

Review into vocational and applied learning pathways in senior secondary schooling

FINAL REPORT

NOVEMBER 2020







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MESSAGE FROM THE REVIEWER

I would like to thank the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education, the Hon. James Merlino, MP, for giving me the opportunity to undertake this important and fascinating work. Vocational and applied learning are of critical importance to young people, educators in all sectors and the wider Victorian community.

I have attempted to provide sufficient detail on the evidence that enables the reader to gain an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of current practice, and provide the rationale for our findings and recommendations. This Review was fundamentally informed by the views and experiences of the many students, practitioners and stakeholders we met, and I trust that our report does justice to those many thoughtful and committed conversations and submissions. I also trust that the report will provide the basis for further discussion, debate and the formulation of proposals for reform that extend beyond the immediate scope of our findings and recommendations.

There is no need to rehearse here what follows—the executive summary and the body of the report speak to our brief and I hope are clear in expression and intent. I will simply observe that I was, yet again in my long experience in Victorian education, mightily impressed by the capacity of so many teachers, school leaders, support staff, VET trainers and others who work with young people in a wide variety of settings throughout the state. They exhibit practical wisdom, commitment to the wellbeing of young people, knowledge and understanding of the world and the issues it presents for senior secondary students. Notwithstanding the many challenges detailed in the report, we have every reason to be confident that our network of schools and other providers will be able to grasp the opportunity to implement the reform directions proposed in this report.

I would like to thank all those who took the time to meet with us, present submissions, engage in debate and whose contributions have been crucial to shaping the report. I was extremely fortunate to have the support of an expert Reference Group of practitioners from all sectors, ably chaired by John Kennedy, MP, Member for Hawthorn. I thank them for their thoughtful deliberations and advice throughout the Review.

I was able to meet regularly with a high-level group of senior officials from the Department of Education and Training who provided me with expert advice and ensured that the Review team had access to information we required for our investigations. Similarly, we met regularly with senior staff from the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority and the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority to ensure that our thinking was appropriately informed by an understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities. I met regularly with the Hon. Jenny Macklin as she undertakes a concurrent review of Victoria's post-secondary education and training system. We are confident that our respective reports will complement each other in the ongoing reform of VET in senior secondary and post-secondary education in Victoria.

The work of the Project Director, Dr Kelly Jarvis and her secretariat team—Bernadette Cronin, Kate Frankish, Stuart Jones, Despina Metaxas, Daniela Spilkin, Jenna Tellefson and Avi Waksberg—has been superb and sustained from the beginning of the Review in November 2019 through to its fruition. Their diligence, attention to detail, work ethic and creative approach to policy development has made them a joy to work with. Our capacity to work as a team was severely tested by the COVID19 pandemic since March, but like so many others, we adapted to the world of remote working and Kelly maintained the camaraderie and commitment of the team. I thank you all—it was a pleasure to work with you.

Notwithstanding all this outstanding support and expert input, the findings, recommendations and report are my responsibility. They constitute my full response to the task I was given.

I am confident that this report provides a grounded and comprehensive basis for a set of reforms that will serve young people and the broader Victorian community well. I look forward to working with you all on successful implementation of these reforms.



John Firth



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is no better time and opportunity to reform the design and delivery of vocational and applied learning for Victorian students. This Review has benefited from the learning and experience of many and varied schools, vocational education and training (VET) providers, teachers, trainers, students and leaders. It is time to embark on a coordinated and integrated reform package that will deliver a better designed and valued specialist vocational pathway in the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), and improved access to this pathway and VET delivered to school students (VDSS) for all senior secondary students.

The need is pressing.

This reform package, underpinned by the recommendations in this report, will be the basis for a renewed commitment to a senior secondary education that will truly prepare all Victorian students to become active and informed citizens, successful learners and confident and creative individuals capable of making successful transitions to further study, training and ultimately secure employment. Senior secondary education needs to offer a range of high-quality pathways so that as many students as possible have appropriate options and can successfully transition to further education after school. Students have different interests, strengths, qualities and aspirations; the range of pathways in senior secondary should reflect this diversity. For many students, a vocational and applied learning pathway will be the ticket to a successful post-school transition.

Current economic conditions and a changing labour market make student preparation for the next step ever more important. There is considerable public commentary about the impacts on the labour market of technological developments, globalisation, environmental challenges, shifting industry growth areas and employer needs, and more recently, the global COVID-19 pandemic. It is too early, of course, to know exactly how the pandemic's effects will be felt but it is reasonable to assume that the impacts on the labour market for young people will be severe.

These challenges place additional premium on the responsibility of senior secondary education to equip students with the knowledge, skills, attributes and capabilities required for a successful transition. Vocational and applied learning pathways must be strengthened and broadened to meet these challenges. Senior secondary education is on the cusp of school and post-school life. It is the last universally available opportunity every student has to become adequately equipped, prepared and place themselves on the best possible track towards achieving their goals—personal and professional—throughout their adult lives.

Significant reform is required to achieve the ambition of vocational and applied learning pathways in senior secondary. Today, high-quality provision is unevenly distributed across the state, poor and inconsistent provider practices have emerged, student access to vocational pathways is limited in some areas and some core activities, such

as exposure to work-related learning and school–industry partnerships, are ad hoc. General perceptions of these programs are poor in comparison with the dominant VCE pathway and do not represent the potential value of vocational and applied learning for Victoria's students, employers and economy. These ingrained perceptions of vocational pathways have limited people's views on what vocational and applied learning is, what its benefits are and who it is for, and is inhibiting student transitions to higher-level VET pathways, including pathways in industry areas with skills shortage.

The Review recommends that Victoria is best served by an integrated senior secondary certificate system. An integrated certificate will empower students to personalise a senior secondary pathway that is aligned with their interests, strengths and aspirations, and to create an optimal subject grouping that exposes them to learning that is most relevant to their desired post-school pathway. An integrated senior secondary certificate will build on the successes of the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) and lessons of the past 17 years by solidifying its position as a respected senior secondary pathway of equal validity to the VCE. It will provide the basis for universal provision of education throughout the state, ensuring that every senior secondary student has access to vocational and applied learning pathways and a core offering of VDSS courses that align with Victoria's growth sectors and local industry needs.

The first step towards an integrated senior secondary certificate is to embed a vocational specialist pathway within the VCE. Separate senior secondary programs, however well intentioned, will continue to reinforce outdated stereotypes and dichotomies of academic versus vocational learning, of applied versus theoretical learning. Embedding the vocational specialisation in the VCE as the initial stage of the reform recognises the inherent interconnections in learning and acknowledges that, already, there is a mixture of these aspects of learning in the VCE and VCAL. It will also become increasingly important for vocational education to build both academic and practical skills as the effects of the COVID-19 crisis continue to unfold and more young people choose to enter post-secondary education.

This first step will lay the foundation for overcoming entrenched public perceptions of VCAL and ensure that the message is loud and clear—all pathways for achieving the VCE, whether through vocational specialisation or the standard VCE program, share a common goal—successful post-school transitions for students.

Many high-quality vocational and applied learning programs are already supporting students to achieve excellent outcomes and be as prepared as they can be for their post-school lives. Pockets of good practice occur across the state, with students being supported to make informed choices about their senior secondary pathway, to tailor it to their interests, strengths and aspirations, where they are exposed to applied learning and work-related activities in the middle years of secondary school, and are able to take advantage of well-developed relationships between schools and industry. The Review spoke with many

dedicated teachers, trainers and school leaders across all school sectors and non-school senior secondary providers (NSSSPs) who have embraced the value of vocational and applied learning and live its mission. The Review also engaged with current and former students who shared their personal experiences and highlighted the impact that undertaking a vocational and applied learning pathway has had on achieving their post-school aspirations.

There is much that can be learned from high-quality programs as well as from the teachers, trainers and school leaders who developed and delivered them. Efforts now need to turn to how this good practice can be adopted systemwide throughout Victoria so that all students can benefit from the full value of these programs. For change to be systemic, it is not enough to rely on the efforts of individuals alone. Neither is it fair to require individual providers to work it out for themselves. The proposed recommendations seek to ensure that schools, teachers and providers are adequately supported and guided to deliver quality programs.

Together, the recommendations under the Review's Terms of Reference provide a cohesive roadmap to improve the design of vocational and applied learning pathways, lift the quality of delivery across school and non-school sectors, improve student outcomes and overcome poor perceptions of vocational and applied learning programs. Six overall themes of reform have been identified across the five areas identified for examination in the Terms of Reference, namely, the objectives, design, delivery, outcomes and reputation of applied and vocational learning.

Transitioning to an integrated senior secondary certificate

The VCAL has notable strengths. When successfully delivered, it exposes students to an appropriate breadth of curriculum, develops work-related skills and capabilities, and engages them in their community while building citizenship skills and developing social conscience.

A transformed vocational specialisation needs to preserve these strengths while at the same time provide a substantially improved vocational pathway that realises its full value. These improvements include introducing sequential curriculum to minimise repeated learning outcomes, recognising higher levels of achievement through enhanced assessment and reporting, intensifying focus on equipping students with digital literacy skills and reducing complexity of the qualification. All students, regardless of whether they fully or partially complete the vocational and applied learning pathway, will receive an enhanced Statement of Results that more accurately captures their strengths, capabilities and achievements when they finish school.

However, while these improvements are necessary for the quality of the qualification, they are unlikely to overcome image problems that dog VCAL. The separateness of VCAL and the VCE has led to the VCAL being seen as 'the other' and being defined by what it is not.

There is value in embedding the vocational specialist pathway within the VCE as an initial step towards an integrated senior secondary certificate to overcome ingrained perceptions that currently plague vocational learning. This will create a vocational specialist pathway having equal legitimacy and deserving the same respect as the current VCE.

An integrated certificate will provide all senior secondary students with a genuine and identifiable vocational pathway that aligns with their personal strengths, interests and post-school aspirations and exposes them to the most relevant learning for their next move. Moreover, stakeholders overwhelmingly supported this approach. A comprehensive plan to transition to an integrated certificate should be prioritised.

