Briefing Note: Pacific adults’ literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills

To: Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education
    Hon Jenny Salesa, Associate Minister of Education
Co: Hon Tracey Martin, Acting Minister of Education

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Priority: Medium

Security Level: In Confidence
METIS No: 1152377

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Messaging seen by Communications team: Yes
Round Robin: No

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this paper is for you to:

Note that the Ministry of Education has prepared an analytical report focussing on the literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills of Pacific adults.

Note that this Briefing will be proactively released.

Summary

- This paper briefs you on the Ministry of Education’s analytical report that focusses on the literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills of the Pacific population aged 16-65 years old.

- It analyses data from the OECD’s 2014 Survey of Adult Skills, which is part of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). The Survey assessed adults’ skills in literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments. It also collected a wide range of education, work and socio-demographic information.

- The report’s key findings include:
  Since 1996, Pacific people’s average English-based literacy and numeracy skills have increased slightly, and since 2006 their numeracy skill has also increased slightly. Pacific people born in New Zealand, or who migrated aged up to 12 years, have much stronger English-based literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills than those who were older when they first arrived in New Zealand.

Noted—Hon Hipkins
11/10/18 KM
Pacific professionals and managers have strong English-based literacy skills – not significantly different from non-Pacific managers and professionals, but Pacific people are less likely to be in these occupations. Employed Pacific and non-Pacific people have similar earnings at the same literacy and numeracy skill levels.

- The Ministry plans to publish the report on its Education Counts website on Thursday 18 October 2018.

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28/09/2018
Background

1. This paper briefs you on the Ministry of Education’s analytical report focussing on the skills of the Pacific population aged 16 to 65 years old. It analyses data from the OECD’s Survey of Adult Skills which is part of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC).

2. The Survey of Adult Skills is the most comprehensive survey on adult skills undertaken in New Zealand. It has also been undertaken in 31 other countries, including almost every OECD country. New Zealand participated in 2014. The survey assessed adults’ English-based skills in literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments.

3. It also collected considerable background data, including: education, employment and occupation, skills and qualifications required for jobs, the use of skills for work and at home, parental education and occupation, first and home languages, and migration status.

4. The Survey results ranked New Zealand higher than the OECD average for literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills. This report is part of a programme of in-depth analysis of the Survey data.

What does Pacific adults’ literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills cover?

5. The report includes:
   a. changes in skill levels over time
   b. the relationships between migration, languages and skills
   c. learning, qualifications and skills
   d. skills and work attributes, such as occupation and earnings
   e. social participation, wellbeing and skills.

6. The report compares Pacific groups, and also compares Pacific and non-Pacific people.

Key findings of Pacific adults’ literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills

7. Key findings are:
   a. The first language learned at home for about half of New Zealand’s Pacific 16 to 65 year olds is a Pacific language.
   b. Since 1996, Pacific people’s average English-based literacy skill has increased slightly, and since 2006 their numeracy skill has also increased slightly.
   c. Pacific people were much less likely than non-Pacific people to be able and willing to undertake the skill assessment on a computer.
   d. Pacific people born in New Zealand or who migrated aged up to 12 years have much stronger English-based average literacy, numeracy and problem
solving skills than those who were older when they first arrived in New Zealand.

e. Pacific professionals and managers have strong English-based literacy skills – not significantly different from non-Pacific managers and professionals, but Pacific people are less likely to be in these occupations.

f. Employed Pacific and non-Pacific people have similar earnings at the same literacy and numeracy skill levels.

g. Pacific people are less likely to rate their health as excellent or very good compared to non-Pacific people. For Pacific people, self-rated health status is unrelated to literacy skill, whereas for non-Pacific people literacy skills and health status are strongly associated.

Consultation

8. The Ministry consulted with the following agencies on a draft version of the report: the Ministry for Pacific Peoples, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, the Tertiary Education Commission, Ako Aotearoa, and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority. The Ministry incorporated the comments and feedback into the final version of the report.

Key Risks and Benefits

9. The Ministry does not consider that the report poses any significant risks.

10. The report provides relevant background for work on raising achievement for Pacific learners within the Government’s Education Portfolio Work Programme, particularly the review of vocational education and training, and the broad focus on improving transitions from school to further education, training and work.

Next steps

11. We intend to publish Pacific adults’ literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills on the Ministry of Education’s Education Counts website on Thursday 18 October 2018. External proofreading of the report is underway.

Other relevant information

12. In June 2016, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment released three summary reports based on data from the Survey of Adult Skills. At the same time, the OECD published an international comparative report. The New Zealand reports were:
   - Skills in New Zealand and around the world
   - Skills and education
   - Skills at work.

13. Since then, the Ministry has published three further reports using Survey of Adult Skills data: Youth skills, Adults’ financial literacy activities and Māori adults’ literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills. The Auckland Council has published a report on
the survey results for Auckland. New Zealand findings have appeared in a wide range of OECD reports using Survey of Adult Skills data.

14. The Ministry is continuing with analytical work using the Survey of Adult Skills data. The dataset is now available to approved researchers in Statistics New Zealand’s Integrated Data Infrastructure. This enables exploration of broader areas of interest through linking the Survey data to the Census, and health, welfare, tax and education administrative collections.

15. The OECD has begun work on the next cycle of the Survey of Adult Skills where data collection will take place in 2021/22.

Proactive Release

16. It is intended that this Briefing is proactively released as per your expectation that information be released as soon as possible. Any information which may need to be withheld will be done so in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.

Agree / Disagree

Annexes

Annex 1: Pacific adults’ literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills