Perceptions, needs and issues
A DISCUSSION PAPER

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Massey University
Perceptions, Needs and Issues

A Discussion Paper
Executive summary

This discussion paper explores the perceptions and literacy needs of a wide range of community members, stakeholders, and agencies in the Wanganui and Districts region. The study comprises one element within a major, longitudinal research programme exploring issues around adult literacy and employment.

First, an overview of the project is provided to contextualise the literacy and employment programme, including the aim, objectives and methodologies used. The New Zealand adult literacy environment, based on the 1996 International Adult Literacy Survey, is then discussed. An overview is also provided of the Wanganui and Districts environment, where this project is located.

Broad public commitment and understanding is vital to the success of national and community initiatives to increase levels of literacies and, in view of the objectives of the research to understand the needs related to adult literacy and employment, it was imperative to investigate what community members perceive to be key issues in literacy and employment. Thus, this report discusses the findings from research undertaken over a period of eighteen months, which includes a community survey of general community members; various focus groups of large employers and small employers; in-depth interviews with large, medium, and small-business employers; a survey of the adult literacy providers in the area; and in-depth one-to-one interviews with non-participants and participants in adult literacy programmes.
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Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to the NZ Foundation for Research, Science and Technology for its support of this research under grant MAUX0308 Literacy and Employment.

This research programme could not have proceeded without the fullest possible involvement of the Wanganui community. In particular, the success of the research is due to the foresight of the Wanganui District Library, later joined by the Whanganui Community Foundation, Literacy Aotearoa (Wanganui) and Te Puna Mātauranga o Whanganui. Under the Library’s leadership, this research programme has benefited enormously from the support of many other local and national organisations, including Wanganui District Council, Enterprise Wanganui, WINZ, the Corrections Dept, Police, TEC, Ministry of Education, and GoodHealth Wanganui.

Many Massey colleagues offered invaluable support, Allyson Caseley, Lance Gray, Sharon Benson, Christine Morrison, Nicky McInnes, Nigel Lowe and David Wallace.

We are also indebted to many other friends and colleagues not named here for their insights and support to date in this research. Comments on pre-publication drafts of this paper from Bob Dempsey and Deborah Neilson were especially welcome. However, all remaining errors and omissions in this discussion paper are of course the responsibility of the authors alone.
Overview of Project

Early in 2004 the NZ Foundation for Research, Science and Technology (FRST) awarded funding to Massey University’s Department of Communication and Journalism for a three-and-a-half-year longitudinal study of adult literacy and employment in Wanganui and Districts. A key research partner for Massey University in planning and implementing the research was the Wanganui District Library (WDL). For a number of years, Library management has had an ongoing interest in low adult literacy and its local concomitants, specifically its correlations with low library use, low income, poor health, low civic participation, and a higher propensity to be convicted of crime. The Library’s relationship with the University has stemmed from personal friendships.

Before being awarded funding, discussions of the planned research were had with several interested local stakeholders via meetings organised by the Wanganui District Library, including the Wanganui District Council, the NZ Police, Work and Income (Wanganui), Enterprise Wanganui (a local business council), the Ministry of Justice and the Department of Corrections. Strong support for the proposed research had been received from meetings of these stakeholders chaired successively by the CEO of the District Council and the Mayor. However, the most important continuing means of integrating all stages of the research effectively into the community was by involving key Wanganui bodies such as Literacy Aotearoa (Wanganui), the Whanganui Community Foundation (a major funder of civic projects which has invested significant energies into developing civil society and civic participation locally), and Te Puna Mātauranga o Whanganui, an iwi education authority that represents Whanganui River Iwi.

Overall Aim

The overall aim behind the adult literacy and employment project is to develop a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding adult literacy and employment in New Zealand. The basis for research in this area arose from the 1996 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), which posited five levels of literacy measured in three categories: prose, document, and quantitative skills. Within these five levels of achievement, level three or above constituted ‘functional literacy’ or “the literacy skills necessary to function adequately within today’s economic market” (OECD, 2000, cited in Culligan, Arnold, Noble, & Sligo, 2004, p. 1). According to the IALS findings “about 45% of New Zealanders aged 16 to 65 were estimated to be in either level 1 or 2” with “1 in 5 with level one literacy skills” (Johnston, 2004, p. 5). These findings gave impetus to the development of the New Zealand Government’s Adult Literacy Strategy, which specifically links literacy with employment: “Low levels of literacy in New Zealand are a serious impediment to the development of a skilled workforce” (Ministry of Education, 2001, p. 3). Central to the government’s strategy is the call for “research and evaluation of best practice” (Ministry of Education, 2001, p. 12).

Objectives

There are four FRST objectives with regard to this research:
1. To establish adult literacy needs of both employed and unemployed in the Wanganui and Districts region.
2. To identify the social, attitudinal, and economic barriers to adult literacy learning of both employed and unemployed in Wanganui and Districts.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of adult literacy programmes in promoting and securing employment outcomes.
4. To examine adult literacy learning processes and their relationship to employment.

After substantial discussion of these, the community groups met to construct the following specific community objectives:

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

It should be noted that while the FRST objectives are primarily research-oriented and general in their nature, the community objectives are geographically specific and oriented to practical outcomes in their goals. FRST and project team expectations are that the research findings from Wanganui should find fuller application on a New Zealand-wide basis. Beyond this, it is also important that close attention should be paid to best practice internationally, so that the research programme can learn from exemplary work overseas, and the research can therefore make its own contribution to the world stage.

This report focuses specifically on Objective 1, “Establish adult literacy needs of both employed and unemployed in the Wanganui and Districts region”, and provides a clear description of the significant literacy issues facing communities such as Wanganui and Districts.

**Methodologies**

The research programme currently features 19 different methodologies (see ‘Barriers to Adult Literacy. A Discussion Paper’ for a complete list), each possessing the potential to reveal new attributes of adult literacy and employment in Wanganui and Districts. The most important methodological approach being undertaken is a qualitative field study involving case study, longitudinal, and action research designs. Qualitative approaches recognise the unique nature of adult literacy interventions in local communities.

The methodologies discussed in this report are:
1. A Community Phone Survey (n = 400) – This is a general attitudinal survey of the wider Wanganui Community that is being carried out by a Market Research Company. The purpose of this survey is to collect perspectives and attitudes to employment issues from a representative sample of the community.

2. Focus groups with Wanganui employers within large and small enterprises.

3. One-to-one interviews with employers within small and medium-sized enterprises.

4. A Provider Survey – Twelve in-depth interviews with adult literacy training providers in and around Wanganui were carried out in order to determine services available to persons with literacy needs. This survey is in two parts. Phase One is an hour-long survey of all identified providers in the Wanganui and Districts region and addressed the objective outlined above. Phase Two is a more in-depth interview that follows the initial survey. This is currently being carried out. Phase Two covers the areas of provider relationships with each other and the community, their perceptions of funding mechanisms, course/teaching details, differing perspectives of literacy, support services for clients and their needs, quality assurance/measurement, Māori learners’ needs, identification of other cultural groups with specific literacy needs, governance structures and relationships, and barriers to effective service provision.

5. Eighty-eight participant and forty non-participant in-depth interviews – Both participants in adult literacy programmes and non-participants (those who were not participating in literacy programmes) were invited to take part in the interview process. The interviews covered nine broad theme areas: socioeconomic background; schooling history; perspectives of their learning environment (for participants only); motivation; resistance; persistence; power dynamics; employment; and barriers to both employment and literacy.

It should be emphasised that this preliminary report is based on only an interim selection of the entire data set that will progressively come available during this research programme. For example, in some methods listed above, data have not yet been analysed or interpreted fully, and in no instance has a full discussion of findings been completed. In some future reports, findings from two or several of the methods listed above will be triangulated to obtain more comprehensive insights than are available from any single source.

**Literature Reviews**

An extensive annotated bibliography ([http://literacy.massey.ac.nz/annotated_bibliograp.html](http://literacy.massey.ac.nz/annotated_bibliograp.html)) and two literature reviews on adult literacy and employment have been completed. One literature review is broadly within a Western social research paradigm, and the second is from an indigenous research perspective.

The literature review from an indigenous research perspective is presented in a separate publication:


Parallel report

This report is one of two reports being produced for FRST in July 2005. This report is a more generalised discussion that explores the perceptions and literacy needs of community members in Wanganui and Districts. The authors also describe conduits to literacy, being the ways in which people find pathways to achieve their aspirations. The parallel report explores perceived barriers to adult literacy in Wanganui and Districts, following in-depth, one-to-one interviews with participants in adult literacy training courses, among other methodologies. The study comprises one element within a major, longitudinal research programme exploring issues in/about adult literacy and employment.

Two further reports are also offered as part of the series. The first ‘Provider survey – phase one: The provision of adult literacy services in Wanganui’, outlines the findings from Phase One of the Provider Survey in more detail than within this report. The second, ‘Theoretical understandings of adult literacy: A literature review’, seeks to bring together understandings from key articles in the international literature on literacy and/or employment.

National Environment

The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) was undertaken in New Zealand in 1996. Alongside New Zealand, Australia, Great Britain, Northern Ireland, and Belgium took part in this survey, which added to data already gathered in 1994 from Canada, The Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, Poland, the United States, Ireland, and Sweden. In 1998, nine other countries participated in the IALS.

The survey’s aim was to ascertain literacy proficiency levels for all participating countries.

New Zealand performed relatively well in the IALS, with average scores on all three literacy scales (prose, document, and quantitative) slightly above average compared with the other countries (Statistics NZ, 2004). However, NZ had nearly 40% of its population at literacy levels one and two.

The Ministry of Education ‘Skills and Education’ Discussion Paper (2002) states that 40% of employed and 70% of unemployed New Zealanders exhibit poor literacy skills (as determined by the International Adult Literacy Survey [IALS], 1996). This paper argues that while continued growth in job opportunities is expected, accentuating the need for higher productivity, this growth will be increasingly constrained by shortages of skilled people. Literacy skills such as reading, writing, and numeracy are essential for coping in today’s labour market and provide a foundation on which further learning and training can be achieved (Ministry of Education, 2002). This leads to the argument that a key priority must therefore be the raising of the skills of those adults with pressing literacy needs (it is estimated that over one million New Zealanders between the ages of 16 and 65 meet this definition, including a significant proportion already in employment). The New Zealand Adult Literacy Strategy (2001) states little is known about the pathways to employment for literacy-disadvantaged New Zealanders.
Wanganui District Community Profile

Wanganui is located on the North Island’s sweeping west coast, less than an hour by road from Palmerston North and only 2.5 hours from Wellington. With a population of around 44,000, a stable workforce, temperate climate, ready access to all major highways, as well as rail, air and sea transport, Wanganui attracts a variety of industries, including light manufacturing, heavy engineering, agriculture, food processing, and tanning. The education, health, and service industries are also significant in the area. Wanganui has evolved to support a hinterland that produces many primary products. (Retrieved from http://www.wanganui.com/about.html, 28/07/05).

Figure 1. Map of New Zealand

In order to contextualise this report, it is important to provide an overview of Wanganui and Districts.

Census

1 The information in this profile is based on the 2001 Census of Population and Dwellings, the 2001 Household Expenditure Survey and the New Zealand Business Demographic Statistics.
Population

At the 2001 Census of Population and Dwellings, the resident population count for Wanganui District was 43,266 persons. This was a change of -3.9% since 1996. Table 1 below outlines the gender split of the Wanganui and Districts region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wanganui District</th>
<th>New Zealand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>20,790</td>
<td>1,823,007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>22,479</td>
<td>1,914,273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>43,266</td>
<td>3,737,277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change since 1996</td>
<td>-1776</td>
<td>118,974</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Education

The 2001 Census also noted that 28.4% of people aged 15 years and over had a post-school qualification, compared with 32.2% for New Zealand as a whole.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wanganui District</th>
<th>New Zealand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No qualification</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>40.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-school</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the Wanganui District Council’s report (2003, p. 26), in 1995 there were 70 community education service courses compared with 129 such courses in 2002. In 1995 there were 862 students attending community education courses compared with 1229 students in 2002. Thus, the numbers of both community education courses and students attending those courses are increasing.

Ethnic groups

Table 3 below reports the ethnic groups that were resident in the Wanganui and Districts region during the 2001 Census.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wanganui District</th>
<th>New Zealand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European</td>
<td>84.3%</td>
<td>80.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Employment
At the time of the 2001 Census the unemployment rate in Wanganui District was 9.7%, compared with 7.5% for all New Zealand. The largest occupational group in Wanganui District was Service and Sales Workers (17.1%); the largest occupational group for New Zealand as a whole was Service and Sales Workers (14.8%).

Literacy level prediction for Wanganui region

According to an analysis carried out on the New Zealand IALS data (Culligan et al., 2004, p. 88), approximately 39% of working-age individuals in the Wanganui area are predicted to function at literacy levels 1 and 2.

Business

In 2001 there were 2720 business locations in Wanganui District. The Wanganui District Council’s report ‘Social Indicators’ (2003, p. 9) also reported on stated disadvantages of living in Wanganui. In 1999 ‘employment/lack of employment opportunities’ was the most stated disadvantage, along with economic downturn and the closing of businesses. In the same report, the number of people who said they would move because of employment opportunities rose from 23% in 1994 to 44% in 1999. One of the most important reported issues to face Wanganui in the years following 1999 was ‘unemployment/business downturn (51%)’.

Why Wanganui?

It was recognised from the outset that as a research issue that would feed into exemplary practice, literacy and employment required a multifaceted community approach in collaboration with the university. The Wanganui community has a strong reputation for interagency cooperation. Early in the project, the Wanganui District Library organised the making of a video to capture the perceptions of stakeholder groups within the community as to why Wanganui is the best location within which to contact this research. Some key insights from this video are listed below:

Geoff Hintz (former Managing Director, Enterprise Wanganui):

For Wanganui to continue to progress, which is very, very strong in terms of growth at the moment, we are going to have to be able to provide industry with a skilled work force. If we can’t do that, we will neither retain nor attract new industry.

Richard Skelsey (Service Centre Manager, Work and Income (Wanganui)):
The good thing here is the interagency cooperation between people and it’s all about communities. We’re actually building communities and working towards getting people into paid work in as far as that’s the avenue that I come from.

Colin Irvine (Senior Sergeant, NZ Police):

The Wanganui community has demonstrated, time and time again, they are a community that is very willing to give their time voluntarily to help projects that will have an impact on this city. In the Police we have had examples of it with many people voluntarily giving up their time to take part or establish the restorative justice programme and other programmes such as youth at risk. So the community here is very experienced at setting up trust, providing time voluntarily, and then getting behind any major project that contributes to make Wanganui a better place for everybody and that is one of the planks that we use, I think, as a community to sell to the government and the university that Wanganui was a good place to run this project.

Bob Dempsey (Manager-Information and Learning Services, Wanganui District Library):

Well, I think one of the really positive things about this research project is that it shows that major strength of Wanganui. The District Council, over the last six or seven years, has built up a very strong network of people like Good Health Wanganui, our local hospital, the Police, Community Corrections, WINZ, and a lot of other agencies as well, as well as...Wanganui UCOL is very keen to establish community networks. Now, right in the centre of that is the Library, and we link well with those organizations and we were able to springboard off that network when we started the research.

Colin Whitlock (Chief Executive Officer, Wanganui District Council):

The Council can take a role. It can be supportive and it can play its part. But at the end of the day, I believe that whatever solutions are called for are going to involve everyone, not just local government. It will involve government itself through various agencies, and it will involve the wider community in all the different groupings in the community. I believe as a community problem it has to have community ownership.
**FINDINGS**

**Community Perspectives**

**Section A  Community perceptions on literacy and employment**

Broad public commitment and understanding is vital to the success of national and community initiatives to increase levels of literacies, and in view of the aims of the research to understand the needs and barriers related to adult literacy and employment, we recognised we should begin with an investigation into what “ordinary” members of the community perceived to be the key skills for employment. Full details of the survey and its findings will shortly be available in a report accessible from the Literacy and Employment Project website at http://literacy.massey.ac.nz/.

**Survey Method**

In the first two weeks of August, 2004, a short telephone survey was carried out involving 400 residents 16 years of age and over in the Wanganui District Council area. A market research company, Consumer Link Ltd, was contracted to deliver the survey. Potential participants were identified through a random sampling of phone numbers in Wanganui and its surrounding districts. Based on figures from the 2001 census of the Wanganui region, we sought a representative sample in relation to age, gender, ethnicity and employment status. As much as practicable, the respondents were representative of all suburbs and areas in the district.

In total, 400 respondents were interviewed to achieve a confidence level of 95% (based on a district population of 43 266). The results are representative of the larger population at a margin of error of +/- 3%.

Initial questions were developed from findings in the literature on literacy and employment. These were then discussed with an academic with survey expertise, before being reviewed and revised in consultation with community representatives from the Wanganui District Council, Wanganui District Library, and Whanganui Community Foundation. The questions were trialled and submitted for reconsideration a number of times to ensure community input. A pilot survey was run in the last week of July 2004. After further adjustments and a final consultation the questionnaire was delivered across a nine-day period in the first half of August.

**Survey Scope**

The survey, attached as Appendix A, consisted of nine largely closed-ended questions in addition to demographic data. It focused on what the interviewees thought about employment opportunities in the area, barriers to getting fulltime jobs, and the important skills for job seekers. The aim was to elicit a number of unprompted responses in the early part of the survey before asking questions specifically concerned with literacy and based on the IALS categories of prose, document, and quantitative literacy.
The first three questions asked for opinions on the ease of obtaining employment in Wanganui, the barriers to getting a full-time job and the most important skills for people looking for jobs. The respondents were then asked for their level of agreement with several statements relating to literacy and employment, followed by a series of questions about whether they knew of people with difficulties with reading, writing and numeracy skills, where people would go to improve their literacy skills, and what they believed might stop these people seeking help. This was followed by a series of questions asking for respondents’ level of agreement with statements about learning of literacy skills in schools. The final question asked what factors might make the respondent decide to seek further training or education. Demographic data were then recorded.

**Summary of Findings**

**Demographics**

*Age:* Those surveyed ranged in age from 16 to 94 years, with almost three-quarters of the sample in the traditional working age range from 20 to 65 years. The spread in age allowed us to hear the views of 22 respondents in the 16–19 years age group, of particular interest to employers and educators. Seventy respondents were over 65 years old. Because these two groups come at each end of the normal span of paid working life, these responses were analysed for comparison with the main sample. Some key similarities and differences are summarised at the end of the findings.

*Gender:* There were considerably more female respondents at 57.8% of the sample compared with males (42.8%). The Census figures from the district are females 52% and males 48%.

*Education Level:* Almost two-thirds of the sample had four or more years of secondary schooling. Almost 40% had some tertiary training, and half of those had completed three years or more of tertiary education. These figures broadly reflect 2001 Census data on tertiary qualifications, and also compare closely to the Census figures for secondary school qualifications. Wanganui has more people with no qualifications, or fifth form qualifications only, than the national average.

*Computer Access and Use:* Community members interviewed had easy access to computers and used them frequently. A high percentage, 84.8%, had access to a computer. Of these, just over half (212 people or 62.5%) used a computer daily. A further 16.5% estimated they used a computer twice or more a week, with another 8.3% saying they used the computer weekly. In all, 296 people, almost three-quarters of the whole sample, used a computer once or more a week. Just over 80% of those who had access to a computer had it available at home.

*Employment Status:* Respondents described their employment status as indicated in Table 4 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status (multiple responses allowed)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time employed (more than 20 hours per week)</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Employment status of respondents
Retired on a pension 20.0%
Part-time employed (up to 20 hours per week) 12.5%
Self-employed 10.0%
Receiving a benefit 9.0%
Student 8.0%
Not in paid employment 5.0%
Caregiver 3.0%

Forty-six respondents gave more than one response. Most described themselves as self-employed and employed for more than 20 hours a week, or as a caregiver employed for more than 20 hours a week, or as working less than 20 hours a week and receiving a benefit. Most students in the sample also indicated they worked part-time.

Ethnic Identification: Respondents were free to choose more than one category. Their answers are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5. Ethnic identification of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Identification</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European New Zealander/European</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>88.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ Māori</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific People</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian New Zealander</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refused</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three percent of those who identified as Māori also described themselves as “European New Zealanders”. Wanganui district has a higher Māori population than New Zealand as a whole: 20.7% as opposed to 14.7%. Wanganui also has a lower Pacific population than New Zealand as a whole at 2.2%, compared with 6.5% across the whole country. Similarly, the Asian population of Wanganui is 1.7%, compared with 6.6% for New Zealand as a whole. The spread of ethnicities in the sample indicates the difficulties of obtaining a sample that reflects the range of ethnic representation in the community. However, it appears the survey may have reached a higher percentage of Māori members of the community than first appeared: 69 respondents (17.3%) knew and gave their tribal affiliation.

Respondents’ First Language: The overwhelming majority – 98% – said English was their first language. Māori was the first language for 3 respondents; Chinese for another 2; and 3 respondents were in the “other” category.

Employment Opportunities and Skills

Is it easy to find a job?

The opening question of the survey asked respondents how easy they thought it was to find a job in Wanganui. Just over half (52.8%) replied that it was either easy or very easy. However,
almost 40% believed it was not easy to find a job. It is worthwhile noting this survey was conducted when the level of unemployment in Wanganui was low, at 2.9%.

What are the barriers to finding a full-time job?

Respondents suggested 47 different barriers to fulltime employment. Fourteen percent of the sample said they did not know. Only 1.8% said there were no barriers. The 10 most frequently listed barriers are shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Ten most frequently mentioned barriers to full-time employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>“Top Ten” Barriers to Finding Full-Time Work</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Not enough job opportunities</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lack of education</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Need experience</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Not any or enough motivation/attitude/lazy</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Need for other skills</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Not the right sort of jobs available</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Lack of qualifications</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Only part-time work available</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All responses (except ‘don’t know’ and ‘nothing’) were then grouped into six major categories (see Table 7 below). Percentages are calculated out of 502 responses, as respondents gave more than one answer.

Table 7. Community views about barriers to employment: major groupings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grouping</th>
<th>number</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structural or Systemic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough job</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>169 (33.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>opportunities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not right sorts of</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jobs available</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only part-time work</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wages/pay/salary</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too many applicants</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for one position</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small/old town/nothing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>much going on here</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population changes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big employers moved</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>out of the area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job not enough to live</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>off</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of job security</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too risky/not worth</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coming off a benefit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of start up</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>money</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs not advertised</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oversupply of</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>educated people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills Shortage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need experience</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>165 (32.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of education</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As Table 7 shows, just over one-third of the responses were related to structural or systemic barriers, especially the shortage of jobs and the kind of jobs available. Just under one-third of the responses related to a skills shortage: the need for experience, education, skills, and training. Only two responses referred specifically to a lack of literacy skills as a barrier to employment.

Most important skills for those seeking jobs

When asked the open-ended question ‘What do you consider to be the most important skills for people currently looking for employment?’ respondents gave over 40 different responses. The table below gives the “top ten” skills named.

Table 8. Most frequently mentioned skills needed for employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top 10 responses to question “What do you consider to be the most important skills for people currently looking for jobs (in Wanganui)”</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Computer skills</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Training/education</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Communication</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Get on with people</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Experience</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Willing to work hard</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Other (inc. range of specific skill, local knowledge, practicality, etc.)</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As can be seen, the most frequent single response (18.3%) was computer skills, followed by training/education (14.5%), communication skills (12.0%) and a further communication skill “getting on with people”. These were followed by experience (9%). “Willingness to work hard”, part of what employers described as a basic foundation skill, had an 8.8% response. These five single responses were used as categories for major groupings, as shown in the table below. Note that we did not group all responses.

**Table 9. Community views about most important job skills: major groupings (552 responses)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grouping: with individual responses</th>
<th>Number out of 552</th>
<th>Total and Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Computer skills</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>73 (13.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Education/training (plus)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Basic level of education</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Qualifications</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Trade qualifications</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Communication skills (plus)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Speak well</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>112 (20.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Get on with people</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Presentation/presenting yourself well</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ability to follow instructions/to do as told</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Personal qualities: experience (plus)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>104 (18.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Confidence</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Look good</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- No criminal record</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Initiative</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Being healthy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Honesty</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Commonsense</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Foundation skills:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Work ethic</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>138 (25.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Willing to work hard</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Motivation</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Reliability</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Flexibility</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Attitude/manners/being polite</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Willingness to learn</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Loyalty to employer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Commitment to work</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When grouped in this way responses suggest the community regard basic foundation skills of primary importance, followed by education or training, communication skills, personal qualities and computer skills.

Unprompted Responses about the Importance of Literacy Skills

Equally significant in the unprompted responses to the question asking for the most important employment skills was the relatively insignificant position of literacy skills, only a total of 5.5% of the responses: 12 responses mentioned ‘reading skills,’ 14 ‘writing skills’, and 12 ‘adding skills’. Because of multiple responses, several people said more than one of the “three R’s” were important; in total only 21 respondents mentioned any of the major literacy skills without prompting.

Literacy Skills and Employment

The questionnaire then moved from unprompted responses to measuring respondents’ levels of agreement with a series of statements about the skills needed for employment.

People can’t find jobs in Wanganui because they don’t have the skills

Almost half the sample, 48%, either strongly agreed (12.5%) or agreed (35.5%) with this statement. The level of disagreement was much lower at 23.8% (19.8% disagreeing and 4% strongly disagreeing). Those who neither agreed nor disagreed made up 28.3% of the sample.

Having first ascertained unprompted responses to what community members believed to be the important skills needed for employment, we then asked four questions relating to specific employment skills; three based on the IALS categories of prose, document, and quantitative literacy, and a fourth on computer skills.

Respondents agreed overwhelmingly that reading, writing, and number skills were important to gain employment; a smaller majority agreed on the importance of computer skills.

- Basic reading skills are needed to gain employment: 87.5% of the respondents strongly agreed (54.8%) or agreed (32.8%).
- Basic writing skills are needed to gain employment: 86.3% of the respondents strongly agreed (47.8%) or agreed (38.5%).
- Basic number skills are needed to gain employment: 86.1% of the respondents strongly agreed (42.5%) or agreed (43.6%).
- Basic computer skills are needed to gain employment: 59.5% of the respondents strongly agreed (17.5%) or agreed (42%).

While members of the community agreed overwhelmingly then, that ‘traditional’ literacy skills are needed to gain employment, in the unprompted situation very few thought to mention that
these skills were the most important for employment. It would appear from this that most people in the community take these skills for granted and assume they are held by most people.

**Adult Literacy and its Impacts in the Community**

*Reading and Writing Skills*

The first question asked respondents:

*Do you know of any adults among your family and friends in the Wanganui area, who struggle with reading, such as having trouble reading a newspaper like the Midweek or River City Press?*

More than three-quarters of the sample (78.3%) answered ‘No’. Of the 87 respondents who knew family or friends struggling with reading, 36 (41.4%) knew one person and, a surprisingly large proportion, 26.4% (23 people), knew five or more people with reading difficulties.

Respondents who knew people struggling with reading said they had difficulties undertaking four key tasks:

- Problems understanding documents such as insurance claims (92%)
- Difficulties filling out forms such as job applications (85%)
- Difficulties reading medical information such as prescriptions (76%)
- Difficulties reading the road code (75%)

*Numeracy Skills*

Fewer respondents knew people with basic numeracy problems in contrast to those with reading difficulties. Seventy-three people (18.3%) of the sample answered ‘Yes’ to the question: *Do you know of any adults among your family and friends who have problems with number skills, such as simple measurements or adding up the cost of a few items?*

**Accessing Literacy Support**

We wished to find out whether members of the community knew where people could get help if they had difficulties with reading, writing and number skills. The wide-ranging responses to this open-ended question revealed that the community had no clear understanding about who delivers literacy support.

- 55 respondents (13.8%) did not know.
- 121 respondents (30.25%) suggested tertiary institutions. “Polytech” or “university” was mentioned by 94, a further 26 named UCOL – the local polytechnic, and one respondent suggested Te Wānanga o Aotearoa.
- Secondary school courses of varying kinds were regarded by a large proportion of the respondents (31.5%) as providing help: “Back to school” (17%); night classes (13%); the community college (1.5%).
- Interestingly, relatively few of the respondents thought of specialist literacy providers in answer to this question. Fifty-four people (13.5%) mentioned unspecified literacy providers. Even less specific were those who mentioned teachers or private tutors (7).
or “courses, special classes of education” (7). A total of 42 respondents or 10.5% of the sample identified (not always accurately) specific providers of literacy and numeracy services

- Family (17 responses) and friends (12) were seen as providing support by 7.3% of the sample.
- A number of respondents suggested various community organisations and service agencies as providing literacy support including: Citizens Advice Bureau (9 responses); the Library (2); legal support centres (2); Work and Income (2); family support centres (1); budgeting services (1); doctor or health worker (1); Senior Citizens (1) and Senior Net (1)
- Three people suggested that those needing literacy help could look in the newspaper, and six answered “nowhere, that such people would not seek help”.

Some literacy providers in the region have indicated they are not well known to the public and the results of the community survey appear to bear this out. This is an important finding in the light of government efforts to tackle adult literacy issues and improve outcomes.

**Success of Schools in Teaching Basic Skills**

Because the primary source of literacy teaching is at school, and employers and other concerned groups had expressed concern about the school system’s ability to teach basic literacy skills, we asked community members for their opinion on this.

**Table 10. Levels of agreement with statements concerning the school system’s success in teaching basic skills**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Skill</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree Strongly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading &amp; Writing</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arithmetic</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computing</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>47.3%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While a small majority of respondents – 56.5% – either strongly agreed or agreed that “The school system succeeds in teaching the basic skills of reading and writing”, 26.3% disagreed or disagreed strongly. There was a similar level (57.5%) of overall agreement to the statement “The school system succeeds in teaching the basic skills of arithmetic”, while fewer disagreed strongly or disagreed (19% in total). However, respondents believed schools were doing a better job teaching basic computer skills than both reading and writing, or arithmetic skills: 65.5% either agreed strongly or agreed with the statement, with only 10.1% either disagreeing or disagreeing strongly.

**Willingness to Engage in Adult Training**

In the light of the Government’s emphasis on the knowledge economy and the importance of constant upskilling, the respondents were asked “What might make you personally decide to seek further training or education?”
The “top ten” reasons for respondents choosing to seek further training or education and the percentage of respondents giving that reason are as follows:

1. Improve job prospects 39.3%
2. For interest 23.5%
3. To get a job 16.3%
4. Nothing would 11.3%
5. Self improvement/personal fulfilment 8.5%
6. Demands of current job 7.0%
7. Other 4.3%
8. Desire to learn/personal preference 3.0%
9. Financial gain – earn extra money 1.8%
10. Having the money – financial support 1.8%

In this listing it is clear that both the most frequent answer and a significant number of the other listed responses are related to employment (getting a job, getting a better job or keeping a job). Another important category appears to be related to personal growth and interest. 11% of people were clearly not interested in further education or training. Interestingly, only two respondents said they did not know in response to this question.

In the table below we group responses to form a series of categories. Because interviewees were able to make more than one response the percentages cited are percentages of all responses given (498 responses).

**Table 11. Reasons respondents would seek further training or education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grouping</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage of responses Out of 498</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job Related</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve job prospects</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>260 (52.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get a job</td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demands of current job</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial gain/earn more</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial reasons</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If it is worth something</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal growth</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>141 (28.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self improvement/personal fulfilment</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to learn/personal preference</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night classes for leisure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Would Not</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing would</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45 (9.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Removing Barriers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having the money/financial support</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free time</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19 (3.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age/If younger</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External pressures</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Necessity/need to</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12 (2.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping up with changes/moving with the</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping Others</td>
<td>Others (minus ones above)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read to my children</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help grandchildren</td>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer work</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This clearly shows that over half the reasons the respondents gave for being willing to take up further training were related to employment. This finding is consistent with further analysis of the International Adult Literacy Survey, which notes that most people participating in adult training courses do so for professional or career-upgrading reasons (Culligan et al., 2004). However, a significant proportion of reasons (28.3%) were related to personal growth and interest; linked to these responses were those which mentioned helping others in various forms. Only a small number of responses mentioned undertaking training only if barriers were removed.

**Similarities and differences between perceptions of 16–19 year olds and those over 65**

These groups at either end of the age sample were more likely than other groups to not be in full-time employment: Of the young sample, 72% were students; 84% of the over 65s were retired on a pension. Not surprisingly, in terms of these figures, both groups were more likely than other groups in the survey to say it was not easy to get a job in Wanganui. Interestingly, no young people chose the “don’t know” response, so they were more clear-cut than all other groups regarding whether it was not easy or easy to get a job in Wanganui. This clarity is likely to reflect their position at the start of their workforce participation. Young people were also more likely to perceive systemic or structural barriers to employment than the over 65s, who focused on lack of education and skills and were more likely to note individual fault or personal circumstances as barriers to employment.

The two groups differed in their unprompted views of the skills needed for employment. Young people prioritised communication and computer skills, but made little mention of foundation skills, education, or training. In contrast, the older group prioritised training, education, personal skills, and basic foundation skills. None of the latter group mentioned communication skills but they were twice as likely as any other group to mention the basic literacy skills of reading, writing, and numeracy. They were also more likely than other groups to agree that people didn’t have the right skills for the available jobs.

These differences between the two groups’ unprompted views of employment skills are of interest. The younger group’s emphasis on communication and computer skills may reflect a generational change in the vocabulary associated with workplace interactions. Olsson and Comrie (2005) suggest that the term communication is often used as a synonym for literacies and does not have the ‘stigma’ associated with adult literacy training in the basic skills of reading, writ-
ing, and numeracy. Similarly, the concern for computer skills may reflect the IT emphasis of schooling for young people. Their lack of concern for foundation skills when defined as work ethic, motivation, and reliability contrasts with the employers’ prioritization of these skills (see Employers’ Report section), and suggests young people may need to be made more aware of these requirements. Since the majority of the group were students engaged in training at the time of the survey, they may take training and education for granted in contrast to the over 65s who, from the perspective of a lifetime of employment, may be more aware of a continuing need for training, upskilling, or retraining. That none of this latter group mentioned communication skills reinforces the possibility of a generational difference in vocabulary.

In the prompted responses on the need for literacy/ies, both groups fitted the overall survey profile of agreement, but the younger group showed less awareness of the need for reading and writing skills, placing more importance on the need for numeracy and computer skills. This may reflect the view put forward by some providers that young people find it difficult to admit to problems with reading and writing, but it is much more acceptable or ‘cool’ to acknowledge numeracy problems (as shown elsewhere in this document).

Finally, the over 65 group were less likely than the young group to know people who had problems with literacy/ies. They also had little knowledge of the support systems available for literacy training. While the young group did indicate an awareness of unspecified literacy providers, there is still a need for greater publicity about community support and resources for young people as well as for all other groups in the survey.

Implications of the Community Survey

The telephone survey provides some important insights into community perceptions related to the literacy and employment project. In particular, the survey covers:

- perceptions of employment needs and issues in Wanganui
- perceptions of the relationship between literacy skills and employment
- adult literacy and its impacts in the community
- awareness of adult literacy support systems in Wanganui
- attitudes to schooling and literacy
- attitudes to adult training

Perceptions of employment needs and issues in Wanganui

While a majority of the sample felt work was easy to find in Wanganui, the relatively high number of people (40%) who felt it was not easy to find a job at a time when unemployment was at a low of 2.9% in the district is unexpected and may be a hangover from previous eras of high unemployment. At the same time, the fact that both the 16–19-year-old age group and the over 65 age group were more likely than any other groups to perceive difficulties in gaining employment may indicate that the end age ranges of the labour pool in Wanganui are not at present being fully utilized, whether because of a lack of experience, or because of the view that older workers are likely to spend a limited time in the continuing workforce is unclear. Re-
responses to barriers to employment provide some evidence of age discrimination (7.25%). In a
time when Wanganui employers are complaining of a skill shortage in the district and an insuf-
ficient pool of potential employees to choose from (see Employers’ Report section), this poten-
tial source of employees needs to be reconsidered.

The possible under-utilization of potential employees is reinforced by the finding that just over
one-third of respondents nominated systemic and structural barriers to employment, while just
under one-third referred to skill shortages, with only 2 respondents mentioning a shortage of
literacy skills. In the perceptions of the community, then, a lack of literacy skills is not auto-
matically linked to barriers to employment.

The grouped responses prioritise foundation skills (34.8%) as the most important set of skills,
followed by communication skills, education/training, personal qualities and computer skills.
The top ranking given to foundation skills links with the employers’ primary concern for these
skills, especially for young people entering the workforce (see Employers’ Report section). That
foundation skills did not register in the 16–19-year-old age group indicates young people need
to be made more aware of the importance to employees of these skills. However, young peo-
ple’s concern for communication skills may include some of the qualities employers and older
people associate with foundation skills and personal qualities, such as honesty, reliability, or
loyalty. Further work needs to be done to see how different groups define the different skill
categories.

Perceptions of the relationship between literacy skills and employment

Of major significance was the position of literacy in the unprompted responses to the most im-
portant employment skills: reading 3%, writing 3.5%, ‘adding skills’ 3%. Moreover, as there
was considerable overlap in these responses (several people said that more than one basic liter-
acy skill was important) only 21 people or 5.25% of the sample identified the traditional basic
literacy skills as most important to people seeking employment. This suggests a low awareness
of the relationship between literacy and employment and indicates adult literacy may be a hid-
den issue in the community.

In contrast, when specifically prompted to respond to literacy skill questions, members of the
community agreed overwhelmingly that the ‘traditional’, basic skills of reading, writing, and
‘adding’ are needed to gain employment. One interesting factor was the greater emphasis
placed on numeracy and computer skills by the 16-19-year-old group, perhaps reflecting a
slight resistance to either acknowledging or dealing with problems of reading and writing.
Overall, however, the difference between the unprompted skills (where literacy was identified
by few) and the prompted responses supporting the link between literacy and employment indi-
cates strongly that most people in the community take adult literacy skills for granted and
assume they are held by most people. This in turn suggests that both the government and pro-
viders need to publicise and raise community awareness of adult literacy as a major issue in our
society and a basic prerequisite to employment.
The possibility that adult literacy is a hidden issue in the community is further reinforced by the relatively small percentage of the total sample (87 people, 21.75%) who knew of family or friends struggling with basic reading, writing, or number skills. Of this percentage, however, people who were aware of the issue knew not just one but a number of people with adult literacy problems. Again, this may suggest that once an individual is aware of the problem with one person they are more likely to recognise it in other people. This possibility needs to be further explored but adds to the arguments for increased publicity about the issue as, for example, in the government-funded campaigns about smoking or mental health.

*Awareness of adult literacy support systems in Wanganui*

Equally disquieting, although connected, was the overall sample’s lack of awareness of the specific literacy providers in the region where people with problems could go for assistance. We suggest the first step is to increase public awareness of the extent of adult literacy problems, the second is to better publicise support agencies and providers.

*Attitudes to schooling and adult training*

Interestingly, an overwhelming majority of the community believe that learning continues after people leave school (85%), suggesting an openness to continuing adult education. When this is coupled with the much smaller majority agreeing with the statements that the school succeeds in teaching basic literacy and numeracy (56.5%, 57.5%), one would expect a greater awareness that adult literacy skills might be an issue in the community. Paradoxically perhaps, there was a greater level of agreement that schools succeed in teaching computer skills (65.5%). This may reflect a point made by a major employer in the district that while young people are extremely adept at using the new technology from computers to cell phones, they do not necessarily have the basic literacy skills of being able to read and write (see Employers’ Report section).

For the most part, the willingness to undertake further training or education was linked to job prospects and career opportunities. This supports arguments for vocational context training. However, it does not address the points made by concerned community agencies of the need for basic literacy skills as part of a social justice perspective, for example, the police view that an increase in literacy will reduce re-offending rates (as described later in the report).

The sizable willingness to undertake further training for personal growth and interest may link with the over 65s’ indication that over a third of people in this group would consider training for interest, but not for job-related reasons. This may indicate that older people have been conditioned not to think of further work opportunities, and yet may constitute a largely untapped potential pool of employees.

A certain resistance to continuing adult education is indicated by the substantial 11.3% of the total sample who indicated that nothing would make them seek further training. Future research needs to further explore this ‘core resistance’ group.
While this report deals with the exploratory, initial stages of the literacy and employment research in the Wanganui area, in providing a snapshot of the wider community members’ views of employment needs and issues at an early stage of the project it forms one basis for further exploration of community attitudes towards adult literacy. As we have suggested, our findings indicate that most members of the general public in Wanganui take literacy skills for granted and assume they are held by most adults. These findings also indicate the need for a government campaign to create greater awareness of the issues surrounding adult literacy and employment.

**Concerned Community Agencies’ Perspectives**

The views of some key stakeholders in the Wanganui Community have been gathered from two main sources. The first was in group discussions between local representatives and some of the University research team in the early part of the project. Other views are taken from participants in the Wanganui District Library community video. In this community initiative, library staff selected a number of prominent local people who believed adult literacy was an important issue for Wanganui.

**Community Agencies’ Discussion Groups**

An intensive, two-day orientation period was facilitated by the Wanganui District Library as a primary instigator and stakeholder in the research project. During this time three members of the Massey University team met with concerned community groups to discuss ideas surrounding the project. The concerned community agencies consisted of four groups loosely designated as follows: a) Police and the Corrections Department; b) a tertiary providers’ group, including representatives from YWCA, the local branch of the UCOL polytechnic, the Specific Learning Disabilities Federation (SPELD), Workbridge, and carpentry tutors; c) a mixed group of social and vocational literacy agencies including representatives from the government department Work and Income, Christian Social Services, Literacy Aotearoa, and a vocational literacy specialist agency; and d) a business and employers’ group, including business representatives from Enterprise Wanganui and two major employers in the area. The views of the business and employers group are incorporated later in the report in the discussion on employers’ perspectives.

All four groups were concerned with basic, functional literacy skills both as a means to employment opportunities and as a social justice issue. At the same time, the differing emphases and issues raised by each group reveal their perceptions of literacy needs in the area.

*Police and Corrections*

A lack of literacy skills was linked by this group with offending and re-offending. Young people in particular can get into trouble partly because of literacy problems and the situation can escalate:

*Unlike patients who are scared to have their medicine because they can’t read the directions, our clients have no fear factor, and so don’t ask for clarification of their instructions.*

With sentencing, low literacy often precludes compliance:
One example … is when a judge hands down a sentence to a youth, and the jargon means nothing to them, it’s no wonder they get in more trouble as they don’t know what the judge means by ‘protection order’.

Lack of literacy was also linked by this group to unemployment and a pattern of intergenerational illiteracy. A police officer said: “My position focuses on youth and truancy, and there is clear evidence that illiteracy runs in the family.”

Gaining literacy skills was seen as a means to break the cycle and there was a call for ‘policies to back this up’. It was also suggested there was a ‘lack of trust’ by clients in established systems and agents. This was summed up in one group member’s comment, “Even the word “literacy” is patronizing.” Understandably, this group was primarily concerned with the importance of training in basic literacy skills as part of a social justice perspective that held the promise of a reduction both in offending and unemployment.

Tertiary providers’ group

The tertiary providers’ group combined a concern with functional literacy with employment skills and needs. Learning problems, as one provider put it, were linked to ‘home life and low socio-economic backgrounds’.

While the group’s primary concern was with literacy skills, members distinguished between literacy and ‘practical’ work skills. The Workbridge representative, for instance, spoke of different types of competency, “Some of my members are illiterate, but skilled.” A carpentry tutor made a distinction between reading and understanding, which suggested a possible problem with the workplace communication of messages: “Some of our students do not understand signs, even though they can read them. For example, “Demolition site” would be meaningless to some.” Reiterating a distinction between literacy, in particular numeracy, and practical skills, the carpentry tutors suggested that, while some students have very low literacy levels and rely on calculators because multiplication-tables have not been taught, they still pass the course because they have practical skills. The group posited the need for a consideration of ‘different learning styles, for example, from a Māori perspective’. The group also discussed the need for better liaison and collaboration between those working in the area.

Social agencies and literacy providers’ group

This group subdivided into those who raised social justice issues about literacy and those who were primarily concerned with vocational literacy training issues. Those who raised social justice issues expressed a concern for family literacy ‘for people who want to be able to read to their children’, coupled with a concern for workplace entry barriers for people with low literacy: “Our clients often can’t read pamphlets, so they don’t apply for jobs.” Such clients often had particular problems with numeracy as shown in budgeting issues. This lack of functional literacy skills was often compounded by socio-economic factors:
We have clients locked into rental agreements where they wrongly believe it is on a rent-to-own basis... There is a similar problem with finance companies charging exorbitant rates. The clients are desperate and agree to unfavourable terms.

A WINZ representative pointed to the participation possible when literacy barriers had been removed for Task Force Green volunteers who worked on reconstruction projects following the devastating 2004 lower North Island floods, which had hit the Wanganui region hard.

The literacy providers’ representatives suggested the issue for employers was that ‘the pool of prospective workers does not match the workplace’ and strongly advocated a vocational or functional context approach to workplace literacy: “We teach literacy while they are working on their specific course.” The group made a central point that courses resulting in a qualification or practical outcome were a strong motivation to attract learners. One person stated, “The [driver] learner’s licence is the carrot.” Another pointed to NCEA as a “carrot.” A further group member described how her Vocational Centre removed learner fears of possible stigma associated with literacy training for people already in the workforce: “The company just gets an invoice for the number who participated that week, but names are not given so that it’s confidential.”

**The Community Video**

The video ‘Wanganui Literacy Research’ was produced by Wanganui library staff in early 2004. It was designed to help spread the word about the project among key people in Wanganui. The participants were all “champions” of the research project, community leaders who had met in the months preceding the grant application to share their concerns about literacy problems in Wanganui and their conviction that the community was small enough, concerned enough, and integrated enough to do something about it. The participants were encouraged to share their thoughts on issues surrounding literacy in the community, hopes and aspirations for the project and potential community outcomes. Below we summarise comments from six participants. The views of iwi partners in the research who took part in the video are deemed to be more appropriately represented in the formal reports for FRST written by researchers from Te Puna Mātauranga o Whanganui.

**Work and Income (Wanganui) Representative**

**Richard Skelsey, Service Centre Manager** at Work and Income’s Wanganui Service Centre said that literacy has become very important in the workplace because of legislative changes:

> What we’ve found is that a lot of employers here now, under legislative requirements with health and safety, require people to understand simple messages that are written around the factories about safety issues.

Work and Income clients want work and are motivated but lack the skills. Employers want people who “can listen to instructions” and “are skilled enough to get into a job and get into it straight away.” Clients, Skelsey said, just needed a few extra skills in reading and writing to be able to understand simple instructions.
However, he commented, it requires alert Work and Income staff to pick up the signals of those who are having literacy problems:

They might pick up some forms to fill out and say, “Well, I’ll take them out and I’ll fill them out at home.”...If we pick up on that, we generally send them to other agencies like Literacy Aotearoa to help them do that sort of thing. They might need a simple thing like a drivers’ licence. If they can’t read and write, they have problems with that. So there again, we send them to those agencies that can actually help them out.

Skelsey stressed the need for a greater understanding of the causes:

The thing is that we only know the tip of the iceberg. We don’t really know all the underlying things like how many people do have problems reading and writing. We only see a very small percentage of it and we need to know how many people are involved so that we can put strategies in place to help them gain employment. Everybody that gets into paid work is a big bonus and just their motivation and their mana increases so dramatically when they get into paid work.

While Skelsey says there are enough helping agencies, the need, once they are able to understand and identify needs of people, will be for an increase in resources to put the strategies and programmes together.

Wanganui Police Representative

Senior Sergeant Colin Irvine from the Wanganui Police pointed to the close link between problems with literacy, related feelings of low self esteem and crime:

Probably 80% of all the people that we deal with as offenders at the police, are illiterate or fairly illiterate. And, for many of these people, admitting that they have a problem is something that they don’t want to admit. They feel a high level of shame about the fact that they don’t have those skills and that leads to low self esteem and, probably, significantly contributes to the reason why they become involved with crime ... It’s not something they want. It’s the situation that they’re in and they don’t know how to get out of it.

Police, he said are daily witness to the way those with low literacy become unwittingly linked into the cycle of offending. It can be as simple as not having the literacy skills to sit a driver’s licence:

Firstly they get ticketed for not having a licence. Their next step in the process is that if they are then prohibited from driving and they drive, then they get arrested, their car gets impounded for 28 days, they get released, often they get disqualified, and next minute they are on the treadmill of repeat disqualified driving which leads to jail terms. And once young people get into the criminal justice system, regardless of the type of offence they get in there for, it’s a very difficult treadmill to get them off.
Irvine commented, though, that this cycle can be broken. Young people before the court were referred to a local provider where special tutors enabled them to gain the skills needed to pass their theoretical test “If you’ve got a driver’s licence you can get a job and get out of the criminal justice system.”

**Wanganui District Council Staff Representatives**

Colin Whitlock, Chief Executive Officer of the Wanganui District Council said that Council office staff regularly face the task of tactfully helping people fill in forms and that the Council as a whole became aware of literacy issues when trying to work out how they could connect and communicate with local people.

Literacy, he believes is certainly an issue for employment in Wanganui, where council research had shown some employers were bringing in outside people to fill jobs because locals did not have the needed literacy levels. Others were testing and rejecting the majority of applicants:

> Did you know at one of our major employers, the freezing works, that up to 60% of the people who apply for a position there can’t get employment because they don’t have sufficient literacy skills?

However, Whitlock said literacy was about more than this:

> It’s very much an issue about being engaged in your community, about the wider issues of social cohesion, of about people being able to feel included.

He said there is a big gap in understanding about why problems arise:

> After all, many children go through school into adulthood and develop good literacy and numeracy skills, but there are those who don’t and also who don’t seem to be able, maybe later in life, to pick up the opportunity even then. So that’s what we need to know. Why is this happening, and what can we do about it? How can we help these people to feel that they are part of our wider community?

Rosemary Hovey, Wanganui District Council Community Development Manager said the council had worked on a report with the local hospital in 2001 in which poor literacy and poor health outcomes were shown to be linked. However, generally the council only had anecdotal evidence of problems and needed to find out more about the size of the problem.

**Whanganui Community Foundation Representative**

Judith Timpany, Executive Director of the Whanganui Community Foundation saw literacy in relation to a number of complex social issues that are not fully understood:

> Certainly in terms of the Wanganui community, there are some pockets of quite high deprivation and what we are seeing are a number of issues in this particular community that it’s important
to understand how those mechanisms work and what kind of social interventions are going to be able to be used that will be effective in dealing with some of those areas.

She also viewed literacy as related to community life and social connectedness:

It’s quite difficult for people with low levels of literacy to be well connected with their communities. If you have a low level of literacy, it means that you’re not able to read the newspaper well, you can’t fill in forms adequately, so your ability to participate is much less for people who have high levels of literacy. So it’s really important in terms of encouraging people to participate in the life of their communities in all sorts of ways that they do have higher levels of literacy.

However, Timpany argued that much could be learned from exploring the coping strategies and the strengths of those who have lower levels of literacy:

So it’s really important, if we believe in a sense of community, that we look for the strengths rather than we look for the disadvantage.

Wanganui District Library Perspective

Bob Dempsey, Manager – Information and Learning Services from the Wanganui District Library said that literacy was at the heart of everything that the library does, although staff were aware of the irony that those with poor literacy probably did not come to the library.

Dempsey saw the library as an active centre of a number of community networks involved with issues associated with low literacy and believed it was well placed to assist with the coordination that is needed to tackle the problem.

The library has also been concerned about the link between low literacy levels and crime, especially with young people:

Because they’re not able to understand what’s going on around them, not being able to read and develop their knowledge, they will get into trouble. That sets a pattern.

Primarily, those at the library believed that increasing literacy increases choice for people:

We know that in people as a family unit, if the parents have low literacy levels, then that limits their choices for the whole family. We do see a correlation and that has to be shown by the research that people with low literacy levels tend not to live as well as others…That’s been the real driving force for us as a library that we see as people gain literacy skills, they get more and more choices in their lives, and not only in their lives but their partners their children, their parents.

Certainly, Wanganui community agencies and providers who work with low literacy clients reveal how these clients are disadvantaged through not having the ‘tools’ or ‘language’ to engage with and understand the discourses of social institutions from finance companies, to employment agencies, to the justice system. We would argue that when adult literacies are re-
garded as multiple and ongoing forms of discourse acquisition, the stigma attached to adult learning of literacy skills may be removed. In turn, skills in multiple literacies would further facilitate interactions with and between diverse groups and systems.

Section B Employers’ perspectives on literacy and employment

In examining Wanganui employers’ perspectives on literacy and employment issues in their area, the Massey research team was particularly aware of the community-based and participative nature of the project. Thus this report attempts to represent as closely as possible the voices, views, and perspectives of those Wanganui employers who gave their time to engage in the project.

Methodology

Data Sources and Sample

An intensive, two-day orientation period, 1–2 April 2004, was facilitated by the Wanganui District Library as a primary instigator and stakeholder in the research project. During this time three members of the Massey University team met with concerned community groups to discuss ideas surrounding the project (see Community Perspectives section). These groups included a business and employers’ group, including business representatives from Enterprise Wanganui and two major employers in the area, who provided initial discussion on their views of employment needs in the district and of the issues they saw as related to the literacy and employment project.

Later the same year an in-depth interview was carried out with the then Managing Director of Enterprise Wanganui, who was about to leave the district to take up a new position. In March–April 2005, two focus groups were conducted with employers. These focus groups were initially arranged through Enterprise Wanganui staff. An information sheet about the project and a list of benefits to employers was provided by the Massey research team. These, together with an invitation to participate in the research project, were sent out in a Wanganui Chamber of Commerce e-letter to Wanganui businesses. The new Managing Director for Enterprise Wanganui then supplied the team with a list of names and companies who had indicated they were willing to participate. From this list two focus groups and two one-to-one interviews were arranged.

The focus groups covered two distinctive groups: large employers and small employers. Cameron and Massey (2003) distinguish businesses according to size: “a micro business is defined as having five or fewer employees, a small business as having six to 49 employees, a medium-sized business as having between 50 and 99 employees, and a large business as having 100 or more employees” (p. 1). However, the Managing Director of Enterprise Wanganui suggested that these distinctions needed to be modified for a small city such as Wanganui, and the grouping into small and large businesses for the focus groups was based on his recommendations about the local populace’s perceptions of the relative size of business within the city.
The small business employers’ focus group was made up of six people: five women and one man representing five companies. The large employers’ focus group consisted of four men representing three companies.

Finally, three further in-depth interviews were conducted with local employers, from large, medium, and small businesses. These interviews are discussed in-depth in the full Employer Report (to be available on the Literacy and Employment website http://literacy.massey.ac.nz shortly).

The total data pool of employers’ perspectives consists of:

- An initial group discussion with employers’ representatives (2004)
- A small business focus group (2005)
- A large business focus group (2005)
- An in-depth telephone interview with a large employer (2005)

Given that the sample is small and largely self-selected, it may represent employers who are more rather than less interested in issues of literacy and communication in Wanganui workplaces. Therefore, overall it should not necessarily be considered representative of other local employers. Nevertheless, one useful contribution from this strand of the research is its identification of possible issues of common concern.

**Question design and recording**

- **Initial orientation meeting with employers**
  At the initial orientation meeting with employers arranged by the Wanganui District Library the Massey research team gave a brief presentation to provide an overview of the FRST-funded, community-based, collaborative nature of the research into literacy and employment in the Wanganui area. In particular, the team outlined the four FRST objectives and timelines, and the wider community objectives of the project. Employers were then asked for their views of the issues surrounding literacy and employment in the area. A shorthand record of employers’ statements was made and subsequently sent to the research team. Massey University Human Ethics consent was obtained for this and for all other processes outlined below with the usual guarantees being given of confidentiality.

- **Initial in-depth interview with employers’ representative**
  An interview outline was developed based on findings in the literature on literacy and employment and from points put forward at the initial orientation meeting with Wanganui employers. These questions were discussed and revised by members of the Massey research team and provided a flexible framework for the interview. With the consent of the interviewee, the interview was recorded and subsequently transcribed.
• **Focus group meetings**
  
  For the focus group meetings, the team attempted to reduce questions to key areas that had become apparent in the previous meeting and interview. A primary aim of the meetings was to provide starting points for employers to relate their own views and experiences. A number of meetings and drafts of question outlines were discussed with the Massey team and considered by the Project leader before a final, simplified question outline was arrived at. Key question areas included a pared-down number of prompts for the focus group facilitator to draw upon if necessary. A copy of the focus group question outline is included as Appendix B of this report.

At the start of the focus group meetings time was taken for greetings, refreshments and an explanation of the process. Consent forms were presented and signed and the meetings were audio taped and subsequently transcribed. In addition, the research project manager sat in on the focus groups and took notes on the discussion to be able to clarify any parts of the transcripts where there might have been voice overlaps or confusion as to speakers.

• **In-depth interviews with large, medium-sized and small business employers**
  
  These three in-depth interviews were undertaken to accommodate employers who were not able to attend the focus groups but who expressed a willingness to participate in the project. The large employer was interviewed by phone. The other two were carried out at the employers’ place of business and conducted by the facilitator for the original focus groups. They covered the same key areas of questions as for the focus groups. With the exception of the phone interview, the interviews were audio taped with the interviewees’ consent, and subsequently transcribed.

**Findings**

**Initial Business and employers’ group meeting**

*Skills shortages*

The business and employers’ group pointed to increasing skills levels required in the workplace. One employer referred to “the bottom of the barrel syndrome” where employers no longer had a choice to pick from people with the relevant skills.

*Literacy skills*

A distinction was made between literacy and numeracy as such, and workplace literacies. Employers were primarily concerned with vocational or functional context literacies. One representative described how three major employers in the Wanganui area had developed their own workplace training schemes ‘tailored to their own needs’.

*Government education and training programmes*
In line with employers’ emphasis on the interface between workplace literacy training, there were some suggestions that current Government programmes do not fit employer needs:

Tertiary providers don’t cater for us; any literacy programme introduced would have to be relevant to us as a company. [We have] lots of minority ethnicities working for us, they may have a different learning style.

Government programmes don’t deal with problem solving.

Also evident was either a lack of understanding of or a dismissal of NZQA Unit Standards: “Employers find Unit Standards a waste of time”. It was suggested that Unit Standards did not constitute a benchmark or a readily recognisable measure of potential employees’ capabilities: “There are no goals in Unit Standards, no 50% pass.”

Overall, the group stressed the importance of vocational context training and also suggested a need for the development of higher level ‘literacies’ related to specific workplace demands.

**In-depth Initial Interview with Employers’ Representative**

A further perspective on business and employers’ perceptions of employment needs was sought through an in-depth interview with a leading Wanganui employers’ representative. Three major areas of need emerged in the interview:

1. basic foundation or life skills
2. literacy skills
3. communication skills.

These needs were discussed in the specific context of changes of the Wanganui workplace and within the wider social context of New Zealand workplace policies and training.

**Changes to the Wanganui economy**

The interviewee described how originally Wanganui, like most provincial New Zealand economies, had a high reliance on central government infrastructure. Government centralisation of many operations in the mid- to late-80s coincided with the shift of private enterprise to main centres and led to a 10-year recession in Wanganui. A number of small businesses have subsequently begun, and the economy has now turned to a proliferation of small to medium-sized businesses as a platform for the economy.

While the Health and Education sectors remain major employers in Wanganui, the growth of SMEs, especially in the design technology sector, includes component manufacturing, light engineering design, and lead-light engineering. At the same time, there has been a 28% expansion in the manufacturing sector over the last five years, particularly in the primary processing sector. Masterfoods is cited as a major employer who have developed from eighty staff four years ago to between three and four hundred currently, with further expansion planned.

**Skills shortages**
The interviewee focussed strongly on young people entering the workforce, claiming the “overwhelming comment from employers is that they can’t find people with a work ethic”. This focus on the need for basic foundation or life skills recurred throughout the interview:

One of the things employers are crying out for is basic life skills. Kids coming through that understand that they need to get up in the morning, they need to be at work on time, they need to be there for 10 hours or 12 hours and they are not going to run the place in the first year.

He maintained employers did not see their responsibility to train people in foundation skills (nor in basic literacy skills). In particular, a lack of these life skills was a possible parenting and a school system issue. He suggested education should prepare people for life and “a major component of their life is going to be their ability to earn an income”. In turn, he argued, gainful employment results in a reduction in crime and in other social ills.

**Literacy skills and communication skills**

Literacy and communication skills were treated as complementary and almost synonymous at times. When asked to define what employers mean when they talk of literacy, the interviewee described basic functional skills as the tools to effective oral communication:

Most people would say that it [literacy] is the ability to write, to recognise the written word and comprehend it. Reading and writing and comprehension, I guess in one slot and then your numeracy. Obviously, the ability to do simple mathematic calculations, add and subtract, multiply in their heads. I think from my perspective it’s broader than that and I just come back to – I think oral communication is part of the literacy thing too. But I think they are all interrelated and a lack of confidence in one leads to a lack of confidence in the others.

Interestingly, when asked what he attributed his own success in business to he replied, “Common sense and communication”. He then went on to describe an inter-relationship of communication and literacy:

It’s about the ability to work in the world, to communicate in the world – and that comes back to the numeracy, literacy thing, even I would say most of it would be the spoken word and the ability to communicate with people and articulate yourself properly. The reality is, I think, if you’re nervous about your ability to communicate in writing you then have a nervousness about communicating in other spheres, and so I think it is – one is important to the other.

The need for an increase in functional literacy skills was linked to changes in the employment context. Non-tariff barriers included the hygiene and sanitation legislation of other countries, which had to be comprehended and dealt with in industries. Within New Zealand there was now a greater need for workers to engage in documentation, form filling, and reading and understanding regulations, as for example, in Health and Safety regulations. Workers in industries where they could previously have functioned with limited literacy now needed higher levels of literacy skills. This was evident, for example, in his description of the meat industry, which also needed “the ability for an individual now to understand instructions both written, oral, or to be able to communicate that to somebody else, a third party.” Auditors now tested people’s com-
prehension skills on the shop floor and poor worker performance in communicating or applying instructions could result in the closure of a plant. At the same time, literacy and communication skills were suggested to be generic across industries: “It doesn’t matter what you are doing, it’s as much about communication and people as it is about process.”

The changes in the workplace that have resulted in a greater need for functional literacy skills are reflected by the greater number of industries who are carrying out pre-screening of applicants. The interviewee mentioned that in a recent pre-screening by Affco, 50% of the applicants failed on numeracy literacy.

In contrast to the government’s concern for the development of a knowledge economy, the interviewee suggested that, while high tech industries in the Wanganui area were experiencing some difficulties in finding people with the relevant skills for computer-assisted design and manufacturing, there was also a real shortage of skills in the more traditional areas of trade such as basic fitter and turners, tool makers, machinists and dye castors.

Of computer skills, the interviewee stated that with the possible exception of the older worker, such skills were not a problem as young people all knew how to use a computer and surf the net, but that did not mean they had good literacy skills.

A distinction was implied between the sorts of skills employers would be seeking for different job levels:

I think if you asked an employer to list the five greatest qualities they wanted from an ordinary employee … they would be talking about their ability to turn up, those basic foundation things. I think if you look at a more senior level either in management or a supervisory level, yes, then you would be looking at communication.

Overall, these descriptions conform to Johnson’s (2000) account of functional approaches that view literacy as ‘a tool to improve workplace communication’ (p. 37). However, they also point to employers’ concern for basic foundation skills as well as literacy skills, and suggest communication skills are of particular importance to career advancement.

Education/Training for employment

In the interviewee’s opinion the old apprenticeship system taught basic work disciplines and foundation skills while training people in specific trades, and he argued that it was a mistake to move away from these traditional training programmes. He felt employers found the new apprenticeship system too difficult to cope with. For example, he argued that the new framework for the engineering industry apprenticeship consisted of 3000 modules, so employers find it too hard to work out which modules are appropriate, and give up, resulting in a big gap in training. Industry Training Organisations (ITOs) work to some extent for the main centres but do not help in the provinces, creating a huge problem with training.

Similarly, the interviewee suggested many training courses were too theory focussed and did not engage in sufficient applied or hands-on training. He also pointed to the way in which gov-
ernment-funded 9.00am to 3.00pm courses did not adequately prepare students for the realities of the workplace which might involve a 10 to 12 hour day.

Employers did not expect to have to train people in basic life or literacy skills, but saw these functions as part of school or pre-employment courses:

They [employers] would expect them to come out ... not only with those foundation skills but also the ability to read a micrometer. To know the difference between millimetres and inches and gallons and litres or whatever. So that they come into the work place and at least understand the basic language and tools. But, ah, the employers don’t see themselves as the trainer. We have a school system.

At the same time, the interviewee acknowledged that employers on the whole would be willing to up-skill workers already in the workforce who demonstrated reliability and a good work ethic in situations where new equipment or demands were made on such staff, for example, computerization of an industry. In such cases, the fact that the worker demonstrated good foundation skills would outweigh their lack of specific new skills that might be required, including specific, vocational literacy skills.

The interviewee also felt there was no alignment between the New Zealand school system, the tertiary system, and the workplace. His reasons for this view form part of the wider social context of New Zealand workplace policies and training.

The wider New Zealand social context: Policies and attitudes to workplace training

A number of interrelated points constitute the interviewee’s view of workplace policies in New Zealand. The first is the way in which the New Zealand education system and society, perhaps in the attempt to work towards a knowledge economy, has created an emphasis on university education and a rejection of training for trades:

One statistic I will give you, 96% of year 13 children said that they had not considered trades as a career. Comments that came back were: “They are dirty, they are for losers, people with no ambition, etc., etc.” So what have we done as a generation of parents and educators? We have told them unless you go to the university and unless you are in technology-type industry, in IT is the one that we are pushing the most. Central government started this by saying there’s no future for agriculture in this country. No future in manufacturing, it will be done in Taiwan and Korea, and agriculture will be too small soon or insignificant. The reality is we still have a high reliance on agriculture and always will as a country. And we will also always be going to have a need for someone to fix our plumbing as they are finding in Japan and other countries. We haven’t trained these people and we have considered the trades to be some second-class introduction— whereas I would argue the opposite. I see those base skills, life skills, as a good platform for someone to develop their own business ... I think that we’ve really done ourselves as a generation a disservice in terms of our youth.
In direct contrast to the notion of building a knowledge economy, then, the interviewee suggested, “IT was the future but of course we all know what has happened with IT, that our market is saturated, technology is drifting in other directions”.

Closely linked to these views is the notion that our society has become too liberal and too politically correct, so a false paradigm of society has been created, “where we have this thing of everybody winning and no losers”. In our school system this has resulted in a movement away from measurement or assessment through tests and examinations. For employers, this has resulted in no benchmarks, and bafflement at the national certificate:

What’s this kid actually good at? They have got a series of marks but it doesn’t actually tell me anything…. There needs to be a benchmark that says ‘yes, you’ve passed’ and ‘no, you are not up to it’ and we can actually hold you back and you can do that subject again.

The interviewee makes the point that people have differing abilities and some may be suited to academic work and others to cadetships or trade where there is a greater emphasis on applied skills. He sees this natural difference in interests and abilities as a case for bringing back streaming:

It doesn’t mean that kids aren’t up to it. But they will have a natural aptitude to one particular thing. They may be very dexterous and very good with their hands; they may have a very good mind for looking at shape and design. And I think we’ve got to spend more time looking at where their skills and abilities lie. And less time on a set curriculum that says this is the way we do it and the end will spit you out. And some will swim and some won’t but that’s not our problem. Well, I really think it is…. I think it’s bloody important. It’s a big philosophical statement I know, but yeah.

The importance of literacy and numeracy skills in the workforce: Statements from the community video

This interviewee subsequently contributed to a video programme about the project, initiated by the Wanganui District Library, which presented viewpoints of concerned Wanganui community agencies and stakeholders (see Community Perceptions section). In the video he reiterated some key points he made in the interview. The first concerns the extent of the adult literacy problem in Wanganui:

I was surprised. We did a needs analysis … recently and that really brought to our attention the fact that Wanganui did have a severe problem in terms of literacy and numeracy with companies reporting anything from 30 to 50% of applicants failing to meet the basic entry criteria. So we found that very surprising.

He also pointed to the increasing need for higher level literacy and numeracy skills in a wide range of industries following the increase in regulation and compliance issues within the workforce, and suggested that where once school leavers could find work with limited literacy skills, this no was longer the case:
Industry across the board, and not just those that have traditionally had a low entry school level, are looking for a greater level of numeracy and literacy. This is coming through particularly in traditional industries like the meat industry, the pet food industries, tanning etc, where there was a time when you could leave school with very limited skills and perform in the workplace adequately. Today, you can’t. Today you actually need a higher level of numeracy/literacy to understand the compliance issues, not just local ones or domestic ones like health and safety requirements in the workforce etc, but also the important country ones, particularly in food safety and hygiene, food handling etc. So it’s very important.

**Employer focus groups**

Two employer focus groups were held, one with small business employers and one with employers from large organisations. While they shared many similarities in outlook, they also dealt with essentially different members of the workforce and faced different issues. Consequently, the findings are given for each group separately.

**Small business employers**

**Skill shortages**

Small business employers felt it was difficult to find people in Wanganui with the skills required for the job, and said they would hire more people if they were available. They said they put in 24/7 weeks themselves to keep their business operating effectively.

While skill shortages were evident in specialised areas such as design, there were just as many problems in obtaining good secretarial staff, people with good word processing and time keeping skills. They were either already employed or just not there. One employer described how he was forced to spend most of his time pushing paper in the office rather than out with the ‘boys’ on the job, and he had his 60-year-old mother doing the office accounts.

School leavers were a primary source of staff. The problem here, especially with specialised skills, was that the employer’s investment in training did not have long-term benefits as young people stayed three or four years and then used their training as a springboard to move elsewhere or go overseas. They do not subsequently return to the Wanganui area. Similarly, one employer quoted a polytech tutor on young people who had got their tertiary qualifications: “They don’t want to waste in Wanganui”.

Like other employer groups in the area, small business employers focused on young people and prioritised basic foundation skills as evidenced in the following statements:

*There aren’t many A grade students. We just want the basic skills.*

*Good thinking. Attitude and aptitude, and that’s pretty hard to come by.*

*Just commonsense is really hard.*
Other qualities looked for in potential employees were integrity, initiative, practicality and willingness to learn. As in the initial interview with the employer’s representative discussed previously, there was general agreement that young people lacked basic foundation skills and had “unrealistic attitudes about working – actually what you have to do to get your income.”

Literacy and communication skills

Perhaps more than any other group, small business employers have more direct interaction with and reliance on their staff and so are more aware of the need for literacy, numeracy and communication skills.

Certainly, small business employers were acutely aware of a lack of numeracy skills among young people. One employer described how he was interested in hiring a part-time College boy but when the 20 applicants were put through “a basic maths test, just someone with a calculator, they couldn’t do it”. In the end he selected a young person with aptitude, practical skills and good parent support, “and I am teaching him the absolute basics at maths”. Another employer pointed out the cost to the business of an employee who could not carry out accurate basic measurements and suggested a lack of concern for such matters on the part of the young person:

If you happen to be a couple of centimetres out, you’ve got 5000 stickers and $1,000 worth of work up the spout. They don’t care. It’s just, ‘Sorry, I got it wrong’.

This awareness of the lack of numeracy skills in school leavers echoes the views of carpentry tutors in the concerned community groups that they had to teach students basic measurement skills (See Community Survey Report).

Basic reading and writing skills were also problems that affected productivity:

If they can’t read written instructions, then they’re not going to get the job done right.

That so many people went through secondary school without being able to read properly was found surprising. One person commented that young people are not able to read for pleasure.

The inability of employees to follow oral instructions well was seen as equally problematic and time consuming. Ironically, this resulted in employers carefully writing out instructions: “We have to write out every step of the way just to get something done”.

Seemingly linked to an inability to follow oral instructions is an inability to record or take accurate phone messages as the employers’ statements below make clear:

They’ll just take someone’s phone number and write it incorrectly.

They hang up and you say, ‘Who was that?’ ‘A man..
The group agreed that problems with basic literacy skills alienated customers and cost businesses money. Young employees have little idea about effective interpersonal communication skills and the need to adapt oral communication styles to the person with whom they were speaking, for example, speaking to a contractor is different from speaking to a lawyer.

However, this was the only employers’ group to mention the shame that resulted from the identification of low literacy in someone and they saw this stigma as comparable to being identified with an STD. The stigma attached to poor literacy posed a difficulty both for employers who had to single out staff and for employees who had to acknowledge they had a problem. Dismissal of such employees was also problematic as this could result in a personal grievance case against the employer.

Education/Training

This group saw literacy problems mainly as systemic, with students slipping through the school system. Employers strongly advocated “a more directive approach to teaching these kids work force skills”. At present, they believed, students do not see the point or relevance of the subjects they study at school. There is a need for these students to be taught to read newspapers and to prepare for the working world. One employer pointed out:

They’re ['kids'] are expected to pay rent and food and they’ll have this much left over. Use examples that actually mean something. That’s why you need to do your sums, add columns straight and know how to use a calculator.

The group also suggested that, like basic skills, a work ethic was non-existent, as were life skills to deal with the practicalities of getting to work:

Knowing how to set your alarm clock. Knowing how to read a bus timetable to get to work.

These problems were seen as systemic and entrenched:

Kids coming from secondary school, they’ve lost their way. So we’re trying to pick up a problem that’s entrenched or we simply can’t because we’ve got too much to pick up and we can’t afford to do all that picking up and training. So we actually need them to come with a basic level of skills to guarantee that they’ve the basic level of skills and enthusiasm and that they’re willing to learn. But it’s gone.

Along with basic life skills, employers looked for basic literacy skills, “practical English skills”, or the ability “to write a business letter”. Given these basic skills, employers stated they were happy to provide on-the-job training:

You don’t mind the specific on-the-job training.
However, training, whether carried out by providers or on-the-job represented a cost to employers and it was suggested employers would be much more receptive if they were subsidized for training:

_We wouldn’t mind training if it was recognised that it costs us money to do the training. I would rather subsidize employers._

There was also some scepticism and perhaps lack of understanding of the NZQA. Laughter greeted the question, does NZQA understand the needs of the business situation. However, one person mentioned that Enterprise Wanganui was running a course on how to understand NCEA and acknowledged the possibility that “Maybe NCEA will work”.

For the most part, small business employers had uneven experiences with workforce training providers. One employer recounted how they had actually gone to a training organisation with students only to be met with resistance from the providers:

_The training wasn’t happening down at those organisations either. It was absolutely shocking. And I’d go down to them with a student and talk to them and I was sort of rubbed out, like you’re just a difficult client, customer, interfering old busy body._

In contrast, another employer described sending people to the Small Business Development Unit as a most positive experience because the study units were so well directed to specific workplace skills. A further issue for employers was the cost involved in day release for staff to take courses, often without a good return to the employer: “For some [employees] it’s like a holiday park –it all comes back to attitude”. There was general agreement that it was important to find the right provider, but this was a real dilemma for employers because there were so many providers to choose from. There was a sense that employers did not have enough information about providers and their programmes. Over-riding this, however, was the view that employers wanted a provider who would carry through and make sure training produced results for the individual worker:

_What you need is a provider with passion to actually see it through. They don’t really care at the end of the day, I guess._

One further issue for employers was that they were sent ill-matched or unsuitable potential employers from pre-employment programmes and government agencies:

_They tell us their sending us the best candidates …it’s exhausted us because we just haven’t got the quality … they haven’t the standards._

Work and Income, in particular, was criticised for providing employers with ill-matched candidates:
We’d never employ through WINZ now. We’ll go down there with a specific detail of what I want, and they’ll send me 20 CVs with nothing like what I want, but at the end of the day it’s just ticking the box.

Employers also expressed considerable dissatisfaction with and resistance to being sent the long-term unemployed as possible workers:

Some of them are unemployable. I don’t know that any amount of training would help.

A final problem voiced in this context was the near parity between the community benefit and the entry level wage, which it was felt offered no inducement for young people to work. As before, the implication was that there were young people out there who were capable of being usefully employed, but the community benefit formed a ‘safety net’ for them which reinforced their lack of work ethic.

Large organisation employers’ focus group

While small business employers are very much at the cutting edge of employment entry issues, employers in the large organisations we spoke with tend to be cushioned from these issues to a great extent by two factors: entry to their workforce is sought after and competitive; two of these companies are in the market for graduates, although one also has a large “hands-on” workforce.

Skills shortages

Despite their interest in graduates, this employer group acknowledged that a tight labour market resulted in shortages at all levels of their organisations:

It’s across the board really. It can be as far as good administrative people, to sales, to even encouraging senior management people to come to Wanganui, and that’s not specifically linked to literacy .... It’s a pretty tight labour market out there and the past six or so jobs we’ve advertised – only one had a decent selection from which to choose.

In contrast to the small business group, however, large employers looked nationally and internationally to fill staff vacancies. They acknowledged that while there were plenty of graduates, they still encountered some resistance to Wanganui as a provincial town perceived to be lacking in the career opportunities offered by the main centres. The large businesses relied on imports, but found that while they could attract graduates, most would move on after a few years. Thus together with the small business employers, this group was affected by the transient nature of the youthful workforce:

We wasted a lot of time and effort and money in employing and training these people only to lose them to somewhere else.
One employer described how his organisation used contract labour to deal with the shortage of tradespeople.

The primary skills looked for in potential employees were adaptability and attitude. Adaptability included elements such as initiative and responsibility:

A person's ability to take responsibility in their position. In order to do that they need to be adaptable to the various issues that come into their ability.

One employer distinguished between part-time and permanent staff to indicate the qualities sought in the latter:

Based on fit and their skills and accessories, also their work attitude, not what they do but how they do it and for, I suppose to a degree, that future potential.

Like the small business focus group, large business employers were concerned about work ethic and attitude, were also interested in the future potential of employees.

**Literacy and communication skills**

For the most part a certain standard of literacy is both demanded and assumed by these employers:

On the shop floor we expect people to be able to read instructions and fill out control sheets. As they work higher up, if they become supervisors, we expect them to use a computer and to fill out Production Incident Reports. If they read something wrong and incorporate the wrong ingredient it could be an expensive mistake.

Some have tests designed to measure the competence of an applicant to perform specific tasks, although there was no specific testing or gauging of literacy levels carried out by these employers. Some employers are therefore cynical about the 'fluffy stuff' found in CVs and employment agency recommendations, as agencies are perceived to have agendas that may not be congruent with the actual needs of the employer:

We don't expect them to know anything much, but if they [the training organisation] suggest they have skill, we expect them to have those and sometimes that's not coming through. You get this fluffy stuff saying, 'We know this and we know that.' In fact, if you gave them a test you would soon discover they couldn't…and sometimes the representation that comes from the agency we contact is contrary to what even the young trainee says.

As a result, some employers require applicants to fill in an application form in front of them. Others ask for a letter of application from which ability with written language is gauged. They acknowledged that problems with writing would be picked up by the requirements of their job application forms, but this would not necessarily pick up problems with reading. One em-
ployer said a certain standard of literacy is assumed to have been established through applicants' tertiary qualifications:

> We just … make an assumption based on what their qualifications are, and assume if they've got a degree or some sort of tertiary education that their literacy would have been already established.

At the same time, there was a general recognition from the group that young people, despite the degree programmes they complete, often have poor mechanics of English:

> They speak a different language and we're talking about kids that have graduated with a Bachelor of Arts. They've done a Diploma course and they come to us and they cannot spell.

> And their grammar is atrocious.

> Oh, their grammar! We won't go there!

This recognition led to further comments that if such poor mechanics were evident in graduates, there must be far worse literacy issues in the rest of the young working age population:

> If that's [graduates with poor mechanics] the top end of it, there must be a mass of people below that are not on these degree courses whose literacy or understanding must be pretty inadequate to say the least, and that is scary.

Such comments reinforced the indications that large organisation employers are cushioned from a lot of the adult literacy problems and issues faced by small business employers.

These large employers' lack of awareness of adult literacy problems became explicit at certain points in the focus group meeting. In line with the unprompted responses to the community phone survey about employment needs in which literacy was mentioned by 5.2% of people (See Community Survey Report), one employer stated:

> I don't think it's [adult literacy] fully understood, and I don't believe people understand how much of a problem it is.

Another employer acknowledged they were not aware of the problem because they did not come across it in their day-to-day experience:

> I think I'd be staggered if I understood how illiterate the average population is. I'm not really exposed to it. I assume literacy is normal.

Linked to these assumptions was a view that because of the various forms of workplace "testings" carried out the “illiterate are not able to get employment nowadays".
Finally, literacy was seen as a form of communication, and the necessity for a range of communication skills from email written communication to interpersonal communication skills was seen as essential:

*Communication in this day and age is more important than ever, and if you can't communicate, and I think literacy is a form of communication, you're at a distinct disadvantage.*

**Education Training for Employment**

To a lesser extent than with small business employers, there was some recognition of a systemic problem in that at least some young people were seen as "lost in the [school] system". The view was "The horse has bolted by the time you have adult problems", and the question was raised of how many young people now read newspapers or books. It was felt television had contributed to this lack of interest in reading by turning information into brief sound-bites, "Fifteen second splurges of info." Positive mention was made of a current television advertisement showing a father reading to his children that contrasted with a television advertisement depicting a young man bringing a box of Lion Red to a book-group meeting was seen as promoting a negative image, "The message is that cool blokes don't read books". At the same time, it was evident that these employers thought of a different level of skill sets when considering training for employees.

There was increasing awareness of the need to support staff training in large organisations. In part, this awareness came from the tightness of the labour market:

*There's nothing like a tight labour market also to drive in up-skilling, because if you can't do it externally, you need to do it internally.*

In one large organisation staff training and up-skilling was seen as an “investment” in associates, and the organisation had a full-time training coordinator and used an Associate Development Model (ADM) with all permanent employees “to train and develop them through a process or a career path,” which started at entry level and included components for succeeding levels from line leaders or supervisors on. Training courses in this organisation were supplied by either internal or external providers and covered both internal technical training and basic communication skills such as presentation and listening skills. These skills were assessed in terms of competencies selected to reflect the various levels or roles in the organisation. Mention was also made of developing a relationship with an ITO such as Competenz so employees could acquire a transferable certificate of unit standards. When asked how well NZQA understands the needs of the business, the responses were as follows:

*The product we put out every day and how well it sells, that’s our NZQA.*

*I think that within the business, though, there are areas that we work in that involve every department that probably run a parallel course. They’re not recognised as NZQA, but there are certain things we’re doing with issues such as Health and Safety, for example, that involve everyone in the company understanding and knowing the process.*
In other words, these employers suggested that they engaged in processes of reading and understanding in the workplace that formed their own, work-based but parallel type of training to NZQA courses.

Overall there seemed to be a preference for vocational context training related to specific competencies identified within the organisation or industry. Linked to this was an awareness of the possible benefits of working with vocational based training providers such as ITOs. There was little evidence of any awareness of the work of other providers, and in particular, of literacy providers in the district. For employers in large organisations, literacy was not a problem they seemed to encounter often in their workforce. Thus, while they acknowledged adult literacy was a major problem in New Zealand, they tended to be removed from the issues surrounding literacy that confronted small business employers on a regular basis.

**In-depth Employer Interviews**

Interviews using the focus group questions outline were carried out with three Wanganui employers who were not able to attend the focus group meetings but who offered to participate in the project. As with the two focus groups, these three employers dealt with very different groups in the community and are discussed in the full Employer Report due out shortly.

The findings from these interviews are congruent with those of the focus groups. There are certainly skills shortages in the area, but there are groups that remain largely under utilized, for example, capable women and unskilled people with a good work ethic.

These employers, like those in the focus groups, value personal skills such as reliability and people skills for good customer service. However, one employer would not employ anybody without literacy skills as they are essential to his customer-focused business. This employer is of interest because he does not have difficulties in finding good applicants for his vacancies.

The employers in these interviews were not aware of any literacy providers in Wanganui.

**Conclusions and future directions**

Like employers throughout New Zealand, Wanganui employers in general report experiencing a skills shortage and a lack of applicants as a result of a tight labour market. This skill shortage is across the board from management or supervisory positions to secretarial or administrative staff. Employers in large-sized organisations look to import people nationally and internationally, and contract out trades work. Small-sized businesses look to attract school leavers, but suggest there are problems as the community benefit is nearly equivalent to entry-level wages. Only the medium-sized business employer in the sample described a range of good applicants from which to select when advertising for staff. This may reflect the nature of his business. Alternatively, the business does not offer a career path as such so it may be seen as a less competitive employment market for women applicants seeking either re-entry to the workforce or part-time work to supplement the family income. Such women may represent an under-utilised potential workforce.
Both small and large employers are affected by the transient nature of the youthful workforce in a provincial economy. Small business employers described a lack of return on their investment in training school leavers who tend to stay for a limited time and then use their training as a springboard to move elsewhere. While one of the large business employers indicated that his organisation regarded their training and career-path planning as a good investment in creating a loyal and motivated workforce, he agreed with another large business employer that young graduates tended to move away from the district after a few years because they perceived further career opportunities in the main centres.

All employers nominated forms of ‘work ethic’ or foundation skills as their primary requirement in employees. Aspects of this work ethic were described as attitude, reliability, integrity, practicality, initiative, willingness to learn, insight, and adaptability. Small business employers who dealt with many school leavers described a work ethic as almost non-existent among young people. Large business employers who dealt with graduates were more concerned with adaptability, initiative, and future potential. The employers’ prioritising of work ethic forms a parallel with the results of the community survey of perceived employment needs, which similarly prioritised work ethic and foundation skills in the unprompted responses (see Community Survey section).

Adult literacy, including numeracy, was acknowledged to be a major problem in the district. A Wanganui Enterprise needs analysis survey found that “Wanganui did have a severe problem in terms of literacy and numeracy with companies reporting anything from 30 to 50% of applicants failing to meet the basic entry criteria”. It was also pointed out that whereas people had once been able to perform adequately in the workplace with limited literacy skills this was no longer the case as a higher level of numeracy/literacy skills was now required to understand basic compliance issues. Despite such acknowledgements of the importance of adult literacy, it was evident employer groups in the sample had very different experiences and awareness of literacy issues in their specific workforces.

In dealing with so many school leavers, small-sized business employers tend to be at the coalface of adult literacy problems. They pointed to the cost to their businesses of employees who lacked literacy and numeracy skills. Such skills were seen to be the basis of effective communication and included giving and receiving instructions, messages and information, interpersonal customer relations, and both following and providing correct information about measurement and volume. There were clear indications that these employers expected employees to already have such skills and felt considerable frustration about having to provide staff with detailed step-by-step written instructions or teaching basic mathematics. While they were open to specific on-the-job training, one employer suggested they should be subsidised for workplace training to compensate for the cost to the employer.

In contrast, the medium-sized business employer was very clear that literacy and numeracy skills were essential to his business and he simply would not employ people who lacked such skills. To ensure this did not happen he carried out a form of pre-screening through asking for letters of application and including numeracy problems in the interview process.
The large-sized organisation employers in this sample were cushioned from adult literacy issues in the workforce because they were primarily concerned with employing graduates. They assumed a certain standard of literacy based on an applicant’s tertiary qualifications. At the same time, they pointed to the often poor mechanics of English displayed by graduates, particularly spelling and grammar.

Significantly, all employer groups suggested that literacy problems are systemic. Small business employers claimed such problems were not only systemic, but entrenched. They advocated that schools take a much more directive approach in preparing students for the workforce. Their position reinforces the view put forward by the employers’ representative of a lack of alignment between the school system, the tertiary system, and the New Zealand workforce. Linked to this view was the claim that the education system has done a disservice to young people by pushing them towards university rather than preparing them for trades or other forms of work that might better suit their abilities.

Employers did not see it as their responsibility to train people in basic literacy skills, although some small business employers indicated that when dealing with a young person with a good work ethic, they did engage in teaching basic numeracy skills. There was much more willingness to provide specific on-the-job or vocational context training. For large employers in a tight labour market, up-skilling their internal workforce was seen as a good investment, particularly as it related to specific, identified competencies within the industry. For the most part, these large employers were concerned to provide their own internally dictated programmes, although mention was made of forming a relationship with an ITO so that employees could gain transferable certificates. However, the employers’ representative suggested the difficulties of linking with ITOs in the provinces.

Overall, there was a general lack of understanding or appreciation of NZQA qualifications, which were difficult for employers to understand as they presented no benchmarks, no 50% pass or fail. Similarly, unit standards in the new apprenticeship system contained a bewildering number of modules for employers to select from and deal with. It was suggested there was too much emphasis on theory rather than on applied skills, and NZQA units were not tied directly enough to the workforce situation and needs. There was a little more openness to the possibilities of the NCEA. These findings indicate a real need both to simplify the NZQA framework and to explain to employers how unit standards are relevant to their workforce.

A further point in relation to small business employers and government agencies is noteworthy. There is considerable resistance to considering job applicants sent from Work and Income because of a perceived lack of ability to match applicants with the employer’s requirements. This resistance is particularly evident towards some of the long-term unemployed. At the same time, the experience of one small employer in the sample, who was proactive in seeking work from employers for his agency clients, suggests an untapped pool of people with a good work ethic are not being fully utilised. Moreover, these people were not generally seen to lack basic literacy skills.
Two findings in this report are of particular significance to issues surrounding literacy and employment. The first is that despite the acknowledgement of adult literacy as a major problem in the Wanganui district, there is limited awareness of the extent of the problem on the part of employers. As was found in the community survey, medium and large-sized organisation employers, like the general public, take literacy skills for granted and assume they are held by most adults. In contrast to small business employers, large and medium employers have not confronted the problem in their workplaces, other than through pre-screening to eliminate applicants with poor literacy skills. Given the current tight labour market, it becomes increasingly necessary for all employers to deal with adult literacy problems. The backing of middle and large business employers is crucial to create positive changes and advancement of adult literacy. While this backing is evident in many of the initiatives in the main centres it is equally important throughout New Zealand, and of specific importance to the Wanganui district.

The second, related finding of significance is Wanganui employers’ lack of awareness of what is offered by providers, and particularly literacy providers, in the area. In our view, the competitive nature of provider funding detracts from the resources and energies they have for publicising their programmes in the community. Employers in the sample clearly stated that they did not know how to select from the providers and that experiences with providers had been both positive and negative; that they saw a primary need to identify the ‘right’ provider and to work with a provider who would carry through training with the individual to the workplace.

Further research is needed to investigate how better to publicise providers’ programmes and to strengthen employers’ sense of the alignment between providers and workplace needs.

This section of the report dealing with employers’ perspectives is complementary to several other research activities being undertaken within the Wanganui Literacy and Employment programme. As noted earlier, the employers interviewed for this report represent a convenience sample, and may have been somewhat more interested in issues of literacy and communication in the workplace than other employers who did not volunteer to participate. Their perspectives, however, were a useful indicator of possible concerns that provided the team with insights into the salient issues, in the views of those interviewed.

Nevertheless, we have noted that key issues and themes identified in this section have also been evident in other strands of the research. These include concerns about systemic problems of preparing individuals for work expectations, and issues of coordination among governmental agencies and community literacy providers. As such, this report provides complementary insights into literacy issues at work to other outputs from this project. Future reports will also attempt to provide interpretation of literacy issues on the basis of triangulated methods and analyses.

A feature of the current study was that strong commonality existed among interviewed employers’ views, with no evidence of very disparate perceptions among the issues covered. An E-survey of Wanganui employers has been designed and is to be actioned later in 2005. Results will add to our information on employers’ perspectives of literacy and employment issues.
While this section of our report deals with employers’ perceptions only in the first year-and-a-half of the literacy and employment research in the Wanganui area, it suggests some important future directions for the project. Most important is the need to create a greater awareness among employers as well as the general public of the extent of the adult literacy problem in the community. There is a need to foster stronger links and interactions between employers and providers. More research is needed to gain a greater understanding both of employers’ definitions of workforce literacies and the requirements of their business situations. Finally, it is important employers across the range from SMEs to large organisations are listened to and that their contributions to issues surrounding literacy and employment are recognised and acted upon.

Section C  Provider Survey Phase 1

The Provision of Adult Literacy Services in Wanganui

During the first phase of this survey our aim was to obtain information on the types of literacy programmes currently available in Wanganui, the number of clients, the funding channels available to literacy organisations, staffing issues, and any general comments about the challenges literacy providers face.

Method

Development of interview questions

Initial interview question topics were developed as part of the research proposal completed at Massey University. Questions were then reviewed by the Wanganui District Library and passed on for review to the library interviewers. The Wanganui District Library and Massey University team met several times to refine the questions further.

Piloting of the questions

The questions were pilot tested by the Library interviewers with the assistance of an adult literacy provider in the Wanganui and Districts community to remove any possible ambiguity of the questions. This process led to further refinement of the questions and a final process to correct formatting and the sequence of questions. Discussions were held between the Wanganui District Library interviewers and Massey University to ensure any possible provider queries during the survey would be answered in a standard way.

Sample selection

A list of known adult literacy providers was obtained from a list held by the Adult Community Education Network (Wanganui), with additional information on other operating providers being ascertained as new research partners joined the project. Thirteen providers of literacy training for adults in Wanganui were approached to determine if they wished to participate in the
survey. Twelve of the thirteen agreed to take part. Every effort was made to include every adult literacy provider in the region who fitted the definition of “providing adult literacy training services as a programme or part of a programme (including those that contract such services, but not referral agencies”). The sample used for the current survey is believed to represent at least 90% of the known literacy providers in Wanganui.

Data collection

Information packs, consent forms, and sheets for pre-recording some of the required data were sent to providers before the interview date. Individual interviews with staff from 12 Wanganui literacy providers were completed by interviewers from the Wanganui District Library, following a standardized format. Interviews lasted approximately one hour, and took place between 11 August and 1 September 2004. Written responses were entered into an SPSS database with answers categorized according to their relevant themes by Massey University. Interviewers also completed feedback sheets on their perceptions of the interviews.

Key Findings

Client Demographics

It is difficult to describe a ‘typical literacy client’ in Wanganui.

- The ratio of males to females varies widely among providers. When calculated as an average, the ratio of female clients was larger (58:42).
- When averaged across all 12 providers, clients with English as a Second Language accounted for approximately 15.29% of the total client base.
- A large number of participants were unemployed (40.5%) or taking part in some form of unpaid work (26.7%). In literacy programmes 20.1% of participants were in work: 15.6% in part-time work. 4.5% were estimated to be in full-time work.
- A high proportion of participants were in the age group 16–19 (accounting for approximately 38% of clients). From this point there was a tailing off of participation in the age groups. Of all age groups, 70 plus was not represented at all, while 60–69 only accounted for an average of 1% of clients. The under 16 age group was very low (3%).

Provider characteristics

- All providers interviewed had NZQA accreditation or had approval of it pending.
- There was wide variety in the length of time providers had been operating in Wanganui, ranging from about two months to twenty years. The average length of time in operation was approximately 8.3 years.
- The number of regular clients currently registered with each provider ranged from 5 to 500.
- The number of regular clients seen per week was generally the same as the number of clients seen per month.
- The number of casual (i.e. unregistered) clients seen was relatively low.
- Initial identification of client need was in most cases made by ‘other agencies’.
• It appeared that the majority of clients were either referred by Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ), or self-referred.
• Nearly 60% of the providers sampled provided services that are specific to certain groups within the population, for example, the Māori population, WINZ clients, or the unemployed.
• The majority of providers used advertisements to let people know about their services. Over 50% also passed on information through outside agencies.

Programme Characteristics

The results obtained for these questions indicated the differences in methods of operation among the providers, and highlighted the difficulty, on occasion, of sharing resources and information when clientele and approaches are so diverse.

• The majority of learners were seen at the literacy programme, followed by other community facilities and the learners’ homes.
• 42% of providers reported that they teach predominantly work-related skills, while 25% reported that they teach predominantly general literacy skills. 25% of providers taught both.
• 33% of providers reported the skills they taught were applicable to general life skills; 25% reported that skills taught were applicable to their course. 42% noted that the spread was about even.
• Most providers preferred the integrated approach to teaching. The most popular skills taught were problem-solving, number, reading and writing, (using an integrated approach) in almost equal proportions.
• The most commonly reported stay for clients was 1–2 years, with 6–12 months being the second most common. The minimum stay was for 1–5 weeks.
• There was a wide range between what different providers accepted in terms of continuity from their clients. This ranged from 5 or more days to 6 or more months.

Addressing Client Literacy needs

• The most common assessment method was by ‘agency-developed test’, followed by ‘client description’ of his or her own skills. No providers reported the use of formal assessment tools. Formal assessment tools were defined here as those nationally and/or internationally standardised tools that are used across all providers. It was found that there is no such thing as a government sanctioned standardised assessment tool for adult literacy in New Zealand\(^2\). However, the providers involved in this survey did make use of rigorous assessment procedures and diagnostic processes, some of which incorporate elements of internationally standardised formal tests.
• Maths was the most frequently reported need, according to 11 of 12 providers. Reading,

\(^2\) It is important to note that progress is being made toward standardised assessment procedures through work being undertaken by the Ministry of Education, Workbase, and other exploratory projects. Also, each provider funded by TEC, makes use of pathway plans and literacy pathway plans for each learner and the development of elements of holistic learning plans for use within provider agencies is currently underway.
spelling and writing were all reported needs by 9 providers. “Other” needs included ‘whole communication field, including verbal skills,’ ‘speaking, listening’, having an attitude to self as ‘dumb’, and lack of self-confidence.

- The most commonly used method of identifying client progress was by ‘informal observation’.
- In terms of progress reports, ‘formal written progress report’ was the most popular type, followed by ‘formal verbal progress report’.
- Training for a job was seen as an important motivator (chosen by 40% of providers), particularly as most of the literacy clients were not in paid employment. Tutor help/expertise was also viewed as an important motivator of clients. 50% of providers reported ‘other’ motivators for clients to improve their literacy skills.
- Eight of the providers reported completion rates of over 80%.
- Personal issues were seen to have a large impact on the participant’s completion or non-completion of the course.
- All providers indicated they use some type of course evaluation.
- Most providers have referred clients to other providers during the last year, although the percentage referred on varied widely. This usually occurred because the other agency provided a different, accredited course, or for the client’s benefit.

**Funding and Resourcing Issues**

- 67% of providers felt their clients were seen as frequently as necessary, while 25% did not think so. 8% reported that this depended on other variables.
- 27% of providers saw their funding as sufficient to cover the amount of time clients should be seen. 27% did not see their funding as sufficient. 46% noted they were funded in a different way, and so could not contribute to the question.
- All the providers reported sharing resources or expertise with other providers.
- Providers mostly shared information with one another, followed by books/library and interestingly staff/trainers/tutors.
- An average of 70.9% of students (across all providers) had been funded by external agencies during the last year.
- All except two providers were funded to some degree by the Tertiary Education Commission.
- The main changes recommended by providers were increased funding for resources, programmes and staff development. There was a great variety of responses to this question, which not only outlines the expanse of the problem, but also highlights the differing needs and range of needs of the providers.
- Many other suggestions for changes to funding were also made for the continued success of adult literacy services in Wanganui, including funding for counsellors, funding to be in specific areas such as employing qualified tutors, funding for advertisers.

**Staffing Issues**
For three providers, the number of employees was about equal to the number of literacy tutors. For eight of the other providers, the number of employees was substantially higher than the number of literacy tutors.

66.7% of providers had staff leave their organization in the last 6 months. The main reason for staff leaving was ‘job elsewhere’.

91.7% of providers had staff join during the past 6 months. The main reasons for them joining were ‘increased job opportunities’ reflecting the increased work demand over this period.

Challenges faced by literacy providers in Wanganui and Districts

- Lack of funding in general was seen as a challenge by nearly 60% of providers.
- It is suggested that this ‘challenge’ refers more to lack of funding for training, resources, etc., than for issues such as client recruitment.
- Many other challenges were referred to, including the need to address multicultural needs, the need for standard assessment tools, and the changing nature of literacy in terms of technology.

Significant changes that could improve adult literacy

- Two providers noted that more involvement and acknowledgement from the community would significantly improve adult literacy.
- Two other providers felt schools needed to play a bigger part in promoting literacy.
- A holistic approach to identifying the need.
- Having more time with the trainees; spending longer on literacy.
- Acceptance of self and the ability to improve.
- Promotion of help available.

Information, resources, or support required for the continued success of literacy services in Wanganui

Many providers chose the ‘other’ category as their response. Requirements included:

- An adult literacy qualification completed by NZQA.
- Adequate funding and pay scales for tutors.
- A professional body for literacy practitioners.
- Increased research and realism about literacy.

General Comments

Providers made many valuable additional comments at the end of this survey. These are summarized under the following themes:

- Great diversity across literacy organizations and approaches.
- The quality of service provision: monitoring is required to ensure standards are met.
- Literacy in Wanganui is worse than imagined. Maths skills have been identified as poorer than English skills.
• Government funders need to recognize that many literacy students require further training rather than moving straight into employment as an outcome of their course.
• There are challenges for small providers as they are required to accomplish many tasks.
• Large variety of learning difficulties to be recognized and catered for.
• Deepening of professional capacity is required: the theory used needs to be as solid as possible around current practice.
• Unit standards are empowering employers to upskill staff.
• Library could have a role as a source of resources for literacy providers.

**Implications from the Provider Survey**

The fact that there was a need for this survey points to some issues of visibility and viability in the sector. Experienced and concerned community agencies had difficulty identifying who was providing adult literacy services as a programme or part of a programme in the Wanganui District. This was partly because the number of providers fluctuated as funding regimes changed – the survey was therefore termed “a snapshot”. The second reason the number and identity of providers was not known was that, for a variety of reasons, community awareness of who the providers were was low. The survey emphasises both of these points.

Client demographics give rise to some questions. There is a heavy weighting of those in the 16 to 19 year age group – probably largely a reflection of funding focus. While there is a significant need to place young people in employment, there is little evidence that literacy problems are restricted to this group. With changing workplace literacy requirements, many in mid-to-late careers face significant challenges. Employers appear focused on the quality of new recruits (see Section B), and the community survey (Section A) reveals some concern with age discrimination. It appears those from middle age onwards may be a neglected group in terms of training provision.

Just over 40% of clients were unemployed or in unpaid work, and gaining employment is a major drive for those who seek training (see Section D). It is perhaps therefore not surprising that gaining employment was a key reason clients did not complete their courses. There is an indication that training schemes that cover the transition to the workplace, or allow for follow-up of some form of “top-up” training would benefit both clients and employers in a time when much initial employment is “flexible” or short term. This would, however, require commitment from both employers and clients.

The variety of programmes reflects responsiveness to client needs and provider demands. However, this and the nature of integrated literacy teaching raise the issue of assessment. Providers used a number of well-established and carefully structured assessment tools. It seems that a commonly accepted assessment tool remains elusive. A discussion from the perspective of providers in the “front line” of whether such an assessment tool is indeed a desirable goal and whether and how key commonalities can be developed appears long overdue.

This first stage of the provider investigation has clearly shown the need for further investigation into the impact current funding systems have on the ability of providers to deliver effective
teaching. However, some concerns arose in the initial round of interviews. Half of those providers who were funded per client believed funding was sufficient to cover the number of clients who should be seen. However, the other half believed the level was insufficient. In a feedback meeting, when results were discussed with representatives from providers (both management and tutors) there was strongly voiced opinion that funding levels were inadequate for the job. Certainly those surveyed expressed a need for increased funding for resources, programmes, and staff development.

There were also requests for funding to be more transparent and for longer than one year. Funding, and therefore course delivery, is contingent on a large number of complex factors that shift in accordance with government policy. This leads to difficulties in long-term planning, employment, training of staff, and in “branding” and visibility issues for providers. This last issue is important as the community phone survey showed low levels of awareness of who could provide literacy support.

Providers believed involvement and acknowledgement from the community could help improve adult literacy. This links with our findings in the community survey, which suggest literacy is a “hidden” or unrecognised problem, and community members do not know where those with literacy difficulties should go. Other providers wanted a holistic approach to identifying the where literacy is needed and for providers to work in conjunction with funders to put such an approach in place.

Providers shared resources and expertise with other providers. There was also considerable “sharing” of staff. However, the major attribute which characterises this industry is the level of inter-agency competitiveness, which is fostered by the funding regime. A number of providers recognised that co-operation and coordination are important and could lead to improved outcomes for clients and providers alike.

Section D  Interviews with participants and non-participants

In-depth interviews aimed at capturing the experiences of those undertaking various kinds of literacy training programmes are the core of this project. As well as discovering the experiences of participants on their courses, we wished to explore certain elements in their family background, including early schooling and learning experiences. We were also interested in how they perceived their learning style, and wanted to discuss with them their employment history, their aspirations, and their community involvement; these being some of the elements mentioned in the literature as likely to have a bearing on literacy outcomes and to be affected by literacy training. The project contains a longitudinal element and we plan to interview as many of these participants as possible twice more over the next two years.

Participants were sought from as many training providers as possible in the Wanganui District. The aim was to interview participants from each course who reflected the range of clients. Because of the collaborative nature of the project and the sensitive nature of the issues to be dis-
closed, working with the providers to identify interviewees and to gain their trust involved time. Eighty-eight participants were interviewed in late 2004 and early 2005.

It became clear that a comparison group of “non-participants” should also be interviewed. These were deliberately chosen to cover a wide spectrum. The majority of the non-participants were sourced through a number of concerned community agencies, through a multiple literacies approach. Some were more broadly representative of the community as a whole and were selected from among the large number of community members who took part in the community telephone survey described in Section A and who had expressed an interest in being further involved in the research. Forty non-participants took part in the interviews, which paralleled the participant interviews, with the exception of questions exploring the participants’ views on their training.

The written transcripts of the one-to-one interviews were studied, which allowed the words used by these interviewees to be considered without knowledge of any respondents’ demographics; therefore, the words speak for themselves.

The categories or codes were derived from interview data by grounded theory approaches (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992), aiming to allow categories and constructs, then collapsed into codes, to surface from the respondents’ own words. By this means we could establish codes well based in respondents’ statements. The aim in each case was to ensure each code could be supported by comments within the transcripts comprising “extensive amounts of rich data with thick description” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 514).

Coding of interview transcript data followed a protocol of line-by-line examination, to surface key constructs or insights, which were then written onto transcripts. It was important to stay in touch with respondents’ viewpoints, yet at the same time prepare codes that would systematise an overview of respondents’ perceptions. In a sense this continuing focus on the words and phrases of respondents, coupled with a schedule of codes, would create a bridge between analysis and interpretation of data, connect respondents’ perceptions and our own, and facilitate a reflexive element within the research.

Examination of emergent codes was supported via use of the HyperResearch data analysis package (ResearchWare: Simply powerful, n.d.). The participants’ and non-participants’ responses will be discussed separately.

**Participants’ Perceptions of Literacy and Employment Needs**

These are preliminary findings based on analysis of slightly over half the participant interviews. Coding is continually refined as data analysis progresses and some categories could be absorbed by others, divided into subcategories, or renamed to better reflect their content as more interviews come in and the overall patterns emerge more clearly. However, these findings indicate emerging themes in the areas of needs, conduits, benefits, learning styles, and coping strategies.
Method

Materials

An exploratory, qualitative interview process was chosen to ensure the participants’ stories were heard, and rich data obtained. The interview structure was developed through collaboration between community partners/subcontractors and Massey University, and consisted of open-ended questions, designated under theme areas and by the key information required. The interviewers were encouraged to be flexible in their approach, and to use the questions and key information required as guidelines to the topic areas they needed to cover in the interview. The interview did not need to follow any particular order, and flexibility to change wording of questions, for example, to reflect interviewees’ way of talking, was also encouraged. The nine theme areas covered in these interviews were: Socioeconomic context (Identity); Schooling (Identity); Learning and Course; Employment (Identity); Motivation; Persistence; Resistance; Barriers; and Power Dynamics.

Procedure to Date

The procedure consisted of a number of steps. First, ethics approval for the interview process was obtained from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee. To ensure informed consent, an explanation and presentation of an Information Sheet to the potential participant was required, together with the signing of a Consent Form, or the audio-recording of verbal consent.

After this process was completed, adult literacy providers in the Wanganui and Districts region were contacted by a community subcontractor and informed of the project, and why we wished to undertake interviews, and the provider was invited to help the project team identify potential participants. (On occasion, participants would self-identify as a result of a direct presentation of the project or from interview invitations to a group of potential interviewees). The adult literacy providers then approached potential participants on the project’s behalf, explaining and handing potential participants the Information Sheet. If a potential participant was willing to be interviewed, an interview time was set up. The participant was offered the opportunity to have a support person present for the interview, if they wished.

Consent to participate in the interview was undertaken at the beginning of the meeting. Time was taken to ensure the participant was comfortable before, during and after the interview process. The interview was audio-taped where the interviewee gave permission for this to occur, and the tapes were then sent back to Massey University for transcribing and analysis (how this analysis was undertaken has been outlined in the report ‘Barriers to Adult Literacy: A Discussion Paper’).

Once the analysis is finished, feedback processes to the participants, community agencies, and other interested parties will begin.

Sample
The sample included 88 interviewees of working age, defined as between 16 and 65 years of age. The participants were undertaking a course of study at one of the 12 identified adult literacy providers in the Wanganui and Districts region. Eighty-three of the participants filled in demographic questionnaires.

Of the sample, 48.2% was male, and 51.8% female. 86.7% reported English as their first language, and 27.7% of the sample stated they were affiliated with an iwi. 47.8% of those affiliated with an iwi reported they were either Whanganui Iwi or Te Atihauaui-a-Paparangi.

Figure 3 shows the age grouping of the sample, while Figures 4 and 5 show the educational achievements and employment status of the participants, respectively.
Figure 5. Participants’ employment status

Findings

Participants - Perceptions of Literacy Needs

To date, analysis has shown participants identifying 23 areas of literacy need. The table below shows these needs in rank order of the number of participants who mentioned them. The third column in the table shows the frequency of comments. This frequency can be taken as some measure of intensity or how strongly participants who mentioned the need saw it as important.

The frame for both participants and non-participants was established around literacy and employment, so the responses tend to be primarily in terms of literacy issues.

Table 12. Participants’ literacy needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy Need Identified</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Computer skills</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training – need one-on-one</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life skills</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maths</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic qualifications or credits</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training needs – other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job specific knowledge set or skills</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Computer skills

Computer skills are the primary need mentioned by 20 participants (44% of those analysed so far), with considerably more total comments than any other need. Typical comments include “There’s a lot more computers in workplaces now”; “Everybody needs computer skills”; “If you don’t know how to operate a computer there’s no way you can get work.”

As well as the ubiquitous nature of computing and the high media profile of “new technology”, the results may reflect that a number of the participants were involved in courses that teach computing skills with a key component of integrated literacy. Computing skill courses are acting to bring young people in particular into literacy training and there is a considerable body of literature and discussion that sees computing as one of a number of “literacies”. The act of “playing” on the internet, in particular, is viewed as an activity through which young people can develop literacy skills they might be resistant to learning at school (e.g., Alvermann & Heron, 2001). In New Zealand, McGregor (2002) found a side effect of introducing computers into low-socioeconomic housing developments that encouraged migrants to learn reading and writing skills to communicate using e-mail.

The importance of technical and functional skills as a related category of needs of participants is discussed further below.

Communication Skills

The next most frequently mentioned need was communication skills, particularly in the workplace. This was mentioned by 31% of the participants whose interviews have been analysed so far. Typical comments here were “You’ve got to get on with everyone”; “Be a good listener”; “You need to be able to relate to people. If you can’t relate to your boss, or your co-workers….”. Again this reflects the high importance placed on communication by the wider community.

This has been linked (see below) to a related category of “whole person development”.

Literacy: the “3Rs”
Although some respondents have included “traditional” or 3Rs literacy as a need, other needs which are not traditionally conceptualised as “literacy”, have priority over reading, writing, and numeracy. The findings in these interviews are similar to what was revealed in the community telephone survey. It is striking how few participants to date nominated reading and writing as a learning need for themselves or their children, even when asked to nominate specific “literacy” needs in today’s society. Instead, they frequently express a need (for themselves or for their children) for positive or aspirational or hopeful attitudes, communication skills, life skills, specific knowledge sets (such as farming), or cultural literacy.

Reading, for instance is mentioned by only one quarter (11) of the respondents analysed so far. It was spoken of as an essential in the modern work environment:

*most jobs come with paperwork that you need... You’ll be in a place that gets faxes all the time. So you’ve always got to read the fax.*

Or it was brought up in relation to safety:

*I work in a machinery factory. You’ve always got to read stuff, because if you don’t know what you’re touching or you’re playing with, you could chop your hand off.*

Numeracy was mentioned by nine respondents, often in a wider, applied context, such as in giving change, or, “the baby has six teaspoons for one litre of milk and you’re making seven litres, you’ve still got to do maths” and even, “maths is all around us”.

Skills in English (such as “a good command of English”) were mentioned by nine respondents.

Writing was mentioned by seven respondents as a need, frequently in the context of filling in forms. The sort of comment below parallels the concerns of employers explored earlier in this paper:

*I was a linesman. When I first started working ... we’d go off and fix pylons; fix it or paint it or whatever. Then like half a year or a year into it we had to write stuff down in our log books, not just for personal stuff but to be sent to the main office. That was a bit of a shock.*

Training- the need for one-to-one training

Eleven of the 45 respondents analysed so far mentioned one-to-one training as being easier and more helpful (if at times more intense). Other training needs were also mentioned, which made this an important category (see discussion below).

Attitude and Life Skills

Related to communication skills was the need for a combination of “positive” attitudes like motivation, confidence, self-belief, and discipline. These were mentioned by ten people. For instance: “I just want to... get up to a standard where I can be respected because I am pretty much an all
right person. It’s just getting stuck in a hole.” Life skills were mentioned by nine people with comments like: “What it takes to actually survive in the real world”, “Learning how to handle money, how to handle peer pressure”, “Time management” and “Punctuality”.

Te Reo and Whakapapa

These have been separated in the combined categories below, but are related. Two interviewees mentioned Te Reo “It is part of New Zealand culture”; “It’s pretty appropriate to use it”. Four mentioned whakapapa; some were beginning to see its importance, while others were actively seeking it, “Te Reo … will help me find my ancestral roots”, or were clear about the importance of whakapapa: “I’m proud to say I come from here”.

Combining Categories of Literacy Needs

The table below groups the participants’ perceived literacy needs into four combined categories: technical or functional skills; whole person development; traditional literacy; and specific training needs. The number of comments made in each area is also listed. The discussion below explains some of the categories not yet mentioned.

Table 13. Participants’ literacy needs grouped into related categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Sub-Category</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-traditional literacy: technical or functional skills</td>
<td>Computer skills</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Job-specific knowledge set or skills</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Te Reo</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Driver’s licence, form filling</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Networking/interviewing skills</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic qualifications or credits</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total comments</td>
<td></td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-traditional literacy: whole person development</td>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Life skills</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whakapapa</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total comments</td>
<td></td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional literacy</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maths</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total comments</td>
<td></td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Training needs:

Specific training needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training need: one-on-one</th>
<th>13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Training needs: other</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training need: feedback</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training group work</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training in own community</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train need: learning how to learn</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total comments 32

Technical or functional skills

Computer skills, as mentioned, led this group. Academic credits and other qualifications were also important: “I need more credits”; “The first thing is a qualification”; “Qualification for meat works, so I can get a job”. Job-specific skills included, “keyboarding and typing skills, accounting” and “food nutrition”. These skills were a driver for training.

Whole person development

This combined category had the most number of comments – indicating its importance to respondents. Communication skills were most mentioned. Understanding, mentioned by two, was also included here as this was seen as the prime need to be obtained through literacy: “to be able to comprehend…to be able to come to any intelligent thought through reading”.

Traditional Literacy

As explained above, these were less likely to be specifically mentioned than were the technical or functional skills or whole person development needs.

Specific Training Needs

These were of particular interest to the ultimate purpose of the study, but this category did not receive a high number of comments. The need for one-on-one training received the highest number of mentions. The “other” category included flexibility, relaxed atmosphere, and providing practical experience. Other comments included the “fun” and “friendliness” of training in small groups, the need for feedback and support, and the need for training in participants’ own communities.

When these codes are grouped into related categories of traditional (meaning traditional Western literacies, or the 3Rs) and non-traditional literacies (meaning new needs outside the gamut of 3R that participants have identified), new, non-3R needs are by far the dominant needs as perceived by our participants, by a ratio of 1:3.4.

Participants—Conduits to Literacy Training
One element of the interviews allowed participants to explain what led them to literacy training. A limited number of cases have as yet been analysed, and so there is potential for more patterns to emerge.

The “conduits” to literacy training are diverse – the least patterned area of response. Often conduits encompass serendipitous and individual incidents that created personal pathways, such as a stand-out teacher, a personal dream that motivated through hardship, or an inspiring role model such as a big sister. There is no standard ‘pathway’ to success in literacy. There is also no correlation yet emerging between a particular learning style and literacy success (although there are much data indicating individuals’ particular learning styles were not catered for in early education and that this was a barrier). When their particular learning styles are catered for, however, learners of various sorts reported being able to ‘blossom’ (in other words no one learning style results in more ‘literacy’ skill than others).

During the course of coding for barriers and needs, it became apparent that many of the participant respondents were talking not only about obstacles and struggles but also about ways in which they had developed their literacy during the course of their lives. A new series of codes was therefore created to record ‘conduits to literacy’. This includes, at a purely pragmatic level, how they discovered the particular literacy course in which they are participating as well as factors that positively influence their learning, such as family environment. By far the biggest conduit to literacy was what might be categorised as internal motivation: having a positive goal that guided them. Also important, however, were external influences, most often from a particular teacher who provided self-confidence and inspiration through positive reinforcement.

Participants – Benefits and positive attributes of courses

Forty-five of the 88 interviews were analysed to define what participants perceive as the benefits of their courses. So far twenty categories have emerged. The key finding is that benefits do in fact extend far beyond the 3Rs. The top four categories are discussed first, then other categories are discussed in terms of two groupings: those connected with the benefits consequent to or correlating with their training; and the attributes of the course they found most positive.

The two most frequently mentioned benefits, according to half the interviews we analysed, are confidence and employment. Confidence gains were significant: “Mate, I’m up there. I’m not frightened any more”; “I’m just loving it. I’m just flying through...”. Often confidence and employment are mentioned in linked contexts, i.e. the course has made participants confident that they can get a job, which has then resulted in employment:

> And I went out and I was so confident it must’ve shone out like anything, because I was so scared about going to get these jobs after 20 years. And all of a sudden I had two and went from there.

As well as actual reports of employment:

> I’ve already had a job out of this course
I’m doing this course to get my reading and writing capability up and try to get a job that I’ll actually enjoy.

The third most frequently mentioned benefit, is improved interpersonal or family communication. Some typical comments include:

*If my daughter comes home with a problem, I can sort it*

*It’s been a real big advantage as far as my personal life’s concerned.*

Another said:

*Before, I used to jump down someone’s throat going ‘Agrrrr!’ And then I’m thinking, well hang on a minute, I was like that. And not everyone is the same. And the first thing I learnt was not everyone is the same. And once I learnt that, well then I’ve got to individually take everyone as they are.*

There is a significant drop to the next most mentioned benefit which is learning reading, writing, and numeracy. These benefits are sometimes transformational: “writing, reading, just huge, just a totally different life” and “amazing”.

However, the group learning and social aspect of the courses is mentioned just as frequently as the benefit of 3R literacy: “The people here are so friendly”; “We all were at the stage where we all started together because we all didn’t know”; “I’m learning to work with other people.” Participants’ own understanding of course benefits relate as much, if not more, to the whole person and their life world, and not only to the mechanics of literacy.

The benefits participants perceived they got from the course are listed in rank order in the table below.

**Table 14. Participants’ perceived benefits (consequent to training only)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Ranking in terms of numbers of comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course benefit confidence</td>
<td>1 =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course benefit employment</td>
<td>1 =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course benefit better interpersonal or family communication</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course benefit skills 3R reading writing numeracy maths</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course benefit life skills</td>
<td>5 =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course benefit motivation</td>
<td>5 =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course benefit qualification</td>
<td>7 =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course benefit skills learning</td>
<td>7 =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course benefit participation (in wider community)</td>
<td>9 =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course benefit skills computer</td>
<td>9 =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course benefit skills time management</td>
<td>11 =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course benefit unlock potential</td>
<td>11 =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course benefit goal orientation</td>
<td>13 =</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As can be seen, participants judged training as important for providing life skills like cooking, “looking after yourself”, budgeting, “treating people with respect”. An equal number of comments mentioned motivation: “to actually get up and be somewhere”, “It gives me a chance to get out of the house” or “I’m really proud of myself … I finally did it”. NCEA and other qualifications were mentioned as key benefits, as was learning a number of skills. Computer skills and community participation were seen as benefits of the course, with several participants saying they had begun some form of voluntary work. A couple of participants said the course had given them time management skills, and two spoke of the course unlocking their potential. One credited the course with improving his/her health: “Don’t drink and smoke now and I’m feeling good, I’m learning”.

The table below groups all comments from the 45 interviews analysed to date that concerned positive aspects of the training itself.

**Table 15. Participants’ perceived positive aspects of actual training only**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Ranking in terms of numbers of comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course positive aspect group learning social</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course positive other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course positive good teaching</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course positive aspect individually paced learning</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course positive aspect positive reinforcement</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course positive aspect one-one-one</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The benefits of group learning and social interaction were first among six perceived positive aspects of the training. The “other” category included a series of remarks about the enjoyment of the course, its difference from school, the sense of mastery students were gaining and so on. There were a number of comments about good teaching: “If you need help, all you have to do is just ask…” “They’re very helpful; they’re probably the best tutors I’ve ever had”. Other comments concerned individually paced learning – “not being pushed too fast.” There were also comments on the amount of positive reinforcement. Some of these showed the vulnerability of these learners:

> I was actually quite amazed on the feedback that I got and I was actually waiting for heckling and laughing and finger pointing and stuff like that, but there was actually none of it … It just made me feel good.

Finally, the one-to-one aspect of some training was seen as beneficial where trainees received help, had things explained or simply were kept “on task”.

Key benefits, then, include confidence, the ability to learn more after the course, and improved interpersonal communication at home or work. It is these factors that appear to lead to improved employment prospects or outcomes, rather than ‘literacy’ itself. The chain of cause and effect may not lead straight from literacy to employment; rather it could lead from literacy to a
range of enhancements in the participants’ selves and communities, such as the ability to speak well in an interview or take up a networking opportunity, positive attitudes in the home, and/or development of a set of life goals. It is these factors that appear to lead to employment.

Participants – Learning styles

This analysis is still very much in the initial stages with only 11 of the 88 participant interviews coded. To date, none of the participants have made any comments that might be interpreted as indicators of a read-write learning style or a theoretical learning orientation. The most commonly referred to learning style is visual, with three interviewees making a total of six comments relating to visual learning. Three interviewees also made five comments indicating an auditory learning style, while two interviewees made a total of three comments that suggested they may have had a kinaesthetic style. Two interviewees made a comment each suggesting they might have pragmatic learning orientation, and one interviewee made three comments indicating an activist learning orientation.

Participants – Coping strategies

Twenty-four interviews have so far been analysed to uncover strategies participants use to cope with literacy issues. Relatively few comments have been made about such coping strategies, probably because interview questions do not directly ask about them. Those strategies that are mentioned include asking lots of questions, sitting back and watching, “bluffing”, and self-teaching. It seems likely the interviewee who described “bluffing” his or her way through school by learning from others has an auditory learning style which was not catered for in school, because as soon as they were able to hear others repeating the information, they were able to recall it: “I could only get back what I’d been told ….. not what I learnt but what I’d been told, not read”. Additional data may indicate that coping strategies relate to learning style in this way (i.e. the coping strategy imposes the learner’s preferred information processing style over what is offered by inserting an additional step in the knowledge transfer process) in other instances.

One interviewee mentioned developing a self-depreciating style of humour as a coping strategy which enabled them to endure feelings of inadequacy about their literacy level.

Non-Participants’ Perceptions of Literacy and Employment Needs

Method

Materials

The interview and interview structures were identical to those described for the participants above with the exception of the removal of the ‘Learning and Course’ theme area from the interview. The eight theme areas covered in these interviews were: socioeconomic context (Identity); schooling (Identity); employment (Identity); motivation; persistence; resistance; barriers; and power dynamics.
Procedure to Date

The procedure consisted of several steps. First, ethics approval for the interview process was obtained from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee. To ensure informed consent, an explanation and presentation of an Information Sheet to the potential non-participant was required, together with the signing of a Consent Form, or the audio-recording of verbal consent.

Community groups, agencies, and employers in the Wanganui and Districts region were then contacted by a community subcontractor and informed of the project, why we wished to undertake interviews, and were invited to assist the project team in identifying potential non-participants. (Sometimes, non-participants would self-identify as a result of a direct presentation of the project or interview invitations to a group of potential interviewees). The community groups/agencies and employers then approached potential non-participants on the project’s behalf, explaining and handing potential non-participants the Information Sheet. If a potential non-participant was willing to be interviewed, an interview time was then set up. The non-participant was offered the opportunity to have a support person present for the interview, if they wished.

Consent to participate in the interview was undertaken at the beginning of the meeting. Time was taken to ensure that the non-participant was comfortable before, during and after the interview process. The interview was audio-taped where the interviewee gave permission for this to occur and the tapes were then sent back to Massey University for transcribing and analysis (how this analysis was undertaken has been outlined in the report ‘Barriers to Adult Literacy: A Discussion Paper’).

Once the analysis is finished, feedback processes to the non-participants, community agencies, and other interested parties will begin to take place.

Sample

The sample included 40 interviewees, of whom all were at least 16 years of age or over. The non-participants were sourced from places of employment and community groups or agencies in the Wanganui and Districts region. All non-participants filled in demographic questionnaires.

The demographic data show that 42.5% of the sample was male, and 57.5% female. In turn, 90% reported English as their first language, and 32.5% of the sample stated they were affiliated with an iwi; 38.5% of those affiliated with an iwi reported they were either Whanganui Iwi or Te Ati-haunui-a-Paparangi.

Figure 6 shows the age grouping of the sample, while Figures 7 and 8 show the educational achievements and employment status of the non-participants, respectively.
As can be seen, a greater number of non-participants than participants were in full-time employment (32.5% vs 3.6%) and in part-time employment (15% vs 10.8%); however, 65.1% of participants were full-time student/trainees, while only 10% of non-participants identified in this way. Non-participants came from across all age groups, with a peak in the 41–50 years of age category (30%); and while participants also came from all age groups, they were most strongly represented in the 16–20 years of age group (47%). Educational achievements were also higher in the non-participant group.
Findings

Non-Participants - Perceptions of Literacy Needs

The following initial findings are based on the 29 non-participant interviews that have been coded to date.

An important point in considering and comparing the findings of non-participants with other groups (such as the community survey through which a proportion also make up the non-participants sample) is that responses to interview questions were framed by the knowledge that the project was about adult literacy and employment. This contrasts with the community telephone survey (Section A) where respondents were asked to comment on employment needs in Wanganui and so provided unprompted or unframed responses until part way through the survey when specific questions about literacy were introduced. Since both participants and non-participants understood the research concerned adult literacy and employment needs, the analysis below retains their discussion of all workplace factors under the overall heading of literacy needs. We suggest, for example, that whereas other groups spoke of computer skills, interviewees were more likely to talk about computer literacy because of the frame of literacy established in their minds.

Top eight codes:

Computer skills

In line with the participants and the community phone survey, computer skills were seen as the most commonly mentioned, single-response need by non-participants. However, the coder noted that one particular interviewer (for the participant interviews only) imposed his/her personal views on the importance of computer skills, pushing them until interviewees acquiesced with a ‘yes’ answer when in fact their initial tendency was often not to mention computers or even to argue that they were not important to them. Even with this caveat, however, computer skills are obviously of high importance to respondents. Illustrative comments on the importance of computers included:

Anybody looking, and I, I say this almost unequivocally, anybody looking for employment in today’s market had better be computer literate, or, or skill up because there’re just not gonna be that many jobs, besides maybe ceramic under-water technologies or something, that you can get in without having, you know, some computer skills, whether it be a keyboard on a terminal as in a bank teller or a cash registers in retail or, network support or whatever it is.

Computer skills were also seen as essential for learning itself:

You have to. Basically, if I need help, the only decent way to get a hold of the tutors is through e-mail.

Communication skills
Again, as for participants, non-participants cited communication skills as the second most important need. Communication skills included interpersonal skills such as teamwork, listening skills, people skills, assertiveness, leadership, and social skills. Most respondents felt being able to understand and communicate was actually more important than traditional literacy, at the same time reinforcing the literacy frame established from the outset:

Social skills are crucial. I mean, I know I should be saying reading, writing and arithmetic, but social skills, confidence and dealing with other people, it’s becoming essential in a lot of ways for getting work.

As with the employers’ representative, there was an emphasis on oral communication skills of social interaction:

It’s about making people feel at ease, making people feel comfortable, making people take that extra step that they might not.

I think it’s really important to be able to communicate, to be able to speak in an articulate and intelligent way.

Such skills included the ability to understand and to communicate that understanding to others in all areas including the workforce:

Literacy is about understanding and then being able to relay that understanding back where appropriate to the world, to your family, to your friends, your job.

Literacy: The “3Rs”

Traditional literacy skills made up the third category of perceived needs. Of the ‘3Rs’, maths was mentioned most frequently, although considerably less frequently than communication skills. Maths was often given as a kind of ‘rote’ one-word answer to questions about literacy needs, almost an auto-response as it were, without an elaboration of how or why it might be useful. Again, while this reflecta the prioritising of maths over reading and writing in the phone survey, especially among young people in the 16–19 age group, it contrasts with the participants’ nomination of reading more often than mathematics. Some respondents also explored what maths might mean in their lives and workplaces. Of the latter types of more exploratory answers, some illustrative ones were:

reading a measuring tape

dealing with money

Maths, definitely, if you were working on the till

Actually, mathematics is in all sorts of different ways. It’s in budgeting. It’s quoting. It’s working out what size canvasses to work on. Converting inches to millimetres
Mathematics, I don’t give much time for, as long as you can basically add up how much things cost.

Reading was the next most frequently cited traditional 3R need, again often simply given as a one-word response. Some of the more expansive responses included:

read my letters from the welfare, read the newspaper you know you can advance yourself

I’ve definitely got into a lot more reading at the moment, and just…broaden my mind.

The responses included recognition of the need for reading and comprehension skills at all levels of the workplace. As in the employers’ perspectives, there was an implicit recognition that whereas once people with low literacy were able to operate adequately in the workplace, this was no longer possible and would impede both employment opportunities and any career progression:

In almost any job now you’ve got a deluge of reading to do, in whatever form, electronic or otherwise. You’ve got to be able to read. You’ve got to be able to absorb it. You’ve got to be able to either scan and read in detail and absorb what’s in there and it’s necessary now, at all levels, somebody just joining as a call centre operator, through to somebody joining as an executive manager. The volume that you must be able to absorb, assess and then regurgitate in some other form is just massive and those who have difficulty with reading are just left way behind. They’re soon pushed sideways and somewhere out the door, and end up in not in an appointment that’s going to give them a true career option.

One person pointed to the increased compliance demands of the workplace:

You’ve got to be able to read the…the compliance book, understanding the codes and all that sort of stuff.

Another person linked reading to greater empowerment through self-determination:

I think if you have the ability to, to read, comprehend, explore, you, you have a great influence over your self-determination.

The fifth most commonly cited literacy need was also a ‘3R’: writing. Again, it was often listed without exploration of application, but when its uses were explored, typical comments included:

We have to do our notes after each shift. If we’re assigned so many patients each shift and you have to do a report on how they presented in that eight hour shift and anything that’s happened. So yeah, there’s writing. And you have to be precise and you can’t be subjective. You have to be objective. So you’ve got to know how to word things.

Attitude and Life Skills
The next most commonly cited need was attitude. Often it was felt that the mechanics of traditional literacy could not be addressed until either a work ethic or a desire for literacy (or rather goals to which literacy was a pathway) was in place. This relates to the ‘goal orientation’ category identified as a common barrier by participants and non-participants alike. It also links with the employers’ prioritisation of basic foundation skills such as work ethic, reliability, attitude, and adaptability. Set within the frame of literacy needs, the non-participants demonstrated a broader understanding of workplace demands that takes literacy beyond the ‘3Rs’ and suggests the primary importance of life or foundation skills:

Oh, basic…you know, time…turning up for work. Reliability. Attitude is the next biggest thing because it doesn’t matter what people know. It doesn’t matter what their intellectual ability is. It doesn’t even matter if they can read or write. If they have the right attitude they can learn.

Attitude or life skills included self-motivation:

You’ve got to be self motivated.

Non-participants suggested that ‘attitude’ or life skills were not taught at school:

Well, you need a certain amount of numeracy of course. But you need to have attitude and attitude is such a…like you need attitude in all sorts of different ways. It’s something that is never taught at school and it’s something that you acquire by being involved.

Another non-participant described life skills in terms of manners and pointed to the often destructive or negative outcomes of ‘bad manners’ in childhood:

When you think about how kids relate to parents, the opportunity the parents or older people have…they have huge skill sets, huge knowledge base, huge wisdom, huge everything and the child can turn off the tap to that resource instantly with bad manners. It sounds old fashioned but jeezers, when kids have bad attitude, bad manners you think, “Well, stuff you then.” And so even though it’s one of those…it’s not one of the three ‘R’s’, it actually is very, very destructive in all sorts of other ways.

Training

Training needs (other) was the next most common category, although in contrast with participants, non-participants did not emphasise a need for one-to-one training. Future coding will probably split this category into distinct sections once clearer patterns emerge, but it currently covers things such as teaching style and training not being perceived to meet cultural or interest needs. One person suggested the need for training to tap into self-interest as a basic motivator:

So if you’re involved in learning, you’ve got to look at that in a sense of where is the skills, where is the interest base? All learning is interest based. And all learning is basically self interest based. So tapping into that is really huge.
And, as with employers, there was an emphasis on training related to specific and identified needs within the workplace:

There such a lot of waste, I think, of our skills and our direction. We really, really need to refine that. To develop it and refine it so that skills are specific to the need. Specific to needs and specific to the needs of the people in the group.

Some comments referred directly to preferred instruction styles and learner reactions. For instance, one person expressed the need to be given space to carry out tasks:

I’m not a person to have a person stand over me all the time. They need to show me what I’ve got to do and then I attack it and if I don’t get it right, then I’ll come to them, rather than a situation where they’re sort of standing there and watching everything I do. Then I would probably go to pieces I think. I wouldn’t like it.

Te Reo and Whakapapa

The eighth most commonly mentioned literacy need was for learning about whakapapa to be incorporated into literacy learning. This was a key motivator some nonparticipants felt might have encouraged them to join literacy programmes, if they had known it was available (although some others mentioned that it was not important to them at all). Although Te Reo was not specifically mentioned as in participants’ responses, it was apparent that whakapapa was clearly linked by nonparticipants with a sense of identity, as the two following comments illustrate:

I want to find my whakapapa, but I don’t know how to go about it. I’ve always wondered… It would give me a cloak, I’ve always wanted to know what my roots were and I just feel I’m not a whole person without it.

Your family history is extremely important, because that’s who you are and if you haven’t got that rock of who you are, you’re going to flounder in life as I’ve seen with a lot of people.

General Data Patterns (Collapsed categories)

As can be seen from the collapsed categories table (Table 16 below), ‘non-traditional forms of literacy’ (termed by other groups such as employers and the community as foundation skills, life skills, communication skills) far outweigh traditional forms of literacy in nonparticipants’ perceptions of their needs. This is despite the fact that many have an initial automatic ‘3R’ response in their first answer to needs questions. Nonparticipants were also concerned that training, if they were to attend any, should meet specific needs such as being particularly relevant to their workplace, helping them think or learn for themselves, and being available within their own communities. Finally, some nonparticipants are focused on needs beyond literacy itself, such as getting an academic qualification or NCEA credit, learning how to fill in a specific form, or becoming qualified for a particular trade or occupation. For example, one says “If you are going to be a hairdresser you will need to know something about chemistry and biology.”
Table 16. Non-Participants’ perceived needs (collapsed categories)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Need</th>
<th>Total comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Computer skills</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whakapapa</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life skills</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health education</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural literacy</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research skills</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te Reo</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilingualism</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving skills</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-traditional literacy needs</strong></td>
<td><strong>150</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maths</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional (3R) literacy including English</strong></td>
<td><strong>82</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training needs other</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training applied learning</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training need learn thinking</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training in own community</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train need Learning how to learn</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training groupwork</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training need feedback</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training need one-on-one</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specific training related needs</strong></td>
<td><strong>41</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic qualifications</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific knowledge set or skills</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driver’s license form filling</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specific functional outcomes of literacy</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Non-participants – learning styles
As with participants, this analysis is still in its initial stages. Comments are indicative of styles only, as none of the interviewees responded to a specific question about learning style or identified themselves on the basis of having been given more detailed information about what constitutes a learning style. To date the majority of interviewees made comments suggesting an activist learning orientation. Many non-participants also made comments that orient them towards either a likely visual or kinaesthetic learning style involving watching or physical movement. At this point in the coding, in contrast with participants (visual), the most common learning style referred to by non-participants is activist, with six interviewees making a total of 12 comments relating to activist learning. Four non-participants made eight comments relating to a visual learning style, while four others made five comments indicating they may be kinaesthetic learners. Two interviewees made five comments suggesting a pragmatic learning orientation, and two others made four comments indicating an auditory orientation. The read/write option, which is sometimes included in visual learning style, was mentioned by three interviewees in three comments. There was also one theorist comment and one reflector comment. Future work is planned to explore learning styles further in relation to literacy.

Non-participants – coping strategies

To date non-participants have rarely reported using coping strategies. In fact only three have done so, making four comments in total. One non-participant’s experience was of particular interest, commenting that an administrative assistant did all typing, e-mailing, and computer use on their behalf. This respondent elsewhere indicated they were a company director, property developer, significant employer in the community, and had been a city councillor at one stage; roles that indicate quite usefully the concept of multi-literacies. The respondent had found a way around what might be termed low technological literacy by using their strengths in other areas, and their participation was not impeded.

Participants’ and non-participants’ background attitudinal and empowerment indicators (self-reported)

This section addresses participants’ and non-participants’ responses to questions about voting participation habits (never, sometimes, always, undecided), communication style in a situation where they felt they were not listened to (assertive, passive, or aggressive), and attitudes towards work for the dole schemes (in favour, opposed, undecided).

This is based on the 45 participant cases and 29 non-participant cases coded to date. Although these samples are of different size and therefore comparisons should be made with caution at this stage, this does roughly represent similar proportional ratios to the final samples, so could be considered to provide at least some early indication of differential attitudinal and empowerment perception issues for these groups.

