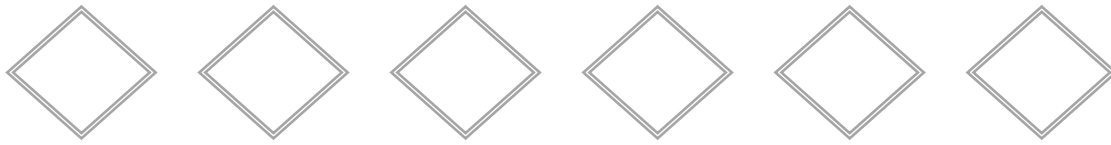


# White Paper: Addressing Declining Literacy and Numeracy Skills in New Zealand's Workforce



## Introduction

New Zealand's 2023 Survey of Adult Skills reveals a worrying trend: significant declines in literacy and numeracy among adults aged 16-65. The data underscores that low skill levels are not only a personal disadvantage but also a workforce challenge, impacting productivity, safety, and innovation. This white paper examines the implications of these findings and explores how tailored interventions, can mitigate these effects and empower both individuals and organisations.

## The Problem: Declining Skills in a Post-Pandemic World

The recent Survey of Adult Skills 2023: New Zealand, highlights an average literacy score drop of 21 points and a numeracy score drop of 15 points since 2014. These reductions represent nearly half a proficiency level, significantly affecting individuals' ability to perform everyday and workplace tasks.

Key insights include:

- **Disproportionate Impact:** The decline is more pronounced among men, those with no or low qualifications, and individuals whose primary language is not English<sup>†</sup>.
- **Vulnerable Populations:** The proportion of adults with literacy below Level 1 rose from 3% in 2014 to 10% in 2023, while those below Level 1 in numeracy increased from 5% to 11%<sup>†</sup>.
- **Economic Implications:** Low literacy and numeracy correlate with reduced employability, lower earnings, and diminished workplace efficiency.

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated challenges, such as data collection disruptions and reduced survey participation, compounded these trends. However, these results still offer valuable insights into skill gaps within New Zealand's workforce.

## The Case for Workforce-Based Interventions

Investing in literacy and numeracy training offers measurable benefits:

1. **Enhanced Productivity:** Improved skills enable employees to interpret data, follow complex instructions, and solve problems effectively.
2. **Greater Safety Compliance:** Numeracy skills aid in understanding safety protocols, reducing workplace accidents.
3. **Employee Empowerment:** Training fosters confidence, improving morale and workplace engagement.

<sup>†</sup>[Survey of Adults Skills 2023: New Zealand](#) Published 10 Dec 2024

Organisations like Aspire2 Workplace Communication focus on delivering tailored training to individuals with the lowest skill levels. By targeting the most impacted populations, these programmes can generate transformative outcomes for both employees and employers.

## Aspire2 Workplace Communication: A Proven Solution

Aspire2 Workplace Communication specialises in practical, workplace-focused training designed to meet the needs of diverse industries. Their programmes:

- **Address Critical Skill Gaps:** Courses are designed to improve literacy, numeracy, and communication skills in real-world contexts.
- **Empower Marginalised Groups:** Specific efforts are made to engage Māori, Pacific peoples, and other groups disproportionately affected by low skill levels.
- **Deliver Measurable Outcomes:** Participants consistently report increased confidence, competence, and productivity.

Aspire2's programmes also include:

- **Skill Assessment:** Initial assessments identify participants' current skill levels, providing a baseline for measuring improvement.
- **Progress Measurement and Reporting:** Detailed reports capture participants' progress, demonstrating the programme's impact.
- **Aftercare Support:** Ongoing support is available to help organisations sustain and build upon the gains achieved.

Case studies show how Aspire2 Workplace Communication training has improved teamwork, individual confidence, literacy challenges and operational efficiency through enhanced communication skills. To read more check out <https://workplacecommunication.co.nz/what-weve-done/>

## Recommendations for Employers

To maximise the impact of workplace literacy and numeracy interventions:

1. **Assess Skill Levels:** Conduct baseline assessments to identify key areas for improvement and establish benchmarks for progress.
2. **Integrate Training into Workflows:** Offer flexible, on-site or online training options to minimise disruption.
3. **Leverage Detailed Reporting:** Use Aspire2's final reports to understand programme outcomes and inform future workforce planning.
4. **Utilise Aftercare Support:** Engage with Aspire2's post-training support services to ensure long-term benefits and continuous improvement.
5. **Foster a Culture of Learning:** Encourage participation by highlighting the personal and professional benefits of skill development.

## Conclusion

The 2023 decline in literacy and numeracy is both a challenge and an opportunity. With the right investments, New Zealand's workforce can rebuild foundational skills and set the stage for greater economic resilience. Aspire2 Workplace Communication stands ready to partner with organisations to achieve these goals, turning today's deficits into tomorrow's strengths.

For more information or to discuss training opportunities, contact a Aspire2 Workplace Communication Relationship Manager to find out how we can tailor a programme to suit the needs of your staff. Contact us at [workplacecommunication@aspire2.co.nz](mailto:workplacecommunication@aspire2.co.nz)