Foundation VCAL recognises the achievements of some student cohorts, especially cohorts with disability and additional needs in both specialist and mainstream settings, and students who are re-engaging in education. Both the content and structure of Foundation VCAL support these cohorts to develop the knowledge and skills they need to make successful post-school transitions. The formal award of a certificate from the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) is crucial for these students and their families. However, the current qualification has its limitations and its senior secondary status is ambiguous. It is vital that an exit point at the level equivalent to Foundation VCAL is maintained and that a new Foundation Pathways Certificate can deliver an enhanced, more flexible qualification, providing a recognised and appropriate foundation for further training that leads to successful transitions.

Universal access, provision and a place-based approach

The best opportunity we have to support all Victorian students and equip them with the best chance at successful post-school transitions is to ensure they have access to programs that are suitable for their circumstances. These programs include the vocational specialist pathway and a core offering of VDSS courses that align with Victoria's growth sectors and local industry needs.

Many different players are involved in the landscape of VCAL and VDSS provision, including schools across all sectors and NSSSPs such as TAFEs and registered training organisations (RTOs). Intermediaries (e.g. VET clusters, Local Learning and Employment Networks) and industry stakeholders also facilitate student access and choice. Different local areas will have a different mix of providers, intermediaries and stakeholders. The current provision landscape has been shaped by individual provider decisions rather than coherent system design. As a result, there is non-uniform provision across the state, with student access restricted in some geographical areas.

The Review supports a placebased approach to provision in which all government secondary schools provide the vocational specialist pathway and the Department of Education and Training (the Department) plays an active role in ensuring provision is consistent across the State of Victoria. Providers will be empowered to collaborate and determine the most effective way to meet student needs, especially methods to deliver VDSS.

The school is the core provider for the majority of senior secondary students. For a small number of students, however, an alternative setting may be more appropriate to deliver the senior secondary certificate. A place-based approach will draw on the capacities of all the various parties to provide the best possible range of student options. It acknowledges the reality that not all providers can have specialised facilities for every VDSS course and supports specialist providers with program delivery in industry areas that are not currently being offered.

Delivery and workforce support

Strengthening support for delivery is necessary to overcome the currently wide variability in program quality. Existing levels of support from the VCAA and the Department fail to recognise the administrative burden, cost and complexity that goes hand in hand with delivery of high-quality vocational and applied learning programs. Unlike the delivery of standard VCE subjects, VCAL providers may need to coordinate contracts with RTOs, arrange shared provision with other providers, comply with health and safety requirements, and build strong partnerships with community partners and employers. The list is long.

The strengthening of quality assurance processes, moderation of assessments, provision of central VCAA support, and funding for in-school pathways coordinators are all important to lifting the quality of programs and building consistency across Victoria.

Specialised skills are needed to teach vocational and applied learning pathways and to cater for the diverse needs of student cohorts. The value of these pathways should also be effectively communicated to school leaders to facilitate promotion from the top. All exemplary VCAL providers that have been brought to the Review's attention share a key element—strong direction and support from school leadership. Providing more professional learning opportunities for teachers and school leaders is necessary if programs are to be rigorous and high in quality; it also signals how important this type of learning is for all students.

The Review recommends and support innovative approaches that address the current challenges that schools face with recruiting and upskilling VDSS trainers and working with RTOs to facilitate provision and improve quality. These recommendations will complement the approaches that will be proposed for the wider VET sector in the Skills for Victoria's Growing Economy Review.

Accountability for quality and outcomes

Schools are not always held to account for the quality of their vocational learning programs and student outcomes. This oversight is partially due to a general overemphasis on VCE programs and their results, which has diverted public scrutiny from VDSS courses and VCAL programs. The lack of clearly defined outcome measures in vocational and applied learning has also contributed to a general public silence—it is difficult to report on outcomes for which there are no clear or agreed measures.

With more delivery support and guidance, expectations of program quality and consistent practice across the state will increase. Introducing more granular outcome measures for vocational and applied learning pathways—and requiring their collection and reporting—will enable the determination of whether they are achieving the ultimate purpose of improving post-school transitions. This data will shed light on student destinations, achievement in the vocational specialisation and VCE-VET courses, and the quality of vocational and applied learning programs—outcomes that all players have a stake in. What it tells us will enable more meaningful conversations at the provider level about the quality and outcomes that are being achieved and where improvements could be made. It will also stimulate more nuanced and informed public dialogue about the value of vocational and applied pathways and the outcomes that they help to realise.

Preparation for senior secondary

Successful senior secondary pathways are more likely to proceed from a strong emphasis on career education and work exposure in the middle secondary years. Earlier experiences with applied learning in the Victorian Curriculum F–10 and with vocational tasters, as well as ongoing career education, will increase student understanding of the different pathways, support students to keep their options open and enable informed student decision-making in senior secondary.

Key influencers of student pathway choices, such as career practitioners and teachers, will also be supported by improving influencers' access to local labour market information and information on higher-level VET pathways. New in-school pathways coordinators will complement the important role of career practitioners by sourcing suitable work exposure opportunities for students and by building stronger relationships with employers.

Funding

Stakeholders frequently highlighted insufficient funding as a barrier to the delivery of high-quality programs. The funding models that underpin the delivery of vocational and applied learning pathways are complicated and could be more equitable. An opportunity exists to simplify funding for VDSS courses and to ensure the level of funding for vocational and applied learning pathways is adequate for NSSSPs, particularly given the needs of their (often more vulnerable) student cohort. If delivery of high-quality programs is to be realised, the funding base needs to be reviewed and revised so that it is commensurate with need.

Next steps

Implementation of the Review's recommendations can begin immediately. The Department and the VCAA can begin implementation in 2021 by enhancing support for delivery of the existing VCAL while developing the new vocational specialisation. The VCAA can also commence the design of the curriculum and the accreditation of the revised qualifications in 2021, followed by devising the communications and program implementation strategies for 2022 to enable the implementation of the reformed courses and qualifications in 2023 (see Figure 1).

Figure - 1 **Stages of implementing the integrated senior secondary certificate**



A collective approach is needed

The task of changing ingrained public and stakeholder perceptions is no easy feat, one that will necessitate a whole-of-system approach. The system leaders in this area, namely the Department and the VCAA, need to lead from the top and signal the importance of vocational and applied learning by prioritising reform in this area and be actively involved in provision decisions and in the monitoring of program quality. Examples of good practice exist and will continue to exist—they just need to be understood, learned and leveraged. At the same time, judgement is needed about what should be expanded, where and how.

The Review's recommendations, when taken together and implemented with fidelity, will support more students to access high-quality vocational and applied learning programs and set them up for successful post-school transitions to further education, training and employment as well as success in personal and civic life. Their successful implementation will deliver an integrated VCE certificate that provides all students with genuine and identifiable vocational pathways in line with their personal post-school aspirations.

We will know that the ambitions of the proposed reforms have been achieved when vocational pathways are held in high regard by students, families, providers and the broader community, and when more students are actively choosing to transition to higher-level VET pathways as their next step.

Now is the time to raise the status of vocational pathways, repudiate the unhelpful false dichotomies that have permeated the existing dual certificate framework, and begin shifting attitudes in relation to higher-level VET pathways.

LIST OF FINDINGS

Chapter 3: A new vocational and applied learning pathway

Finding 1

There are many high-quality VCAL programs delivered by Victorian secondary schools but too much variability in the quality of VCAL practice.

Finding 2

Poor public perceptions of VCAL are entrenched and are unlikely to improve as long as we have a dual senior secondary certificate framework that positions it as 'second best' compared with the VCE.

Finding 3

The strengths of the current design of VCAL should be incorporated into a new vocational specialist pathway, namely, its strand structure, opportunities for integrated learning, flexibility, its focus on work-based learning and work readiness, its opportunities for community engagement and partnerships, and its development of workplace capabilities.

Finding 4

There are opportunities to strengthen vocational and applied learning pathways, such as by increasing the rigour of the curriculum, enhancing its assessment and reporting, and reducing its complexity.

Finding 5

VCAL providers should be better supported by the VCAA and the Department to deliver high-quality VCAL programs.

Chapter 5: Foundation VCAL

Finding 6

Foundation VCAL plays an important role in recognising achievement of students with

disability and additional needs in specialist and mainstream settings, re-engaging students with education and introducing students to an applied learning pathway.

Chapter 6: Senior secondary provision

Finding 7

The mechanisms of accountability for students who leave government schools prior to completing Year 12 are ad hoc and have resulted in transitions that lead to students disengaging with education and employment which is the least desirable outcome.

Chapter 7: VET delivered to school students

Finding 8

VDSS plays an important role in providing pathways into post-school education, training and employment for both VCE and VCAL students.

Finding 9

VDSS serves multiple purposes in developing industry-specific knowledge and skills that are applicable across a wide range of employment, training and educational settings.

Finding 10

Most students are better served by attaining a senior secondary qualification that includes VDSS than by a standalone VET certificate.

Finding 11

Auspicious delivery of VDSS is an attractive delivery model for schools but requires appropriate quality assurance and raises perception issues about the quality of VDSS.

Finding 12

Schools require more support to shoulder the many and varied administrative requirements of delivering a comprehensive VDSS program.

Finding 13

As structured workplace learning adds considerable value to VDSS courses, its availability should be expanded.

Chapter 8: School based apprenticeships and traineeships

Finding 14

SBATs provide students with a valuable specialist pathway that enables them to develop workplace competencies and industry-specific knowledge and skills while attaining their senior secondary certificate.

Finding 15

Relative to full-time trainees, school based trainees do not spend enough time in the workplace and are prevented from developing vocational competencies.

Finding 16

Contrived employment arrangements do not provide students with quality workplace training and undermine both the quality and purpose of SBATs.

Finding 17

Schools require additional resource support to manage the heavy administrative burden associated with SBATs, which includes timetabling, coordinating with employers and registered training organisations, and navigating complex regulatory requirements.

Finding 18

Current rules and arrangements relating to SBAT funding and fees may limit access to SBATs for students experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

Finding 19

There is limited awareness of SBATs among employers and students about their benefits, and low prioritisation by schools, which have contributed to their status and perception challenges.

