
**Adult basic skills in New Zealand**

While there had been a community-based adult literacy movement active in New Zealand since the late 1970s (Hill, 1990), the sector’s provision and political presence was marginal at best. Its advocates struggled to establish a secure funding source without a research base, within an educational system that had long prided itself on its child literacy achievements and therefore had scepticism about the existence of adult literacy issues. The results from the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) in 1996 proved to be a turning-point, as it provided the first substantial evidence of the levels of New Zealand adults’ basic skills.

Like a lot of comparable countries such as Canada, the US and Australia, the IALS results (OECD, 1997) showed that approximately one quarter of New Zealand adults were operating at Level 1 and a similar proportion at Level 2. While all groups were represented to some degree in the lower skill categories, there were disproportionately higher numbers of Pacific Islanders,¹ Maori², those who have a first language other than English, those with minimal secondary education, older people and those not in employment. Further analyses (Ministry of Education, 2004; Workbase, 1998) showed concentrations of low skill populations in some rural areas (especially the Far North and the eastern North Island) and the Auckland metropolitan area and in blue-collar occupations, the manufacturing, agricultural, hunting and fishing industries. These results are reasonably akin to other countries with which New Zealand traditionally compares itself such as Australia, Canada and the US, but behind others like Sweden and the Netherlands.

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¹ The biggest Pacific Island groups in New Zealand are Samoan, Cook Island Maori and Tongans.

² The tangata whenua or indigenous population of New Zealand
The IALS results provoked a modest level of public debate, but had a significant impact within political parties and government departments. For the first time, concern about adult basic skills began to appear in official documents, party manifestoes and eventually, government policies, irrespective of the political party in power.

National basic skills policy

The period following the publication of the IALS results has seen major changes in basic skills policy and provision in New Zealand. Basic, or as it is more commonly termed in this country, foundation skills, is now a central part of post-school policy and a range of diverse funding streams have been centralised under a new funding body, the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC). There have been a number of policy responses since the IALS results and it is particularly worthy of note that the responses have had repercussions for the whole tertiary sector and not just the traditional adult literacy part of the sector.

In May 2001, the ruling Labour government adopted a national adult literacy strategy, *More than words* (Ministry of Education, 2001b). The strategy has the broad goal that “over the long-term New Zealanders should enjoy a level of literacy which enables them to participate fully in all aspects of life including work, family and the community.” Literacy in both official languages (English and Maori) is recognised and underpinned by four principles:

1. gains for learners will be achieved as quickly as possible
2. programmes will match learners’ needs in content and pace
3. best practice, evaluation and research will guide programme development
4. programmes will be suitable for the wide range of learners.

The strategy then identifies three key elements that have guided subsequent developments:

1. developing capability to ensure adult literacy providers deliver quality learning through a highly skilled workforce with high quality resources
2. improving quality systems to ensure that New Zealand programmes are world class
3. increasing opportunities for adult literacy learning by significantly increasing provision in workplaces, communities and tertiary institutions.

A year later, the government then introduced its first-ever Tertiary Education Strategy (TES) (Ministry of Education, 2002) to guide future developments in the post-school sector. Significantly, the Tertiary Education Strategy underlined the importance of literacy and numeracy skills at all levels by including the goal “to raise foundation skills so that all people can participate in our knowledge society” as one of its six priorities for the development of the whole tertiary range of provision. This document (and its subsequent Statements of Tertiary Education Priorities (Ministry of Education, 2003b, 2005a)) have largely superseded the initial adult literacy strategy and has brought the issue of foundation skills to the centre-stage of educational debate and policy. Alongside these two main policies, foundation skills have been identified as a key component in a review of industry training (Ministry of Education, 2001c) and related national policies for community education (Ministry of Education, 2001a) and the teaching of English as a second language (Ministry of Education, 2003a).

The TES document lists as one of its specific objectives, “Clear accountability of quality and outcomes within foundation education, including a greater focus on assessment.” The accompanying text (p. 38) talks about achieving “widespread demonstration of good practice teaching,” but there is only mention of measuring outcomes and none specifically about formative assessment. The interest in foundation learning is in keeping with an increasing emphasis over the New Zealand education system generally on improving the effectiveness of teaching and learning for students at all levels.

