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***LITERACY AND LANGUAGE SKILLS IN
THE NEW VOCATIONAL TRAINING
ENVIRONMENT***

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
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Alison Joy Sutton

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ABSTRACT

Significant numbers of New Zealanders do not have adequate literacy, numeracy and spoken English language skills for the demands made of them in the workplace, particularly where workplace reform initiatives have increased the quantity and sophistication of the skills required. Recent reforms in the national vocational education and training system are intended to increase participation in education and training, yet many adults with poor literacy skills never participate in post-school training and therefore may not be able to make use of these new opportunities.

Industry Training Organisations (ITOs) are responsible for the design, management and delivery of training for their respective industries, and are national standards-setting bodies for the National Qualifications Framework. ITOs are therefore key stakeholders in the vocational training arena. This study evaluated the extent to which a sample of senior managers from 32 ITOs recognised literacy, numeracy and language skill levels as significant issues and the manner in which literacy skills are being incorporated into industry qualifications on the Framework. The evaluation used an enlightenment evaluation methodology to provide a policy focus to the research.

Literacy, numeracy and language skills were regarded as significant by only a small of respondents, but this is likely to change when more workers participate in training and in particular when large numbers of learners are assessed against unit standards. Some ITOs have put strategies in place to support learners with limited literacy skills, but these are not adequate. There was some evidence of poor assessment practices. There was confusion about the most effective way to integrate literacy, numeracy and language skills into qualifications and the methods used were not in keeping with research on the transfer and integration of literacy skills from a training context to on-the-job performance. In order to improve the integration of these skills into the training system national policies and common definitions need to be established, supported by substantial research.

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