Finding 20

The alignment between SBATs and local labour demand could be improved to ensure that students who complete them have strong employment outcomes.

Finding 21

The Head Start model addresses many of the issues that plague SBAT, and full rollout of the Head Start model should focus on ensuring all schools are adequately resourced to support all SBAT students.

Chapter 9: School–industry engagement

Finding 22

School–industry engagement improves student and employment outcomes, although their effective practice remains uneven across the system.

Chapter 10: Preparing for senior secondary pathways and career education

Finding 23

Schools would benefit from appropriate central support to build applied learning in the delivery of the Victorian Curriculum F–10 in order to engage students and support their decision-making regarding senior secondary pathways.

Finding 24

Vocational tasters expose students to a variety of vocational pathways and support informed choices relating to senior secondary pathways. Although there are a range of successful models for delivering vocational tasters, their provision is ad hoc.

Finding 25

A balanced career education is important for informed student decision-making about post-school pathways. However, university pathways are better understood by school career advisers, teachers and students than applied learning and vocational pathways.

Finding 26

Opportunities for exposure to the world of work, including work experience, support students to make links between learning and work, and to develop work-related knowledge.

Chapter 11: Senior secondary outcomes

Finding 27

Public dialogue on senior secondary outcomes is unbalanced and focuses on the VCE, reinforcing widely held perceptions of VCE results and their positive post-school outcomes.

Finding 28

While the outcomes and measures for Education State targets and the Outcomes Framework are broad and aspirational, the lack of achievement data for VCAL students means that current measurement and reporting focus disproportionately on VCE performance.

Finding 29

Limited data being collected on vocational and applied learning makes it difficult to assess the quality of its practice.

Finding 30

A successful post-senior secondary outcome for a student is transitioning to university, higher-level VET or employment that has a vocational training component.

Finding 31

The Department should continue to monitor and report on student completion, noting it is only a partial indication of successful outcomes.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 3: A new vocational and applied learning pathway

Recommendation 1

The VCAA should create a new vocational specialisation that is embedded within the VCE and has the following design features:

- a sequential curriculum for vocational and applied learning units
- course requirements that are based largely on existing VCAL strand structure to maintain an appropriate breadth of curriculum
- enhanced assessment and reporting for vocational and applied learning Units 3–4
- new digital literacy units developed in a Unit 1–4 sequence
- tailored industry-based curriculum for Personal Development Skills and Work Related Skills units
- an enhanced Statement of Results for all senior secondary students.

Recommendation 2

Intermediate level achievement should be recognised in an enhanced Statement of Results for students who partially complete senior secondary qualification and are early school leavers.

Recommendation 3

The Department's performance framework for senior secondary education should make explicit reference to student achievement in recognised vocational and applied learning programs to support the delivery of high-quality programs.

Recommendation 4

The VCAA should provide additional support to deliver vocational and applied learning pathways, in the form of centralised and enhanced quality assurance processes, assessment moderation and the provision of implementation support programs and

professional learning opportunities for VCAL providers and teachers.

Recommendation 5

The Department should fund in-school pathways coordinators in government schools to reduce the administrative burden associated with delivering high-quality vocational and applied learning programs.

Recommendation 6

To support the delivery of vocational and applied learning programs across all school sectors, the VCAA and Department should:

- improve the quality of, and access to, professional learning in vocational and applied learning for both teachers and school leaders
- provide students, families and providers with enhanced information and guidance about industry pathways that include indicative subject groupings for particular occupational fields.

Recommendation 7

Implementation of the new senior secondary reform package should be accompanied by a promotional campaign to drive cultural change and address entrenched perceptions of vocational pathways.

Chapter 4: A single secondary certificate

Recommendation 8

The vocational specialisation should be embedded within the VCE. The VCAA should recognise students who complete this pathway using an appellation on the senior secondary certificate.

Recommendation 9

The VCE should be a fully integrated certificate with an embedded vocational specialisation. Under this single

framework, all students will have access to all components of the single certificate framework. The VCAA should develop a comprehensive plan to facilitate the transition to a fully integrated certificate.

Chapter 5: Foundation VCAL

Recommendation 10

A new Foundation Pathways Certificate should be created to formally acknowledge student achievement at the AQF level equivalent to Foundation VCAL and to facilitate pathways to the reformed senior secondary certificate, further education and training, and employment.

Chapter 6: Senior secondary provision

Recommendation 11

All government secondary schools should provide a vocational specialist pathway. A place-based approach should be adopted to ensure that all students have access to a high-quality vocational pathway that includes VDSS options with the most appropriate provider.

Recommendation 12

As public providers, TAFEs should have an explicit role in supporting universal access to vocational and applied learning pathways, which includes the provision of a range of core VDSS options that align with Victoria's growth areas and local industry needs.

Recommendation 13

The Department should play an active role in developing a place-based approach to providing vocational and applied learning pathways. Such an approach should include government schools, TAFEs and non-school senior secondary providers and, where appropriate, providers in the Catholic and independent school sectors.

Recommendation 14

The Department should be accountable for ensuring all students can access appropriate pathways and requirements for schools to follow up students who transfer out before the compulsory leaving age should be strengthened to support successful student transitions.