**Terminology**

As basic skills-related policy has developed, a range of terminology has been employed in the debate. Adult literacy was the first term used and is still widely used. Sometimes the term expands to adult literacy and numeracy and also adult literacy, numeracy and language (referring primarily to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), but also to the teaching of the Maori language, te reo Maori). These are the terms most used
by practitioners. Government policy documents now refer predominantly to *foundation skills* and *foundation learning*. In addition, a recent major initiative for the sector has been entitled the ‘Learning for Living’ project. Some policy documents also refer to *key competencies*.

This list of terms suggests there is no common agreement about the concept and that an agreed definition has not yet been fully accepted. Even the Tertiary Education Strategy document itself (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 36) admits that “a precise definition of ‘foundation skills’ is difficult to confirm, before going on to define it as “generally referring to a bundle of skills such as literacy, numeracy, technological literacy, communications skills, teamwork, ‘learning to learn’ and self-confidence skills.” The report also points out that these foundation skills “are the same core skills that are described by other names in different nations (for example, ‘key skills’, ‘basic skills’, ‘essential skills’, ‘literacy defined broadly’) and these names refer to a similar set of identifiable skills that people require.” The strategy calls for ‘a common understanding of the definition of foundation skills. Interestingly, a more recent report monitoring the Strategy’s outcomes (Ministry of Education, 2005b) refers to both foundation skills and competencies, but limits the latter to “a set of skills, knowledge and dispositions in the areas of language, literacy and numeracy” (p. 26).

The shift to the terms foundation skills, learning for living and key competencies has been influenced by the work of DeSeCo within the OECD (www.oecd.org/edu/statistics/deseco). However, there is on-going debate about the validity of the DeSeCo approach for the sector. This is partly because of the breadth of the key competencies concept, which runs the risk of distracting attention from the core skills of literacy and numeracy, and also a perception that the existing definitions of key competencies and foundation skills fail to recognise the importance of cultural factors in literacy.

While there is probably widespread agreement that the term foundation skills does encompass the broad elements of communication skills, teamwork and self-confidence skills, the breadth of these elements has proved to be problematic when accurately identifying the nature and extent of provision.
A coherent foundation skills sector has yet to develop in New Zealand, inhibited at least in part by the lack of agreement on definitions. Some argue that these broader, generic definitions of foundation skills tend to blur the issues somewhat and therefore dilute the debate about them because they are common to many, if not all, tertiary educational programmes. It is therefore argued that this broad definition inappropriately takes the emphasis away from learners with the lowest skill.

Foundation skills provision

Foundation skills provision in New Zealand occurs in a wide range of contexts ranging from informal, non-credentialed community settings through to individual workplaces and formal tertiary institutions. Approximately 303,000 people took part in foundation learning provision in 2003 primarily in either polytechnics or private training establishments (Sutton, Lander, & Benseman, 2005). Of the 303,000, over half (161,000) were participating in programmes that had a clearly identifiable literacy and/or numeracy focus (although it may not have been the primary or sole focus). Most learners in foundation skills programmes participate in short courses and receive less than 100 hours teaching per year.

There are three lead agencies with a national mandate (and some government funding) to develop foundation skills – Literacy Aotearoa which works predominantly in community settings, the ESOL Home Tutor Service (both of whom have a predominantly volunteer workforce) and Workbase, the New Zealand Centre for Workforce Literacy Development, providing programmes in the workplace. All these agencies offer provision that is free to the learner.

Much larger numbers of students are accessing foundation skills programmes in government-funded polytechnics and private training establishments. Sometimes called ‘bridging education’ or foundation education courses, these programmes are usually intended to staircase learners into higher level vocational qualifications.

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3 The Maori name for New Zealand

4 Government subsidies are available to partly fund workplace programmes, with employers making contributions of approximately 25% of cost
From 2001-2003 there was a significant increase in foundation skills participation, driven largely by distance programmes offered by two tertiary institutions. Both institutions' programmes involve distance learning packages incorporating foundation skills components. The foremost of these is Te Wananga o Aotearoa’s Mahi Ora programme and the other is the Open Polytechnic’s Lifeworks programme that was modelled on Mahi Ora. These programmes have open enrolment and differ markedly from traditional adult literacy forms of provision in that they are broad life skills programmes that have a strong foundation skills component incorporated into them.

