The National Centre of Literacy and Numeracy for Adults

Enhancing the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Implementation Strategy through Data-Driven Decision-making

A framework for developing organisational benchmarks for literacy and numeracy learner outcomes – **The Framework**

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How do we know that Tertiary Education Organisations and Industry Training Organisations are making a difference to literacy and numeracy learner outcomes?

Purpose of this document

This document presents a framework for adult literacy and numeracy that enables Tertiary Education Organisations (TEOs), Industry Training Organisations (ITOs) and the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) to measure organisational performance against agreed benchmarks and to make evidence-informed strategic and operational decisions for the improvement of learner outcomes. This includes but is not limited to, those of the Tertiary Education Strategy Priority Groups: Māori, Pasifika and youth. The framework is referred to as the Benchmarking Framework, or the Framework.

The Framework is targeted at ITOs, Private Training Establishments (PTEs), Wānanga and Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITPs), to assist these organisations with creating benchmarks that are meaningful for their organisations.

An accompanying User Guide is available to support organisations with implementing the Framework.

Definitions

Key terms in this document and the User Guide are defined as follows.

Literacy is the written and oral language people use in everyday life and work. A person's literacy refers to the extent of their oral and written language skills and knowledge and their ability to apply these to meet the varied demands of their personal study and work lives (TEC, 2009, p. 41).

Numeracy is the bridge between mathematics and real life. A person's numeracy refers to their knowledge and understanding of mathematical concepts and their ability to use their mathematical knowledge to meet the varied demands of their personal, study and work lives (TEC, 2009, pp. 41-42).

Literacy and numeracy proficiency is the ability to complete literacy and numeracy tasks as measured against the Learning Progressions[1]. Therefore proficiency in the context of this Framework refers to proficiency in English[2].

Literacy and numeracy practices are the literacy and numeracy that people use in their everyday work and life tasks. Practices are deeply contextualised and strongly embedded in

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[1] The Learning Progressions (TEC, 2008) are only partly applicable to learners of English as a second or other language (ESOL). This document only refers to ESOL learners' proficiencies that can be described by the Learning Progressions. An extended or alternative progressions framework would be needed to include all ESOL learners' proficiencies.

[2] An extended or alternative progressions framework would be needed to include, e.g. proficiency in te reo Māori.

these tasks, implying that a task cannot be completed successfully and competently without the literacy and numeracy practices within it being effective.

Literacy and numeracy practices cannot be isolated from the tasks in which they are embedded. Therefore, measurement of effective literacy and numeracy practices can only occur in the context of the task. However, for practices to be effective they require a minimum level of literacy and numeracy proficiency – as defined above. This minimum level can be identified through a process known as 'Knowing the demands' (National Centre, n.d.).

Literacy and numeracy objectives are outcomes for learners that a particular TEO, ITO or government agency aims to gain from (embedded) literacy and numeracy programmes. For reasons of simplicity this document will speak of 'objectives' where it refers to literacy and numeracy objectives.

Learner literacy and numeracy outcomes are actual outcomes of a learner's literacy and numeracy proficiency and/or practices as a result of their engagement in (embedded) literacy and numeracy programmes. For reasons of simplicity this document will speak of 'learner outcomes' where it refers to learner literacy and numeracy outcomes.

A **benchmark** is "a standard, a reference point, or a criterion against which the quality of something can be measured, judged and evaluated and against which outcomes of a specified activity can be measured" (ESMU, 2010). A benchmark is to be distinguished from an **indicator**, which is defined as something that can be measured, judged and evaluated, without including the criterion against which to measure quality.

Organisational benchmarks for learner outcomes are criteria against which judgments can be made about a whole organisation's performance. The criteria of concern are those that indicate the extent to which the organisation has made a difference to learners' literacy and numeracy outcomes.

Programme benchmarks for learner outcomes are criteria against which judgments can be made about a programme's performance. The criteria of concern are those that indicate the extent to which a programme has made a difference to learners' literacy and numeracy outcomes.

Why benchmarks?

The Benchmarking Framework presented in this document has been designed to:

- facilitate self-assessment, evaluation, and data-driven decision-making for ongoing improvement of the organisation's services and operations

- enable organisations to monitor their own performance against their own mission

- signal to internal and external stakeholders what the organisation finds important

- provide evidence for external quality assurance reviews and audits

- gauge how well the organisation is meeting learner needs

- provide information to the Government for accountability and reporting purposes.

Who uses the Framework?

In line with the above purposes, users of the Benchmarking Framework include managers and leaders in TEOs and ITOs with a responsibility for one or more of:

- development of organisational plans and performance indicators

- development of departmental and programme plans and performance indicators

- organisational and/or programme self-assessment and quality assurance

- programme and/or qualification development

- embedding literacy and numeracy across the organisation.

Design principles for the Benchmarking Framework

The following design principles have guided the development of the Framework.
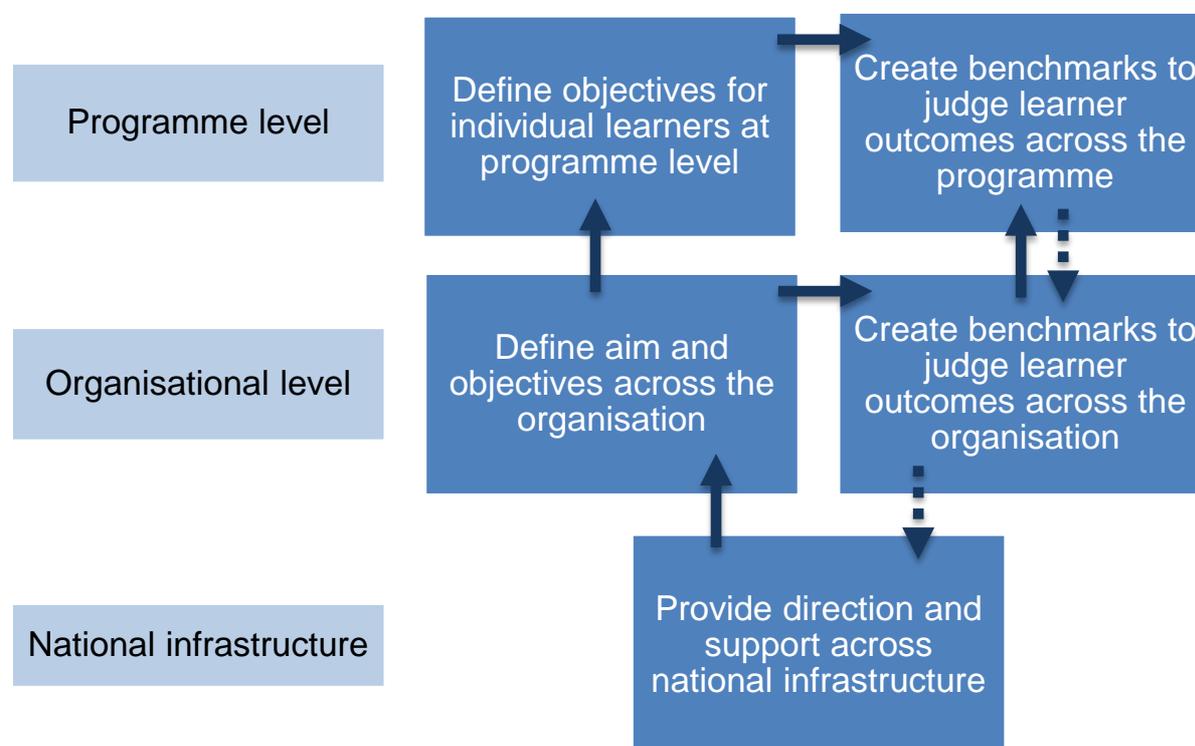
The Benchmarking Framework:

- integrates (embedded) literacy and numeracy into existing processes and systems in tertiary education, be it at programme, organisational, or national level; it also makes the role of (embedded) literacy and numeracy explicit and deliberate in these processes and systems

- is grounded in and an essential part of the National Centre of Literacy and Numeracy for Adults' Embedded Literacy and Numeracy Whole Organisation approach

- promotes literacy and numeracy for the purposes of quality improvement

- has an explicit focus on outcomes reflecting literacy and numeracy proficiency and practices

- is able to acknowledge the diversity of learners, programmes and organisations involved in adult literacy and numeracy initiatives

- is easy to understand and meaningful to its audience

- is robust: it should still be able to be used when government policies change or when organisations change

- is internally consistent, implying that all components of the Framework support and reinforce each other

- is practicable for its users

- enables inclusiveness of all learners, not only those with low literacy and numeracy proficiency or practices

- uses aims and objectives as drivers for defining benchmarks and collecting data

- enables development of benchmarks that are valid, reliable and non-corruptible

The Benchmarking Framework

The Benchmarking Framework is visualised in Figure 1. It consists of three levels: the level of individual programmes, the level of an organisation, and the level representing the national infrastructure.

The programme level is critical to the Framework as this is where learner outcomes come about. Each learner participates in a programme, whether it be in a group or as an individual. It is through engagement with a programme that learners develop their literacy and numeracy proficiency and practices and that learner outcomes can be measured.

However, a programme does not exist in isolation. Although a programme is sometimes created in close consultation with the learner, it is ultimately developed by and within the context of an organisation. The objectives at programme level are therefore strongly guided by the aim and objectives at organisational level. In turn, the objectives across the organisation are strongly guided by the national infrastructure, which include expectations set by standard setting bodies, funding agencies, policymakers and quality assurance agencies. The solid arrows in Figure 1 reflect this guidance.

Figure 1: Benchmarking Framework for literacy and numeracy learner outcomes; the solid arrows indicate how components guide other components. The dotted arrow indicates an information, reporting and accountability line.

Benchmarks at the organisational level are the criteria against which the quality of the learner outcomes across the organisation can be measured, judged and evaluated. Benchmarks for learner outcomes at organisational level are derived from the objectives across the organisation. Organisational benchmarks as well as the measurement results against these benchmarks provide the information needed for accountability and reporting to the national infrastructure. This is shown through a dotted arrow in Figure 1.

Benchmarks across a programme are the criteria against which the quality of the learner outcomes of the programme can be measured, judged and evaluated. These benchmarks therefore refer to the objectives at the programme level, and are created in accordance with benchmarks developed at organisational level. Programme benchmarks as well as the measurement results against these benchmarks provide the information needed for reporting to the organisational level, to enable measurement against the organisational benchmarks. Mutual alignment of the benchmarks at both programme and organisational levels is therefore essential.

Explanation of the Framework components

This section explains each Framework component, starting with the national infrastructure, and then moving through the Framework in Figure 1 in a clockwise direction.

Provide direction and support across the national infrastructure

Within the Framework, the national infrastructure defines the national goals to which literacy and numeracy initiatives are expected to contribute, as well as the expectations of the explicit role of literacy and numeracy in achieving these goals. It also creates supporting mechanisms to help TEOs and ITOs contribute to the national goals effectively and efficiently. The processes of investment planning and external evaluation and review are the mechanisms through which organisations could explicitly report their literacy and numeracy plans and achievements, in a way that is fully integrated into existing accountability systems.

Agencies which are likely to play a significant part in setting the above goals and expectations, and therefore in supporting organisations with the implementation of the Framework, include: the Ministry of Education, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, the Tertiary Education Commission, and other agencies which provide funding for adult education and training programmes.

A description of the direction and support that will assist TEOs and ITOs is found in the User Guide.

Define objectives across the organisation

To determine whether it is making a difference to its learners through (embedded) literacy and numeracy programmes, an organisation defines an aim and objectives which will guide programmes in setting specific and relevant learner objectives.

The aim and objectives across the organisation must contribute to the goals, objectives and expectations set through the national infrastructure. They are also informed by the organisation's own stakeholders, mission and vision statements, and/or strategic direction. Included in this process is deciding which programmes will be offered, which programmes are expected to embed literacy and numeracy, and why, thus setting expectations for the programme level.

Defining objectives may be integrated into existing processes for deciding on organisational outcomes but the process referred to in this Framework should be explicit and deliberate about literacy and numeracy proficiency and practices.

Define objectives for individual learners at programme level

For each programme, explicit, specific and relevant objectives for literacy and numeracy are defined, which must contribute to the organisation's objectives. The programme objectives are further informed by the specific needs of the target group of learners and other stakeholders.

Programmes exist in many shapes and forms. They may vary in the qualifications to which they lead, for example a programme leading to the New Zealand (NZ) Certificate in Cookery (Level 3) is different from a programme leading to the NZ Certificate in Agriculture (Level 3). Other programmes, for example intensive literacy programmes, may not lead to any qualification at all. Programmes may also be developed around the needs and goals of individual learners, resulting in each learner having their own individual programme. When programmes are offered in different organisations, they are guided by different missions, goals and values. For example, a programme leading to the NZ Certificate in Agriculture (Level 3) is likely to be different in an ITP compared to an ITO. Programmes leading to the same qualification may also have been developed to benefit different stakeholders. For example, a programme may have been developed for school leavers, while another programme leading to the same qualification may have been developed to support the industry in its development. Both programmes could well be taught in the same organisation.

The above implies that objectives are likely to vary across programmes, including objectives for literacy and numeracy. Therefore, programme-specific objectives for literacy and numeracy need to be set on a programme-by-programme basis. They are specific and relevant to the programme, while contributing to the literacy and numeracy objectives across the organisation and meeting the requirements set by standard-setting and funding agencies.

In order to establish whether the programme or the organisation is making a difference to learner outcomes for literacy and numeracy, all objectives for literacy and numeracy must be explicit, and should be explicitly assessed as part of the programme.

Guidance on defining objectives at programme level is found in the User Guide.

Create benchmarks to judge learner outcomes across the programme

Once programme objectives for literacy and numeracy have been defined, benchmarks can be created to judge whether these objectives have been achieved to a sufficient level.

In principle, benchmarks at programme level refer to the minimum number of learners who have successfully achieved the literacy and numeracy objectives of the programme. Not all objectives may need to be judged against benchmarks however. Guidance on which objectives are to be judged and on setting the minimum number of learners is provided by the organisational level.

Further details on setting benchmarks at programme level are discussed in the User Guide.

Create benchmarks to judge learner outcomes across the organisation

Organisational benchmarks form the criteria to judge whether the objectives across the organisation have been achieved to a sufficient level.

In principle, benchmarks to judge learner outcomes across the organisation refer to the minimum number of learners who are expected to have successfully achieved the literacy and numeracy objectives of their programmes, across all selected programmes or learner groups in the organisation.

The setting of benchmarks across the organisation is explained further in the User Guide.

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