Recommendation 15

The regulatory requirements for non-school senior secondary providers delivering senior secondary courses should be strengthened to promote delivery of high-quality programs and improve student outcomes and student welfare.

Recommendation 16

An equitable funding model for non-school senior secondary providers should be developed to ensure these providers are adequately resourced to deliver high-quality programs and able to cater for the needs of their student cohort.

Chapter 7: VET delivered to school students

Recommendation 17

Existing VCE-VET offerings should be further developed to include:

- high-quality learning materials and assessment resources to support delivery of all VCE-VET subjects
- scored assessment for all VCE-VET subjects that include a unit 3 and 4 sequence
- a greater range of subjects
- credential the partial completion of identified subjects in some qualifications.

Recommendation 18

To facilitate the management of VET contracts and student enrolments, the Department should develop a single portal for schools and VET clusters that can be synchronised across existing administrative systems so that administrative requirements for schools can be streamlined.

Recommendation 19

The Department should facilitate specialised equipment replacement in Trade Training Centres (TTCs) and other facilities for VDSS, supported by improved strategic planning to increase utilisation across TTCs, TAFEs and other registered training organisations.

Recommendation 20

The Department should address student barriers with accessing VDSS through:

- increasing travel options and subsidies for students in areas with poor access to public transport
- working with TAFEs, schools and VET clusters in regional areas to pilot alternative delivery models for delivering VDSS, including blended learning models, intensive classes and mobile classrooms
- promoting the sharing and uptake of good practices in VDSS delivery across all VET clusters, including the facilitation of forums for clusters to learn from each other and receive guidance.

Recommendation 21

VDSS funding should be reviewed to:

- ensure it is based on the full costs of delivering VDSS and acknowledges that costs differ across industries and geographic areas
- reduce the complexity of the funding model
- signal that VDSS is a part of core school delivery while accounting for the additional costs of delivering VDSS
- ensure that materials costs of VDSS are not a barrier to student access.

Recommendation 22

The Department should play a greater role in the contracting of VET providers and should consider:

- providing schools with guidance to help them make provision decisions that will maximise quality and access to VDSS
- exploring options to assist schools deliver

VDSS under auspice arrangements with appropriate quality assurance processes in place

- leveraging economies of scale and brokering agreements with registered training organisations on behalf of schools to potentially negotiate reduced prices
- assisting schools to establish more efficient cluster networks to support sustained VDSS delivery
- developing and maintaining a shortlist of place-based preferred VDSS providers who offer high-quality VET courses that are suitable for school students.

Recommendation 23

The Department should promote professional development and peer learning for VDSS trainers through:

- developing professional learning for VDSS trainers focused on age-specific pedagogy
- expanding and promoting Professional Learning Communities with a specific focus on VDSS
- supporting VDSS trainers to maintain industry currency.

Recommendation 24

The Department should increase the supply of VDSS trainers and teachers by:

- increasing the profile of VDSS trainer roles among industry professionals
- exploring the creation of an education instructor category for VIT registration and pairing this with paraprofessional positions for VET trainers.

Recommendation 25

The Department should increase support for schools to ensure that all VDSS students have access to structured workplace learning opportunities by:

- requiring government tenders to include work-based opportunities
- providing employers with more guidance on how to engage with schools and what to expect from workplace learning arrangements

- requiring government business to deliver work-based learning opportunities.

Chapter 8: School based apprenticeships and traineeships

Recommendation 26

The Department, in consultation with the VRQA, VCAA and industry, should develop a policy requiring a minimum number of workplace hours for SBAT traineeships. The VRQA should use this policy to prescribe the minimum workplace hours for approved training schemes.

Recommendation 27

The Department should develop policy outlining the minimum requirements and workplace arrangement for SBATs so that the VRQA can monitor compliance and ensure that SBATs are offering students genuine employment and training opportunities.

Recommendation 28

Schools and non-school senior secondary providers should be required to approve SBATs before a student and employer can sign and enter into a training contract.

Recommendation 29

Schools need time and resources to actively monitor their students' SBAT experiences. The Review recommends providing more administrative support in the following form:

- increase resourcing so that schools have access to specialised staff to support SBAT students and are equipped to navigate complex VET and SBAT systems
- increase guidance on SBAT suitability so that schools know what arrangement is or is not appropriate and whether students are prepared
- enhance the role of Local Learning and Employment Networks to assist regional and rural schools find employers of SBAT students and help employers and students choose an appropriate

registered training organisation, thereby reducing workloads for schools, increasing community engagement and connecting students to legitimate employment prospects

- produce a comprehensive, clear and concise one-stop guide that is regularly updated and maintained, available to all and in particular made prerequisite reading for any coordination role.

Chapter 9: School–industry engagement

Recommendation 30

The Department should adopt a place-based approach to building school–industry partnerships. It should also have a stronger coordination role in these partnerships to provide students with more industry and employer exposure. Exposure can be promoted through, for example, local employer forums and career fairs, common forms of information sharing and provision of guidance to employers and schools to build productive relationships.