Another significant component of foundation skill provision has occurred under the pre-vocational programmes for the unemployed, Training Opportunities, Youth Training and Skill Enhancement. These programmes have been notable for successful recruitment of large numbers of Maori and Pasifika learners. In the past there were a small number of literacy-focused programmes, while the rest concentrated on vocational content. Now there is a much explicit expectation that a larger number of providers will integrate literacy support alongside teaching other vocational content. The Tertiary Education Commission has also funded tutor professional development and other provider capability initiatives to develop this form of integrated provision.

Over recent years, extended foundation skill funding has been made available for tertiary providers to increase and extend previous provision through a number of designated funding sources such as the Literacy Funding Pool, and the Workplace Basic Skills Development Fund. The sector-wide structural reforms in tertiary education have created policy and structural incentives (a National Qualifications Framework and a National Register of Quality Assured Qualifications) to recognise learner achievement and facilitate staircasing between programmes and providers. However, there is little

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5 A tertiary institution run in accordance with Maori protocols and traditions. This wananga is one of three that receives government funding and has been embroiled in an on-going series of controversial administrative and political controversies. Restrictions on the type of courses offered and its student roll have been imposed for 2006.

6 Funding short term innovative pilot programmes

7 The NQF is a framework for registering national qualifications and competency standards. Certificates are awarded at Level 4, Level 7 is equivalent to a first degree and Levels 8-10 are post-graduate. Foundation learning occurs primarily at Level 3 and below.
evidence to date that clear pathways exist for learners to progress from foundation skills studies to higher level programmes.

The foundation skills workforce

The foundation skills workforce teaches in diverse contexts but very little is known in detail about their characteristics, backgrounds or teaching practices. In 2005 a project was undertaken to map the extent and nature of foundation skills provision throughout the country that also included data about foundation skills teachers (Sutton et al., 2005). The report's data is indicative only because it was drawn from three previous surveys of various sub-groups of teachers in this sector and therefore probably under-represents foundation skills teachers working in formal tertiary institutions. The report's authors recommended a comprehensive national study of foundations skills teachers because of their importance and the paucity of valid information about them. The following information is taken from the report's synthesis of the three studies.

In 2003 there were approximately 1,700 (primarily voluntary) teachers working in community adult literacy (often only teaching a few hours per week). Another 3,500 volunteers worked with learners on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), offering primarily social English support. The exact number of teachers in pre-vocational programmes or tertiary institutions working in foundation skills-related areas is unknown, but based on enrolment figures may be in the vicinity of 2000.

Teachers in polytechnics and private training establishments are more likely to be full-time than those in community programmes. Full-time teachers tend to have formalised work contracts (albeit usually short term); part-timers may have sessional contracts or work voluntarily. As is true in general adult and community education, the great majority of foundation skills teachers are women (ranging from 60 – 85% in different contexts) and a similar proportion is Pakeha (of European ancestry). It is noteworthy that there are far fewer Maori and Pacific Island teachers than the proportion of learners from those ethnic groups. As a group, foundation skills teachers tend to be older, with the majority

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8 All data in this section is taken from this report unless stated otherwise.
aged over 40 years. A third of foundation skills teachers have worked in the field for two years or more and another third have been working in the field for more than 10 years.

Currently the only systematic national training programme has been initial training provided by Literacy Aotearoa for its predominantly voluntary workforce. In 2006 a competency standards-based national Adult Literacy Educator Qualification is being introduced, at a level equivalent to the first year of a degree course. In the absence of foundations skills-specific qualifications, most teachers have an eclectic mix of qualifications, on-the-job experience and ad hoc continuing professional development. In one survey, approximately half\(^9\) of the respondents had university degrees; nearly half had primary or secondary teacher training and a third had a qualification in teaching adults. Individuals also held a range of other non-education related qualifications. Only a very small number have gained specific adult literacy-related qualifications from overseas.

With so few formally-qualified foundation skills teachers, professional development is an essential component for developing the capability of the sector. It is difficult to quantify how much professional development is provided or patterns of participation in it, but an estimate for 2003 recorded over 100 nationally-funded professional development events involving over 2,500 teachers, including over 800 from workplace contexts.

A smaller study (Benseman, Lander, & Sutton, 2005) involving a cross-section of 15 foundation skills teachers found that professional development varied from 70+ hours per year for teachers working in a large workplace provider to none for those working in small private training establishments. A typical amount of professional development among the teachers was a one-day workshop per year.

These data show that foundation skills teachers are a reasonably homogeneous group of Pakeha, middle-age women who differ markedly from the learners they teach. A significant proportion has tertiary qualifications, albeit in non-literacy disciplines and receives variable amounts of professional development according to where they work. Apart from a group who have been in the field for more than 10 years, most are recent

\(^9\) Percentages exceed 100% because respondents could enter multiple qualifications.
arrivals to foundations skills. Overall, there is tremendous diversity among the workforce and highly variable working conditions, which is reflective of a sector that is still marginal relative to other educational sectors.

The three national literacy agencies have played an important role in training and supporting for foundation skills teachers and acted as ‘nurseries’ for the national workforce in this sector.

Gaps in provision and take-up

The IALS provided a reasonably detailed overview of where the greatest areas of need are in foundation skills, but it is not easy to compare these needs against current patterns of participation. In brief, the mapping project discussed earlier encountered difficulties in clearly identifying which programmes and courses were providing foundation skill teaching. Again however, the data from this study represent the best-available information to identify current gaps in provision and which groups may be under-represented relative to need as indicated by IALS.

Participation patterns vary from context to context (for example workplace learners are predominantly male and community-based learners are female). Those most significantly under-represented in current provision are Pacific Island learners (although they are proportionally overrepresented in workplace programmes) and those in some small towns and rural areas, some of which have the highest incidence of need according to IALS (Ministry of Education, 2004), although the total numbers of potential learners in these areas are not great. Rural areas lack tertiary institutional involvement because the current funding arrangements are particularly detrimental to low population density areas and there is often a lack of skilled practitioners available (Benseman, 2006).

It is interesting to note that in recent years, a high representation of Maori learners in foundation skills programmes has been due primarily due to Te Wananga o Aotearoa mentioned earlier. This single institution has changed the participation patterns of Maori from being the ethnic group with the lowest participation rates in New Zealand tertiary education to the highest in a period of five years. The Wananga has been particularly
successful in recruiting people who left school without any qualifications (especially older women and those in small towns and rural areas).

Every tertiary institution receiving government funding is now required to develop a public Charter and Institutional Profile that detail its educational mission, including identifying under-represented groups in their catchments and specific planning to address foundation learning needs in its student population. This process has resulted in foundation learning considerations featuring more prominently, especially in relation to Maori and Pasifika learners.

Assessment policies and structures

Foundation skills programmes result in a range of possible outcomes for learners, including: changes in literacy, numeracy and oral language skills (both tested and self-reported); achieving credits on the standards-based National Qualifications Framework (NQF); employment-related outcomes and changes in confidence and self esteem.

In the absence of national standardised testing or widely-used literacy assessment instruments for foundation skills in New Zealand, providers use a range of proxy measures such as assessment against unit standards that have an explicit literacy focus e.g. Unit Standard 2976 ‘Read independently texts for practical purposes’; or unit standards that have reading and writing requirements embedded in them (e.g. ‘reading a manual’). Providers may also design summative assessment processes specific to a programme - for example, the completion of institution-specific qualifications, to meet workplace requirements or learners’ personal goals via an Individual Learning Plan.

When government began to be interested in foundation skills, an early focus was on whether learner gain has occurred, and in determining what mechanisms to use to record it – summative assessment and the recording of results. In 2003 a draft Adult Literacy Achievement Framework (ALAF) was developed to identify learner goals and report progress, as a first step to developing a national reporting process (Sutton, 2004).

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10 Other examples include: 1273 – Express own ideas in writing; 1291 Participate in conversations with known people; 2970 Read independently texts about life experience; 2976 Read independently texts for practical purposes; 2987 Read independently texts to gain knowledge; 3485 Write presenting information.
ALAF was successfully trialled, but emphasis has since shifted to the development of draft Key Competencies, Descriptive Standards and Learning Progressions. Learning Progressions are under development for reading, writing, speaking, listening and numeracy; they are intended to identify the common sequence of knowledge and skills an adult needs to ‘reach foundation level competence’ (Tertiary Education Commission, 2006).  

Recently there has been more interest in initial or diagnostic assessment and the Ministry of Education has proposed the development of a standard initial assessment tool on its future work programme. In addition to initial assessment, the Ministry of Social Development has also been reviewing foundation skills screening mechanisms for beneficiary applicants (Sutton & Benseman, 2005) and it is likely a generic screening tool will be developed during 2006, capable of being used in a variety of contexts. 

Another current development is the introduction of Foundation Learning Quality Assurance Requirements set of requirements that is out for consultations at present to be followed by a piloting process. Aimed at improving the quality and effectiveness of provision, the draft ALQM includes the following elements under its Delivery requirements:

5.4 A range of formative learning assessment tools and processes are used that are suitable for, and integrated with, the adult learners’ experiences, culture and learning contexts

5.5 Formative assessment of the learners’ progress is reported to the learner, and other relevant parties, and leads to revisions of the learning plan as appropriate.

Interest in formative assessment has only recently begun to emerge, as recent research discussed in this report has identified the need to upskill the tutor workforce. At the same time, a national literacy strategy in schools has led to a much greater emphasis on

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12 http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/for-providers/foundation/docs/flqa-consultation.doc
developing the ability of school teachers to use formative assessment related to developing literacy skills with children.

Research relating to assessment of foundation skills

Foundation learning research has been limited in both quantity and quality until very recently. A review of all previous New Zealand research (Benseman, 2003) located only 54 studies, most of which were programme evaluations, involved very small sample sizes, and had limited research methodologies. Few were of a scale or quality to be taken seriously by policy makers.

Following the adoption of foundation skills as part of mainstream educational policy, there has been a substantial increase in the quality and quantity of research in this area. The Ministry of Education group responsible for implementing foundation skills policy is now advocating a ‘research-based’ approach to its work, and recently has commissioned several studies that have specific relevance to formative assessment.

A large-scale review of the international literature on effective foundation skills teaching (Benseman, Sutton, & Lander, 2005) was undertaken to identify strategies to inform professional development programmes and the development of sector infrastructure. The review identifies assessment as an important component of effective teaching, including; diagnostic assessment to guide teaching activities, summative assessment and formative assessment. In relation to the latter, the report concluded (p.9):

On-going assessment that takes into account the variation in learners’ skills across the dimensions of reading and writing. Assessment processes need to incorporate measurement of all four components of reading: alphabetics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. The assessment of reading needs to use more than silent reading and oral comprehension questions as


assessment tools…Assessment also needs to include self-assessment by learners, and constructive, verbal feedback from the tutor.

Parallel with this literature review, a study of 15 foundation skills teachers was undertaken to observe how they actually teach (J Benseman et al., 2005). During these observations, very few of the teachers used activities or strategies normally associated with quality formative assessment. For example, questions tended to be closed rather than open, involve lower level thinking (such as simple recall rather than analytical or evaluative tasks) and were seldom initiated by the learners or between learners. Feedback from foundation skills teachers at recent seminars where this research was presented indicates that the findings from this study have proved provocative for many practitioners as a prompt for reflection on their own teaching behaviours.

While formative assessment was not used as a lens for analysis during this study, the findings are very much in keeping with the definition of formative assessment being promoted in New Zealand schools, (Clarke, Timperley, & Hattie, 2003) where it is considered to include:

- Clarifying learning intentions while planning teaching sessions
- Sharing those intentions with learners
- Involving learners in self-evaluation against those intentions
- Focusing oral and written feedback about the learning intentions of particular tasks
- Appropriate questioning
- Raising self-esteem through the language used in class.

A third research study involved a survey of how foundation skills teachers utilise assessment in their teaching and is reported in some detail in the section below (NZCER, 2005a).

**Assessment policy and practice**

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Prior to this NZCER study, very little was known about what specific forms of assessment foundation skills practitioners were using or how they were being applied in teaching. The study report has therefore been a useful step in understanding ‘the state of the play’ in current practice, although its small sample size precludes confident extrapolation to all practice. The study was intended “to contribute to an understanding of what is required to enhance the assessment capability of tertiary education providers of learning in literacy, numeracy, and language “ (p. xi). Data for the study was gathered from 12 providers by way of teacher interviews and document analysis, with a very small amount of opportunistic observation.

The project developed six broad assessment principles based on research literature and consultation with key informants that were then used as a framework for examining the current practice of initial/diagnostic, formative and summative assessments in 12 different programmes (including one distance provider). The six principles were:

1. there are transparent assessment goals and clarity of purpose
2. assessment aims to improve learning and pays attention to the needs and interests of the learner and to the process of learning
3. assessment is valid, reliable, ethical, fair and manageable
4. assessment is authentic
5. the assessment is credible to all relevant stakeholders
6. assessment is undertaken by tutors with experience and assessment practice is supported by ongoing professional development.

