



15 FEB 2018

Mitchell Palmer
fyi-request-7130-7d876108@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Mr Palmer

Thank you for writing to the Ministry of Education on 17 January 2018, to request the following information:

- *All documents, formal or otherwise, related to the rate of functional literacy among school cohorts and the population at large, created in the last 3 years, and*
- *the latest headline figures on the rates of functional illiteracy among school leavers and the adult population, including any figures available divided by income, education level, ethnicity and gender.*

Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act).

Information about literacy, the uptake of reading and associated skills among all levels of the New Zealand population is captured in several reports and studies which we have contributed to, and which you may be interested in:

- Since 2001, we have collected information about reading among Year 5 students as part of a study involving 49 other countries in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS).
- New Zealand is part of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which aims to evaluate education systems worldwide, by testing the skills and knowledge of 15 year old students in participating countries.
- We are part of the OECD's Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), the most comprehensive survey of adult skills ever conducted, and
- We assess student achievement across the curriculum among Year 4 and Year 8 students as part of the National Monitoring Study of Student Achievement (NMSSA). Previous reports have focused on English, reading and mathematics
- We have compiled several reports on secondary school literacy, including three written in 2013, in conjunction with Auckland University's Woolf Fisher Research Centre.

The June 2016 PIAAC report *Skills in New Zealand and around the world*, which is available on *Education Counts* notes that adults in New Zealand score for literacy is above the OECD average. The average literacy skills of New Zealanders are high by international standards. On average, New Zealand adults score fourth in the world for literacy, behind Japan, Finland and the Netherlands.

The study grouped New Zealand adults grouped into levels of skill from Level 1 to 5. Level 1 refers to a person with low literacy skills, meaning:

- they have basic vocabulary skills, and understand the meaning of sentences
- can find short pieces of text within larger pieces of text when it is identical to what they are looking for, and
- they may have difficulty deciphering competing information from the same text.

The study showed that 88% of New Zealand adults were at level 2 or above, and of those, 16% were at level 4 or 5, meaning that they have high literacy skills.

All information in this letter has been published on our website *Education Counts*. You can find it by searching at www.educationcounts.govt.nz. To assist you, the addresses of the items listed above have been provided in the email this letter was attached to.

With regard to your specific request, the Ministry of Education does not measure the rate of “functional literacy” or “functional illiteracy” among school students or the population as a whole. I am therefore refusing your request under section 18(e) of the Act, as the information you have requested does not exist.

Our studies measure skills on continuous scales, and highlight the proportions of people with low, medium and high skills, but there is no concept of “illiteracy” in the studies.

Under section 28(3) of the Act, you have the right to refer this response to an Ombudsman. You can do this by writing to info@ombudsman.parliament.govt.nz.

Yours sincerely



pp. Dr Craig Jones
Deputy Secretary
Evidence, Data and Knowledge