errors. These issues need to be taken into account when comparing assessments to establish learner gain.

Learner engagement in the second assessment was a significant issue in 2011. If learners are not engaged in the assessment process, this can affect their scores. As stated in section 6.6, the extent of the 'engagement effect' is unknown at present. However, it is likely to be a real effect. Therefore, it is possible that changes in assessment scores between beginning and the end of a programme could reflect changes in learner engagement, as well as actual changes in skill levels.

In looking at learner skill gain over time, other evidence should be considered alongside the assessment scores. This could include information such as the length of participation and course pass rates. This provides a fuller picture of learner outcomes and helps moderate effects that may be due to changes in learner engagement.

9 LEARNER VOICE

Overall learners displayed mixed feelings towards the Assessment Tool. While some found the items interesting, others commented that they were too long and there were too many of them. Individuals responded to the Assessment Tool in different ways depending on their literacy and numeracy skills, comfort with computers and previous experience with education and assessment.

Learner focus groups were conducted at two large ITP/Wānanga near the end of the academic year, including 16 learners in all. While this is not enough to make generalisations, it does provide a useful insight into learners' understanding of the tool, its purpose and how educators will use the results.

A number of educators had indicated that learners found the assessment items difficult to engage with. Therefore the focus groups were asked for their overall thoughts of the Assessment Tool and whether they found the assessment items interesting.

I don't know, I really enjoyed it. I thought it was a good little assessment to show what I'm good at.

Yeah from the start it goes harder and harder.

Some of them were hard, cause I hate reading.

Some of the literature was quite interesting, some of the passages I actually learnt something from while answering the questions, even though I probably got it wrong.

There are a lot of mixed questions in the assessment.

It wasn't interesting at all because it was like paragraphs and paragraphs and that's just not fun.

An effort to gain a deeper understanding of the learners' impressions of the tool led to asking them what they would change about the Assessment Tool to make it more interesting.

Make it like simple ah, like simple questions or something like that. I don't know.

Make it easier to read. Shorter texts.

I think nothing needs to be changed; it's pretty much basic instructions to follow. It's good.

I think it was too many I was getting a bit bored.

Moving animations.

PowerPoints.

Comic and cartoons kind of thing all saying stuff.

As demonstrated by these quotes, most of the feedback related to the number, length and complexity of the texts used in the reading assessments. Little explicit feedback was given about the numeracy assessments. Learners were not asked if they had completed the adaptive or snapshot assessment.

Finally, the learners were asked about the end-of-programme assessments. At one of the organisations the learners had completed their end-of-programme assessment the week before the focus group session.

[Interviewer] Why did they want you to do the second assessment?

It was a post test for the first one.

To see if we'd improved from the first time.

[Interviewer] What did you think of it? Were you quite happy to do the assessment or were you more wondering why are we doing the assessment?

It was easier to understand than the first time. 'Cause the first time we done it was about topics we didn't even want to know about. So we didn't understand it.

It was hard to read it all.

Some of it we could read but I couldn't understand it.

Too much writing, some of them you couldn't understand.

They were way too long. I'd read like quarter of it then I'd read the question then I'd forget what I'd just read.

I just clicked any of them.

[Interviewer] Just clicked any of them?

Yeah

Nah, I could understand some but just some of them were too long eh and they were just yeah. Yeah I just gave it my best, gave it a shot, that's all.

[Interviewer] Do you think that you did better the second time?

I reckon I done better eh. I reckon I done better from the last time. But I don't know.

Two groups of learners had not yet completed their end-of-programme assessments, so the question was whether they were aware they were required to do one and what it was for.

[Interviewer] So the assessment that you've got coming up, what have you been told about why you're doing it?

It's the post-assessment.

See if we've gained skills.

I think we've been told that we're going to have a post-assessment but we haven't heard anything about it and they'll probably spring it upon us. We'll be doing it sometime; we got told there'd be another one at the start.

[Interviewer] How do you feel about the fact that you're going to be doing a second assessment?

Something I'm looking forward to, to show improve from the last assessment, ah.

[Interviewer] Is anyone feeling nervous about it?

Nah, no [a number of learners said this]

The learner responses demonstrate that learners were not fearful of the assessments; however, this could be seen to reflect a lack of engagement with the assessment process.

10 TURNING IT INTO PRACTICE

Organisations are working towards a sustainable approach for implementing the Assessment Tool. Most are looking to move towards a more educator-led approach in future. A number have taken steps to make educators more familiar with the processes of the Assessment Tool. All have recognised the importance of providing ongoing professional development. The general aim across TEOs for 2012 is for the Tool to have greater use by vocational educators with less need for intensive support from organisational administrators and/or literacy and numeracy specialists.

Most organisations see the need to do further work to ensure that the results of the assessments are used to inform teaching and learning. Once educators are comfortable with administering the Tool and understand the information it provides, they need to be supported further on how to use it to improve their teaching practices.

Organisations are working to ensure that the long-term approach to implementing the Assessment Tool is sustainable. Some organisations initially took a centralised approach, with one person or a dedicated group of people administering the Assessment Tool to learners. Some wanted to ensure a consistent approach; in some cases there was limited learner and educator access to computers or Internet. Most organisations were looking to move to an educator-led approach in the future, to address sustainability concerns.

One of the key difficulties identified in the initial assessment process was the uploading of learner details to the Assessment Tool. This process has been most successful where the different teams across the institution have worked together during planning to ensure a clear understanding of each team's availability at different times of the year.

A number of organisations have taken steps to make educators familiar with the Assessment Tool so they can create assessments, allocate assessment codes to the learners and provide a suitable introduction to the purpose and use of the assessment information. Organisation administrators recognised that while this was the most sustainable approach it wasn't without risks.

A risk in terms of the tool itself in giving the educators access has been the naming conventions. Making sure that they've ticked the right assessment type, and following up with them when they've made mistakes. We've empowered them to be able to do it, it just needs to be checked and reinforced.

Large organisations can end up with hundreds of assessments, and agreed naming conventions are an integral part of using the Assessment Tool sustainably.

All organisations involved in this research recognised that it is important to provide educators with ongoing professional development in the use of the Assessment Tool. A number of organisations have established internal professional development to support educators and share resources and information. Some organisations have developed resources for educators to help them introduce the Assessment Tool, including learner information sheets or scripts of what educators should say. As one organisation administrator in a large ITP/Wānanga explained, they "set up a Moodle⁷ so that less of that basic information has to be repeated, they can go onto

⁷ Moodle is an open source Internet-based system for delivering e-Learning programmes for educational and training organisations. For more information see <http://www.moodle.org.nz/>.

Moodle and see how to create an assessment, and a group and they can learn how to give feedback.”

One of the smaller organisations had taken a centralised approach in 2010 and 2011 to ensure consistency in information and approach for all learners across the organisation. At the time of this research, in August 2011, they were working to prepare educators working with key learner groups at levels 1 to 3 to manage the assessment process in 2012.

Some of the tutors have now been trained how to administer the assessment, how to supervise the learners, how to give the feedback and how to save it to the student’s own log-in. We’re going to have more training on that. We’re still debating the next step.

While the organisation administrator and senior management were keen to see educators take responsibility for creating and running assessments, they still wanted to ensure that someone had overall responsibility for the Assessment Tool in each faculty. This is similar to the approach adopted by two of the large ITP/Wānanga, where each faculty had a team leader who:

- supported the individual educators in creating and administering assessments
- modelled providing feedback
- provided support in analysing reports.

It was expected that over time their role would become less intensive as educators became more familiar with the Assessment Tool and the reports that it generates.

Most organisations felt that they were probably not using the Assessment Tool reports to their full extent and that many educators would benefit from further professional development on using the reports to inform their teaching and learning. One of the reasons educators were not using the reports to their full extent was available time. This was particularly evident when the issue at hand was providing feedback to individual learners about their results. In some organisations the reports have been used to develop individual learning plans, but for many organisations this level of individual support was just not possible.

Many people who were interviewed for the research recognised that implementing the Assessment Tool was an iterative process and that they had learnt much during the 2010 and 2011 implementation which would inform their work in 2012 and beyond. Many organisation administrators and literacy and numeracy specialists expected that as the logistical implementation of the Assessment Tool becomes more familiar to educators they will be able to put more focus on using the educational information that it provides to inform their teaching.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The following glossary includes Assessment Tool terms used throughout this report. The full glossary was developed by NZCER and is available from the National Centre website (National Centre of Literacy and Numeracy for Adults, 2012h).

Adaptive assessments (also called Computer Adaptive Tests, or CAT Assessments) adapt to the learner's ability while they are sitting the assessment. This means that questions are selected based on the learner's actual performance at the time the assessment is taken, rather than from a preselected list.

Assessment strand is a description of the assessment's area of coverage in terms of its relationship with the Learning Progressions.

The **Read with Understanding** assessment strand includes items from the following progressions:

- vocabulary
- language and text features
- comprehension
- reading critically.

The **Write to Communicate** assessment strand includes items from the following progressions:

- purpose and audience
- spelling
- vocabulary
- language and text features
- planning and composing.

The **General Numeracy** assessment strand includes both number knowledge and number strategies and measurement.

The **Number Knowledge** assessment strand includes items from the following progressions:

- number sequence
- place value
- number facts.

The **Number Strategies and Measurement** assessment strand includes items from the following progressions:

- additive strategies
- multiplicative strategies
- proportional reasoning strategies.

Assessment type both reading and numeracy assessments can be created as *adaptive*, *non-adaptive*, *non-adaptive for printing*, or *snapshot*. Vocabulary assessments may only be set as *adaptive* by default, and writing assessments can only be printed out and performed as written

offline assessments that are then marked and entered into the Assessment Tool to be automatically assigned a Scale Score.

Educator is the generic term used to describe the people who use the assessment reports to inform the intervention provided to their learners. This could include educators in a classroom environment and resource writers, training advisors and on-job trainers in an industry training/workplace environment.

Learner is the generic term for the individual who completes the assessment on the Assessment Tool. However, individual organisations used other terms, e.g. student or taura, to refer to their learners. Quotes included from organisations use the original term used.

Non-adaptive assessments are performed on the computer, but use an algorithm to determine a likely spread of questions based on a starting point that is chosen when creating the assessment. Non-adaptive assessments have the advantage that everyone is answering the same set of questions, but run the risk of the assessment being too easy or too hard for some learners.

Non-adaptive for printing assessments are non-adaptive assessments that are specifically created to be printed and handed out to the learners for completion – for example, when an online assessment cannot be performed. The answers for these types of assessments are automatically compiled in a Marking Guide, which is downloaded and used to mark the assessment, after which the marks are entered into the Assessment Tool by the educator or organisation administrator.

Organisation administrator is the person (or people) with an organisation who handles Assessment Tool matters. They have special privileges within the Assessment Tool. They are responsible for creating organisational groups and assigning educators and learners to these as appropriate. They have access to all assessment data held within an organisation.

Snapshot assessments (available only for reading or numeracy) are shorter adaptive assessments aimed at using a minimum number of items to make a broad estimate of a learner's achievement level. They use the same assessment items as the adaptive assessments.



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga