

Looking forward: Commitment to a system-wide Language, Literacy, and Numeracy Implementation Strategy

Language, literacy, and numeracy (LLN) are significant parts of the Manako programme provided by Ako Aotearoa, the National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence. The Manako programme, formerly known as the Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Cultural Capability (ALNACC) programme, continues our partnership with the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) to enhance educational capability across Aotearoa New Zealand. Embracing our roots and expertise in literacy, numeracy, and both Māori and Pacific cultural capability, Manako expands our commitment to delivering inclusive and effective education across the tertiary education and training sector, informed by the values and needs of all New Zealanders.

Executive summary

Aotearoa New Zealand is at a critical juncture in adult foundational skills development. The expiry of the 2015–2019 national Literacy and Numeracy Implementation Strategy, with no formal successor, has left a strategic vacuum. At the same time, results from the 2023 OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) reveal significant declines for Aotearoa New Zealand in adult literacy and numeracy performance, especially amongst priority equity groups such as Māori, Pacific, and young adults.

This paper therefore proposes that there should be a national commitment to a new, system-wide Language, Literacy, and Numeracy Implementation Strategy for tertiary education. The Strategy should be evidence-driven and future-focused to address digital inequities, economic resilience, and the critical need to equip all learners with the language, literacy, and numeracy skills they need for work and study.

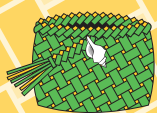
Context and background

» Legacy of the 2015–2019 Literacy and Numeracy Implementation Strategy

The original Implementation Strategy brought national coherence to adult literacy and numeracy efforts, embedding practices across tertiary education. It advanced professional standards, and supported investment in educator capability. Its absence since 2019 has created fragmentation across the sector.

» The strategic gap

Without a current national framework, tertiary education literacy and numeracy provision is inconsistent. Whilst TEC's 2025 Investment Toolkit mentions literacy and numeracy as a focus under foundation education, there is no operational strategy, no system-wide professional learning plan, and no equity-centred policy directive. Aotearoa New Zealand is falling behind.



Problem definition

Nationally, these are some of the problems we are facing::

- » **Declining performance:** Aotearoa New Zealand has experienced a 21-point drop in literacy and a 15-point drop in numeracy since 2014.
- » **Workforce risk:** 28% of adults now score at or below Level 1 in numeracy – a level insufficient for most workplace tasks.
- » **Equity failures:** Māori, Pacific, and foreign-born adults remain overrepresented among low-skilled cohorts. However, there is a lack of clarity surrounding the interpretation of what the OECD means by the term ‘foreign-born’ and whether it infers that English is a second or other language.
- » **Fragmented delivery:** No current national mechanism to guide implementation, educator development, or technology-enhanced delivery.

Why now? The case for a new Language, Literacy, and Numeracy Implementation Strategy

» Economic imperative

OECD analysis shows that a one-standard deviation increase in numeracy proficiency is associated with a 9% increase in hourly wages in Aotearoa New Zealand. The economic consequences of continued skills decline are severe: lower productivity, increased welfare dependency, and reduced international competitiveness.

» Equity imperative

The 2023 PIAAC results show deep and persistent skill disparities for Māori and Pacific peoples, younger adults, and foreign-born residents. Without a nationally mandated, equity-led Language, Literacy, and Numeracy Implementation Strategy, these gaps will worsen.

» Educational imperative

Educators and tertiary providers need clarity. A cohesive Strategy provides direction for professional learning, assessment practice, resource development, and culturally grounded pedagogy.

Strategic priorities for the Language, Literacy, and Numeracy Implementation Strategy

We propose the Strategy contains nine domains:

1. **Digital literacy and inclusion:** Address widening digital gaps, with a focus on post-COVID and remote delivery contexts.
2. **Cultural responsiveness:** Embed Te Whare Tapa Whā and Fonofale models across all LLN frameworks.
3. **Neurodiversity-inclusive pedagogy:** Equip educators with tools for inclusive, accessible delivery.
4. **Vocational contextualisation:** Tailor LLN provision to the language, literacy, and numeracy needs of learners and the demands of industries.
5. **Data-driven practice:** Use diagnostic tools and learner analytics for real-time improvement.
6. **Professional capability development:** Build a national LLN workforce development framework.
7. **Technology access and equity:** Expand digital delivery, with AI-powered learning tools and accessible platforms at the forefront.



8. **Intersectoral partnerships:** Connect TEC, industry, iwi, community providers, and employers in implementation efforts.
9. **Civic literacy and environmental awareness:** Position LLN as essential to democratic engagement and climate literacy.

Implementation and monitoring recommendations

To support strategic execution, we recommend the following:

- » **A TEC-led national LLN advisory group**, including Māori, Pacific, youth, neurodivergent, and workforce voices.
- » **Adaptive policy cycles:** Review biennially, using AI-supported insights and alignment with PIAAC cycles.
- » **Establishment of pilot sites in 2026**, focusing on high-need communities, digital equity, and vocational alignment.
- » **Creation of a LLN outcomes framework** integrated into TEC's funding and monitoring system.

Conclusion

The current absence of a national Language, Literacy, and Numeracy Implementation Strategy is not neutral – it is a risk. It undermines equity, weakens economic resilience, and leaves the tertiary sector rudderless. TEC now has the opportunity to lead a coordinated, culturally grounded, and digitally future-proofed response.