The researchers defined formative assessment as being when there was feedback both on progress and on the next learning steps. It may include all or some of these elements (NZCER, 2005b, p. 2):

- Learning intentions clarified during planning and shared with students
- Students self-evaluating against these learning intentions
- Receiving specific feedback from the tutor about their progress in meeting those planned outcomes
- Being supported to set their own learning goals.
Table 1 below summarises the tools and approaches the 12 providers reported using, the factors that influenced when and how the approaches were used, and the typical uses to which the formative assessment data was put.

Table 1. Formative assessment – findings from a New Zealand study

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<th>Assessment tools and approaches</th>
<th>Factors that guide use of assessment</th>
<th>Use made of assessment information</th>
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<td>Teacher observation and feedback ***</td>
<td>Learning to learn – drawing learners deeper into learning decisions***</td>
<td>Adapting tasks/next learning steps ***</td>
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<td>Monitoring in relation to learning plan **</td>
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<td>Staff discussion of individual students *</td>
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****=often used, ** = sometimes used,*=occasionally used

A common theme among the providers was for assessment to be ongoing through continual observations that tutors made and recorded against the initial learning plan. Learning logs sometimes formed the basis of a kind of ‘running record’, with an emphasis on its use for ‘learning to learn’. In some workplace settings some monitoring occurred as learners used their new skills while carrying out their routine work.

However despite there being assessment related activity, some tutors were not able to articulate how they identified, and shaped evolving learning goals as their programmes unfolded, or how they used these new insights to shape next learning steps, which are essential components of formative assessment. There appeared to be a lack of transparent assessment criteria. Without these criteria, it is not as easy to give feed-forward, or to share ownership of formative assessment decisions with learners. The
report suggested that the determining factor as to whether tutors could effectively set up the next learning steps was the individual tutors’ own professional knowledge.

There were instances of formative assessments being a practice for a future summative assessment task. This has the potential to restrict the next learning steps into only preparing for the ‘test’. The providers did not often talk about the use of moderation by groups of practitioners as a way of developing assessment expertise.

The NZCER study included a number of recommendations relevant to formative assessment:

- There is an opportunity to build further assessment expertise by supporting professional conversations between tutors who have been involved in designing and using purpose developed assessment tools. This would enable the sharing and critique of current practice and possibly the dissemination of models of good practice/exemplars.
- It would be helpful to develop a bank of assessment tools, and possibly exemplars and stories of good practice, provided that the introduction of such a resource is supported by professional development. Training would need to cover both use of the tools and their appropriate modification to new settings.
- There is an opportunity to use the data collected in the initial/diagnostic assessments more systematically for formative assessment purposes. Overall, there is a need to develop a greater understanding of the role of formative assessment in supporting learning.
- There is a need to explore how learning outcomes such as motivation and confidence building are valued and assessed alongside the traditional assessment focus on cognitive learning gains. This may require new types of assessment tools, probably self-assessment tools.
- There is a need to develop a greater shared understanding in the sector of the purposes of assessment—for systems accountability, to support teaching and learning, and to support lifelong learning. From such a shared understanding could come new possibilities for designing assessment tools and processes to meet all three purposes, in a way that places the priority upon assessment that supports the learner and their learning.
While the NZCER study and the observation study did not use the same providers, the findings about the lack of clear and explicit formative assessment processes are very similar, which suggests that there may be similar issues within other provider contexts.

Since 2005 the Ministry of Education has commissioned two rounds of Learning for Living projects, both of which have had a focus on summative assessment. The first round was intended to provide information on effective practices that led to learner gain. The second round has been structured around a cluster group approach for two strands of professional development, one on strategies for teaching reading and the other on numeracy. Both strands are using summative assessment processes to establish learner gain. The evaluation of the round as a whole will involve gathering information about assessment practices.

**Concluding comments**

Foundation skills have only recently emerged as a serious issue for policy-makers in New Zealand. While there has been an upsurge in interest in increasing both the quantity and quality of provision, these developments have been hindered somewhat by a lack of data and rigorous research on which to base funding decisions. With the recent completion of some research studies about effective teaching and actual classroom teaching behaviours, there is now a clearer focus on improving foundations skills teachers’ skills and strategies. Formative assessment has not been prominent in these discussions to date, but has now been identified as a fruitful element for future work in the sector.
References