The initial comparison of participants’ and non-participants’ percentage responses to these questions suggests participants may be: less likely to self-report assertive responses to a question about their likely behaviour in a challenging communication situation; more likely to report passivity; less likely to report regular voting behaviour; and more likely to be polarised in
their attitudes towards work for the dole (they appear both more supportive of it and more opposed, while non-participants appear less certain and tend to see more issues that would need clarification and examination before confirming a viewpoint). From the sample groups so far, non-participants would typically seem to characterise themselves as more assertive (55% of their comments were assertive compared with 31% of participants’ comments), more participative in voting (56% of comments suggest they always vote compared with 41% of participants’ comments), and more likely to elaborate on a community political issue rather than offer a definite conclusion (65% made comments categorised as unsure and raised complexities, compared with 24% of participants’ comments). These are early indicators, however, and more data are needed before firm conclusions can be drawn.

Codes and typical illustrative comments are below:

Table 17. Codes and illustrative comments

| Not listened to Aggressive | “I get quite frustrated”
|                          | “Bash them”
|                          | “I’ll say to ‘em, ‘you’re obviously a wanker’”
|                          | “I’d probably get louder and louder and louder until they had to listen to me”
| Not listened to Assertive | “Well, the first thing I think about is why they’re not listening to me: 1) either I’m right and they don’t want to hear it, or 2) is that I’m just talking out my ass, and that’s when I stop and think about what I’m saying and try and say it a different way or tone down the agro”
|                          | “I’d ask them a question”
|                          | “I stood up for myself … I argued my case”
| Not listened to Passive   | “I just don’t listen back”
|                          | “Walk away”
|                          | “I slink away and stay away”
| Voter always             | “I’m a voter. I always like putting my voice into anything I can”
|                          | “You can’t complain if you don’t vote”
| Voter never              | “I should, but I don’t.”
| Voter sometimes some modes | “I haven’t voted the last local body election because I wasn’t…I hadn’t got myself back on the roll since I went to England so I was a bit slack in that regard. But, yes, I do vote for national elections. I’m not really into the politics of it”
| Voting undecided         | “I’m not too sure [if I’ll vote] … I’m not a very political driven person”
| Work for dole no         | “Why don’t they just get all these people jobs, then?”
| Work for dole undecided see various issues | “It’s a question that’s fraught with emotional fish hooks. To be quite honest, I just don’t know”
| Work for dole yes        | “I think it’s a good idea, provided that they are able-bodied people who can work”
|                          | “I’d have to agree with that because some people out there take advantage or it, or don’t really try hard enough to get a job”
### Table 18. Participants’ self-reported communication styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not listened to Aggressive</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not listened to Assertive</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not listened to Passive</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Pie chart showing communication styles of participants]

### Table 19. Non-Participants’ self-reported communication styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not listened to Aggressive</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not listened to Assertive</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not listened to Passive</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Pie chart showing communication styles of non-participants]
### Table 20. Participants’ answers about work for dole schemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided see various issues</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Pie chart showing the distribution of responses among participants.

### Table 21. Non-Participants’ answers about work for dole schemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided see various issues</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Pie chart showing the distribution of responses among non-participants.

80
### Table 22. Non-Participants’ self-reported voting behaviour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voter always</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter never</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter sometimes some modes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting undecided</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Pie chart showing voting behaviour distribution](chart1)

### Table 23. Participants’ self-reported voting behaviour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voter always</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>41%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voter never</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter sometimes some modes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting undecided</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Pie chart showing voting behaviour distribution](chart2)
More interviews need to be coded and further analysis completed. Further cross-matching reports need to link the various themes to see whether there are any significant correlations. The following questions would be useful to explore attitudinal and empowerment indicators:

- Does an aggressive communication response to present situations correlate with less likelihood of voting? Do these correlate with needs not being met at school, learning style barriers, or any other barriers?
- Are there differences between participants’ and non-participants’ communication responses to present situations? If so what?
- Do geographical isolation/transport difficulties correlate with any other factors in particular?

It may also be useful to map barriers and conduits for the location of images of empowerment and disempowerment – are there patterns between participants and non-participants in terms of barriers being perceived as individual, community-wide, or institutional?— and map attitudes towards literacy against voting attitudes and assertiveness to check for correlations (if any).

Such comparisons could uncover whether the attitudinal shift mentioned by many of the participants (‘I woke up’) could be defined more clearly (for example, is it a shift from feeling powerless to feeling empowered at an individual level, an institutional level, or some combination?). Can we better define ‘it’ (the factor that participants believe motivates their learning), and therefore can we determine whether this factor can actually be taught, or focused on in marketing, or otherwise developed in individuals, communities, or institutions as a precursor to ‘literacy’ training? How does this ‘shift’ relate to taking personal or communal responsibility?

**Possible Areas for Development**

1. **Learning styles:** What learning styles do participants and non-participants exhibit? Which learning styles appear least catered for among interviewees’ accounts of their educational history, and what coping strategies have they therefore used? How might the specific data from this particular study contribute to the growing understanding in pedagogical theory in general of how education (both compulsory and post-compulsory) can better cater for all learning styles?

2. **Literacy:** etymological historiography and problems with current uses of the term (apparently, literacy first appears in English in 1883, but illiteracy dates back to 1660 – so the word literacy is already a reactive term that presupposes the existence of a negative, a ‘lack’). Why is it a problem term (both in terms of theory and in terms of practice, as per the data from this research), what alternatives might be better, and why?

3. **Needs:** Is there a mismatch between what people say they need and what educational policy says they need? How does this fit with what employers say they need? (In other words, are the institutional requirements for literacy attainment mismatched with
community and individual requirements for literacy performance?) How can all the needs be made to match with what is delivered?

4. **Measurement**: How can the measurement of literacy outcomes better reflect the benefits that participants actually believe they receive?

**Overall Key Implications**

A summarised version of the key implications from the various perceptions outlined in this report is provided here.

**Community**

There appears to be low awareness of the relationship between literacy and employment, which indicates that adult literacy may be a hidden issue in the community. Yet when prompted to respond to literacy skill questions, respondents agreed overwhelmingly that the ‘traditional’, basic skills of reading, writing and ‘adding’ are needed to gain employment. Overall, however, the difference between the unprompted skills (where literacy was identified by few) and the prompted responses supporting the link between literacy and employment indicates strongly that most people in the community take adult literacy skills for granted and assume that they are held by most people. This in turn suggests that both the government and providers need to publicise and raise community awareness of adult literacy as a major issue in our society and a basic prerequisite to employment.

Overall, there was lack of awareness of the specific literacy providers in the region to whom people with problems could go for assistance. A recommendation is first to increase public awareness of the extent of adult literacy problems, and then to publicise support agencies and providers more effectively.

For the most part, the willingness to undertake further training or education was linked to job prospects and career opportunities. This supports arguments for vocational context training. However, it does not address the points made by concerned community agencies of the need for basic literacy skills as part of a social justice perspective; for example, the police view that an increase in literacy will reduce re-offending rates.

**Employers**

Like employers throughout New Zealand, as a result of a tight labour market, Wanganui employers are experiencing a skill shortage and a lack of applicants from which to select. Adult literacy was acknowledged to be a major problem in the district. It was also pointed out that while people had been able to perform adequately in the workplace with limited literacy skills, this was no longer the case as a higher level of numeracy/literacy skills was now required to understand basic compliance issues.
While all groups of employers argued that literacy problems were systemic, small business employers claimed that such problems were not only systemic, but entrenched. They advocated that schools take a much more directive approach in preparing students for the workforce. Their position reinforces the view put forward by the employers’ representative of a lack of alignment between the school system, the tertiary system and the New Zealand workforce.

Employers did not see it as their responsibility to train people in basic literacy skills. There was much more willingness to provide specific on-the-job or vocational context training.

Overall, there was a general lack of understanding or appreciation of NZQA qualifications. It was suggested that these qualifications were difficult for employers to understand as they presented no benchmarks, no 50% pass or fail. These findings indicate a real need both to simplify the NZQA framework and to explain to employers how unit standards are relevant to their workforce.

Two findings in this report are of particular significance to issues of literacy and employment. The first is that despite the acknowledgement of adult literacy as a major problem in the Wanganui district, there is limited awareness of the extent of the problem on the part of employers. Given the current tight labour market, it becomes increasingly necessary for all employers to deal with adult literacy problems. The second related finding is Wanganui employers’ lack of awareness of what is offered by providers, and particularly literacy providers, in the area. In our view, the competitive nature of provider funding detracts from the resources and energies available to publicise their programmes in the community. Employers in the sample stressed they did not know how to select from the providers and that experiences with providers had been both positive and negative As a result, they saw a primary need to identify the ‘right’ provider and to work with a provider who would carry through training with the individual to the workplace.

**Literacy Providers**

Experienced and concerned community agencies had difficulty identifying who was providing adult literacy services as a programme or part of a programme in the Wanganui District. Some provider agencies reported that they felt there was a lack of coordination and interaction in the sector (this was not necessarily true of everyone’s experiences, but is a reflection of some providers’ views).

Client demographics of adult literacy providers show a heavy weighting of those in the 16 to 19 year age group. While there is a significant need to place young people in employment, there is little evidence that literacy problems are restricted to this group. With changing workplace literacy requirements, many in mid-to-late careers are facing significant challenges. It appears the latter may be a neglected group in terms of training provision.

Just over 40% of clients are unemployed or in unpaid work, and gaining employment is a major drive for those who seek training. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that gaining employment was a key reason that clients did not complete their courses. There is an indication that
training schemes that cover the transition to the workplace, or allow for follow-up or some form of “top-up” training would benefit both clients and employers.

The variety of programmes reflects responsiveness to client needs and provider demands. However, this and the nature of integrated literacy teaching raise the issue of assessment. While providers used a number of frequently well-established and carefully structured assessment tools, it seems a commonly accepted assessment tool remains elusive.

This first stage of the provider investigation has clearly shown the need for further investigation into the impact current funding systems have on the ability of providers to deliver effective teaching. While half the providers who were funded per client believed that funding was sufficient to cover the amount clients should be see; the other half believed the level was insufficient. There were also requests for funding to be more transparent and for longer than one year. Funding, and therefore course delivery, is contingent on a number of complex factors which shift in accordance with government policy. This leads to difficulties in long-term planning, employment and training of staff, and in “branding” and visibility issues for providers. This last item is important as the community survey showed low levels of awareness of who could provide literacy support.

Participants and non-participants in literacy programmes

As the analyses of participants and non-participants have not yet been completed, it is premature to infer any implications.

Future Direction of the Project

The Literacy and Employment Project future directions include finalising the above data and several further methodologies, including:

Provider Survey Phase Two

The objective here is to provide more in-depth information about the key issues identified in the phase 1 interviews and those issues raised by the providers in the feedback meeting.

The following main research themes emerged from the provider feedback meeting held in March. Questions about these theme areas were developed in consultation with Massey University and Wanganui project partners.

Course/teaching details – range of services and programmes provided by each organization.

Differing Perspectives of literacy—Definitions of literacy from the perspective of staff, providers and associated organizations, staff individually and collectively, and funding bodies; and how these impact on key goals and values of each organization.
Support services for clients and their needs. Support given by providers to meet social/personal problems of clients.

Quality assurance/measurement. Methods used to assess initial needs of clients, measure progress of clients, and review performance of each agency in terms of meeting its goals and objectives. Methods of reporting required by funding bodies and any impact of this on the provision of literacy services.

Funding/resourcing – Levels of funding and resourcing in context of learners’ needs?

Māori learners’ needs – elements of programmes designed specifically to meet needs of Māori clients.

Identification of other cultural groups with specific literacy needs.

Governance – descriptions of management structures and relationship of providers to their governing bodies.

Working relationships with other providers of adult literacy in Wanganui.

Provider involvement with community and statutory organizations.

Barriers to effective service provision.

*The Process*

It was decided during the development stage to interview both management and literacy practitioners from each organization to ensure both perspectives were captured.

Fourteen providers of adult literacy in Wanganui were identified and contacted by telephone to ascertain their willingness to participate.

Information sheets and consent forms were posted out and appointments made for interview. These interviews are currently being conducted by two researchers from Wanganui District Library and are being tape-recorded to ensure accuracy and that maximum information is obtained. Consent to be tape-recorded has been obtained before each interview.

To date, approximately 90% of interviews have been completed and are now being transcribed. It has been found that several of the identified providers were not currently providing literacy services or were not available for interview.

Following transcription, the qualitative data obtained will be analysed at Wanganui District Library with the assistance of the Massey team.

*Expected Outcomes*
It is envisaged the data will be sorted into major themes for qualitative discussion. Where possible, comparisons will be made between perspectives of management and teaching staff. It is expected the information contained in the final report will describe in depth the major issues currently facing literacy providers and offer possible solutions. It is hoped that it can be used as a planning tool for the future.

**Participant and Non-Participant In-depth Interviews**

The second round of the participant and non-participant interviews is scheduled to continue in September/October 2005. Collaboration on the questions will take place between the Community and the University to explore issues identified in the first round, as well as changes and events in participants and non-participants lives since their last interview.

**Employer E-Survey**

An employer e-survey has been circulated to all 900+ employers in the Wanganui and Districts region to gather information from those employers who do not have the time to participate in a focus group or in-depth interview. The survey questions are similar to those used in the previous methodologies, although they have been re-formatted to fit within a survey design.

**Case studies and Action Research**

One action research project is currently in development with an adult literacy provider interested in examining the effects of self-reflection strategies on literacy learning. A case study investigating the range of impacts in both personal, social, and employment spheres of participation in Enhanced Task Force Green is also underway. Three other action research/case study programmes are currently in the initial stages of development.
References


Feedback Sheet

We welcome your feedback to the ideas in this paper and have provided a number of methods of contact. You may wish to email us or you may want to write to us.
Send an email to: N.S.Culligan@massey.ac.nz The following feedback sheet can also be used.

Feedback to “Perceptions, Needs & Issues: A discussion paper.”

Name: ______________________________________________________

Contact Telephone:_____________________________________________

Company Address:  ____________________________________________

Email:  ______________________________________________________

My comments are:

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

Freepost Authority No. 114 094
Niki Culligan
Massey University
Private Bag 11-222
PALMERSTON NORTH
Or fax to: Niki Culligan
(6) 350 5889
Appendix A

Community Survey: Employment-related Skills

Good morning/afternoon/evening sir/ma’am.

My name is __________ and I work for ConsumerLink, a Market Research Company, that is currently contracted by Massey University to survey people in the Wanganui area.

We are currently gathering information from people on their views on employment issues in Wanganui.

By answering the questions you indicate that you are happy to participate in the research. You do not have to answer any question that you do not wish to and you can stop the survey at any time. This interview is strictly confidential. Only the collective results will be used in the research.

Could you please spare ten minutes of your time to go through some questions? Yes/No If No, thank the person.

Just a recap of what the survey is about: This is a collection of your opinions and views on employment issues facing people in the Wanganui and Districts area.

1. How easy do you think it is to find a job in Wanganui?
   
   Very easy
   Easy
   Not easy
   Don’t know

2. For people who are trying to get a full-time job in Wanganui, what are the main barriers?

3. What do you consider to be the most important skills for people currently looking for jobs?

4. Please respond to the following statements, on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is strongly agree, 2 is agree, 3 is neither agree nor disagree, 4 is disagree, and 5 is strongly disagree.

   The reason people can’t find jobs in Wanganui is because they don’t have the skills for the jobs. Basic reading skills are needed to gain employment.
   Basic writing skills are needed to gain employment.
   Basic number skills are needed to gain employment.
   Basic computer skills are needed to gain employment.
5. **Do you know of any adults among your family and friends in the Wanganui area, who struggle with reading, such as having trouble reading a newspaper like the Midweek or the River City Press?** *Yes/No*

If yes, how many?

If yes, does this affect them in the following areas?
- Filling out forms such as job applications (*Yes/No*)
- Understanding documents such as insurance claims (*Yes/No*)
- Reading medical information such as reading prescriptions (*Yes/No*)
- Reading the road code (*Yes/No*)

6. **Do you know of any adults among your family and friends who have problems with number skills, such as simple measurements or adding up the cost of a few items?** *Yes/No*

If yes, how many?

Where or to whom would people with any of these difficulties go to improve their reading, writing and/or number skills?

7. **What do you think would stop people seeking help if they have problems with reading, writing or number skills?**

8. Please indicate your attitude to the following statements, on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is strongly agree, 2 is agree, 3 is neither agree nor disagree, 4 is disagree, and 5 is strongly disagree.

- Learning ends when you leave school.
- The school system succeeds in teaching the basic skills of reading and writing
- The school system succeeds in teaching the basic skills of arithmetic
- Schools need to make sure everyone knows their times tables
- The school system succeeds in teaching the basic skills of computing

9. **What might make you personally decide to seek further training or education?**

Now we have a few final questions about you.

10. **What part (suburb) of Wanganui do you live in?**

11. **What year were you born?**

12. **Are you male or female?**

13. **Which most closely describes your educational achievements:**
Primary school only
Up to 3 years secondary school
Four or more years secondary school
Up to 3 years tertiary education (polytech, university or other training institute)
Three years or more of tertiary education

14. Do you have access to a computer? Yes/No

If yes, on average, how often would you use a computer?
Daily
Twice or more a week
Once weekly
Less than once a week

If yes, is this access at (you may choose as many as you wish)?
Work
Home
Family or friends house
Community such as a library
Community such as an internet café
Other, please specify:....

15. What most closely describes your current situation? (you may choose as many as you wish).
In paid employment 20 hours or more
In paid employment up to 20 hours
Not in paid employment
Self-employed
Retired on pension
Student
Caregiver
Receiving a benefit

16. Which of the following ethnic groups do you identify with? (you may choose as many as you wish).
NZ Māori
European New Zealander
Pacific Islander
Asian New Zealander
Other, please state:....

17. Do you have any tribal/iwi affiliations? Yes/No

If yes, what iwi do you identify with (may choose more than one)?
What is your first language?

English

Māori

Other, please state: …

18. Would you be interested in being contacted at a later date to potentially participate in another aspect of this study? Yes/No

If yes, could we please have your contact details?

First name: ……………………………………………………………

Contact Phone Number: ………………………………………

19. Would you be interested in receiving a summary of the findings of this survey? Yes/No

If yes, summary results will be available on the internet from the 31st of August at literacy.massey.ac.nz. Otherwise you can pick up a copy of the summarised results from the Wanganui District Library or the Wanganui District Council from the 31st of August, or we could post you a copy if you would like?

If yes, could we please have your postal address?

Address: ……………………………………………………………………..

………………………………………………………………………………

That’s the end of the survey. Thank you so much for your time.
Appendix B

Questions for Employers’ focus groups
9 March, 2005

1. How aware are you of skills shortages in Wanganui and Districts?
   How do they affect you?
   
   Prompts:
   How do these skills shortages affect your company and how do you cope?
   What are some of the difficulties of bringing people in from elsewhere? Drawbacks?
   “How do ‘skill shortages’ limit your business opportunities?”

2. What are the skills that you look for (generally) when employing?

3. What do you see as the relationship between literacy and workplace productivity?
   
   Prompts:
   What do you understand by ‘literacy’?
   Do you see a difference between ‘literacy’ and ‘workplace literacy’?
   In your view, what are the relative merits of vocational training compared with literacy training programs?

4. In your experience, is there a difference between literacy and communication skills?
   
   Prompt:
   What are they?

5. If it is apparent that an employee has what you consider to be a shortage of literacy skills, what do you do?
   
   Prompts:
   What ways do you think literacy ‘deficits’ can be hidden from you?
   How much responsibility do you think employers have for the education of staff (both old and new)?

6. How do literacy programs you know about fit the bill?
   
   Prompt:
   What’s a better way to do things/ what are better things to learn?

7. How well does NZQA seem to understand the needs of a business such as yours?
This discussion paper explores the perceptions and literacy needs of community members in Wanganui and Districts, including focus groups with employers and in-depth interviews with adult literacy providers, concerned community agencies, and participants and non-participants in adult literacy programmes.

The study comprises an element within a major, longitudinal research programme exploring issues around adult literacy and employment.