Recommendation 31

As a large employer and procurer of major projects, the Victorian Government should play a more direct role in creating partnerships with schools to provide students with work-related opportunities, increase the visibility of work opportunities in government projects and inform guidance for large employers on how to engage and partner with schools.

Chapter 10: Preparing for senior secondary pathways and career education

Recommendation 32

To ensure all students are exposed to applied learning and to a range of vocational pathways prior to senior secondary:

- the VCAA should develop additional guidance for providers that identifies opportunities for applied learning in the Victorian Curriculum F–10

- the VCAA should provide advice on how experiential learning can be linked to the Victorian Curriculum F–10
- the Department should promote student participation in vocational tasters that are linked to the Victorian Curriculum F–10 by using Tech Schools to host tasters, promoting partnerships with TAFEs and increasing the use of Trade Training Centres.

Recommendation 33

The Department, with the VCAA, should support enhanced career education relating to applied learning and vocational pathways in all schools by:

- developing a planning tool that enables schools and non-school senior secondary providers to map their work-related activities
- supplying schools and non-school senior secondary providers with up-to-date, credible and localised labour market information showing the diversity of pathways possible through both vocational and applied training and university.

Chapter 11: Senior secondary outcomes

Recommendation 34

The Department should adopt as a target the proportion of 24-year-olds who are engaged in full-time education, training or employment. The Department should also adopt indicators of successful transitions to post-school education and training that include the following measures:

- the percentage of Victorians aged 24 years who have attained a senior secondary qualification or equivalent
- the percentage of Victorians aged 19 years who are engaged in full-time education, training or employment with a vocational training component.

Recommendation 35

The Department should continue to invest in longitudinal data collections and post-school survey data while also exploring opportunities for data linkage.

Recommendation 36

The VCAA should review and update the completion data collected on VCAL, to record reasons for non-completion and to exclude those students who receive a 'Not yet complete' because they are continuing with their senior secondary studies in subsequent years.

Recommendation 37

The VCAA and Department should work with other jurisdictions to develop common indicators of capabilities and associated measurement and reporting for the Victorian Curriculum F–10 and the senior secondary curriculum. The VCAA should explore the potential to extend its work on assessment and reporting of capabilities for the Victorian Curriculum to capabilities to the senior secondary curriculum.

Recommendation 38

Schools should be provided with more granular senior secondary data:

- the Department should provide schools with results of existing surveys, such as the Attitudes to School Survey and School Staff Survey, broken down by cohort and senior secondary program
- the VCAA should collect and provide schools with more detailed and disaggregated results on unit completion as well as achievement, enrolment and satisfactory completion, similar to the reports produced on the VCE
- the Department should collect more information on VDSS outcomes, student experiences and student engagement with career education activities, including employer–school relationships, participation in work experience and structured workplace learning.

1

Introduction





High-quality vocational and applied learning pathways in senior secondary schooling are vital if Victorian students are to make successful post-school transitions to further education, training and employment as well as succeed in personal and civic life. The labour market of Victoria's secondary school students will differ from that of the generations before—industry growth areas are changing, a skills shortage is looming, emerging skills and capabilities are in demand and shocks from COVID-19 imminent with likely long-lasting effects. It is, of course, too soon to know exactly what these will be but strong preparation in the knowledge, skills and capabilities that underpin successful participation in the broader labour market will certainly be a priority.

On November 2019, the Victorian Government announced it would be undertaking a Review into Vocational and Applied Learning Pathways in Senior Secondary Schooling (the Review) to ensure all Victorian secondary school students have access to high-quality vocational and applied learning options. Given the current labour market conditions and significant recent investment in vocational and applied learning by the Victorian Government, it is timely to examine how vocational and applied learning pathways can be reformed and revitalised to prepare secondary students for their next step.

In 2019 a significant number of Victorian senior secondary students enrolled in a vocational and applied learning pathway: more than 24,000 students enrolled in the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), around 50,000 students in a VET delivered to school students (VDSS) course and almost 3,500 students in a school based apprenticeship or traineeship (SBAT).

However, despite these substantial enrolments in vocational and applied learning pathways, the Review has identified common challenges that are inhibiting their uptake, including inconsistent program quality, unequal access for some students, workforce and funding issues, poor understanding of labour market opportunities and poor perceptions of vocational and applied learning.

Victoria's vocational and applied learning pathways ought to be responsive to the learning needs and aspirations of as many and as diverse senior secondary students as possible if these students are to succeed post school. This objective has been uppermost for the Review.

The Review's recommendations aim to strengthen the design and delivery of vocational and applied learning pathways. In doing so, they seek to promote the benefits of this type of learning, improve public perceptions about these pathways, and give students the best possible chance at preparing for what awaits when they leave school. The implementation of the recommendations will ensure Victoria continues to provide an engaging, inclusive senior secondary experience that successfully prepares students for their post-school transition.

1.1 About the Review

1.1.1 Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference provide that the Review will make recommendations to reform vocational and applied learning in senior secondary schooling for the VCAL, VDSS and SBATs in five areas: the objectives, design, delivery, outcomes and reputation of applied and vocational learning.

The scope of the Review is defined by 22 questions across these five areas. A full copy of the Terms of Reference is available in Appendix A.

1.1.2 Approach to consultations

The Review placed significant emphasis on consulting widely with stakeholders. The views, experiences and opinions that stakeholders shared in these consultations were the primary source evidence that the Review relied upon to develop its findings and recommendations. Three phases of consultation were held during the Review.

Fortunately, the Review was able to conduct the vast majority of its proposed Phase Two consultations face to face, prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia. However, a visit to the Wimmera region and roundtables in Dandenong, Bendigo and Shepparton were cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions. The remainder of Phase Two consultations and all Phase Three consultations were online. Because of the substantial impact that the transition to remote learning has had on schools and other providers, the timelines for the Review were extended to ensure the reforms could be tested with key stakeholders prior to finalising the Review.

The Review visited 23 schools in February and March 2020. These visits included consultation with leadership teams, VCAL and VDSS practitioners and students in Years 9, 10, 11 and 12.

Phase One: November 2019 – January 2020

The Review targeted consultations with key stakeholders, including peak bodies, to raise awareness of the Review and to clarify the problems and challenges of vocational and applied learning. These consultations were used to refine the consultation questions and to identify key practitioners to consult for the second phase of consultations.

Phase Two: February – April 2020

This phase consisted of a significant period of consultations with stakeholders, including stakeholders from across all school sectors, industry representatives, employers, tertiary providers and parents and carers. A public submission process was run through the Engage Victoria website (Department of the Premier and Cabinet, n.d.), with targeted survey questions for the following groups: students; parents and carers; and education, training, industry and community stakeholders.

The Review's consultation activities in Phase Two included:

- roundtables with key stakeholders in regional and metropolitan locations, including schools, industry representatives, employers and tertiary providers
- regional and rural visits, including meetings with schools, principals, local TAFEs, local Indigenous groups and Local Learning and Employment Networks
- government school Area Principal Forums

- consultations through peak body forums, such as the Principals Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools, the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated general conference and the Local Learning Employment Networks' statewide forum
- consultations with current and former VCAL students
- market research with parents and carers
- regular meetings with the Department of Education and Training (Department) and the Review's Reference Group.

There was strong public and stakeholder engagement through the Engage Victoria platform, through which the Review received:

- 40 written submissions
- 185 survey responses from education, training, industry and community stakeholders
- 279 student survey responses
- 76 parent and career survey responses.

Phase Three: May – July 2020

The proposed reforms underpinning the recommendations were tested with key stakeholders to refine the findings and recommendations, and to understand the likely impacts of the reforms.

A full list of stakeholders consulted during the Review and of the survey questions are available at Appendix B.

1.2 Review context

Victoria's young people will face many challenges in their pursuit to become active citizens, productive contributors and valuable members of society. Among others, these challenges include rapid technological developments, climate change and resource challenges, issues of identity and inequality and changing social mores. Today's students are facing a world where workplace, jobs and tasks are changing at an unprecedented rate.

Education needs to rise to the task of equipping students with the knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions that will enable them to respond and adapt in an ever-changing world. Students need to leave school equipped with foundational literacy, numeracy and digital skills as well as general capabilities to navigate a changing labour market. Lifelong learning is a reality as people increasingly move between jobs and occupations. Given these needs and challenges, senior secondary education will be all the more critical to preparing students—regardless of their interests, abilities or aspirations—for post-school education or training and, ultimately, employment.

Senior secondary education in Australia shares the common national goals outlined in the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (Education Council, 2019). Victoria's challenge is to design the certification frameworks and delivery systems that can deliver these common goals and that provide the greatest likelihood of a high-quality senior secondary education for all Victorian students.

1.2.1 Changing labour market conditions

Education and training are more important than ever. The economic impacts of COVID-19 on young people are likely to be disproportionate, making it less likely that they can find secure employment straight out of secondary school. Compared to more experienced older workers, young people with less experience generally go through more job losses that take longer to recover from (de Fontenay et. al., 2020). The lack of entry-level jobs is likely to increase demand for secondary and postsecondary education as young people delay entry into the labour market and increase their education levels to increase employability.

Before the COVID-19 crisis, it was already difficult for young people to find secure employment. In February 2020, the youth unemployment rate was more than four times the overall unemployment rate, despite 29 years of continuous economic growth. Young people are also more likely to be long term unemployed than older workers, to require more insecure jobs before securing full-time employment, and are taking longer to secure full-time employment after finishing full-time study (Brotherhood of St. Laurence, 2019). For example, in 2017 it took an average 4.7 years for young people to find full-time employment after completing full-time study; in 1986, the average was one year (Brotherhood of St. Laurence, 2019; Foundation for Young Australians, 2018). The casualisation of the workforce, increase in independent contracting (e.g. through the gig economy) and stagnant wage growth have all adversely affected the ability of young people to find secure employment.

Given the severe economic shock and social dislocation caused by COVID-19, which is having—and will continue to have—a disproportionate impact on young people entering the labour market for the first time, it is more important than ever that the education system adequately prepares young people for their future by providing them with the skills, training and experience they need to engage in meaningful employment and other opportunities.

Victorian Council of Social Service, submission

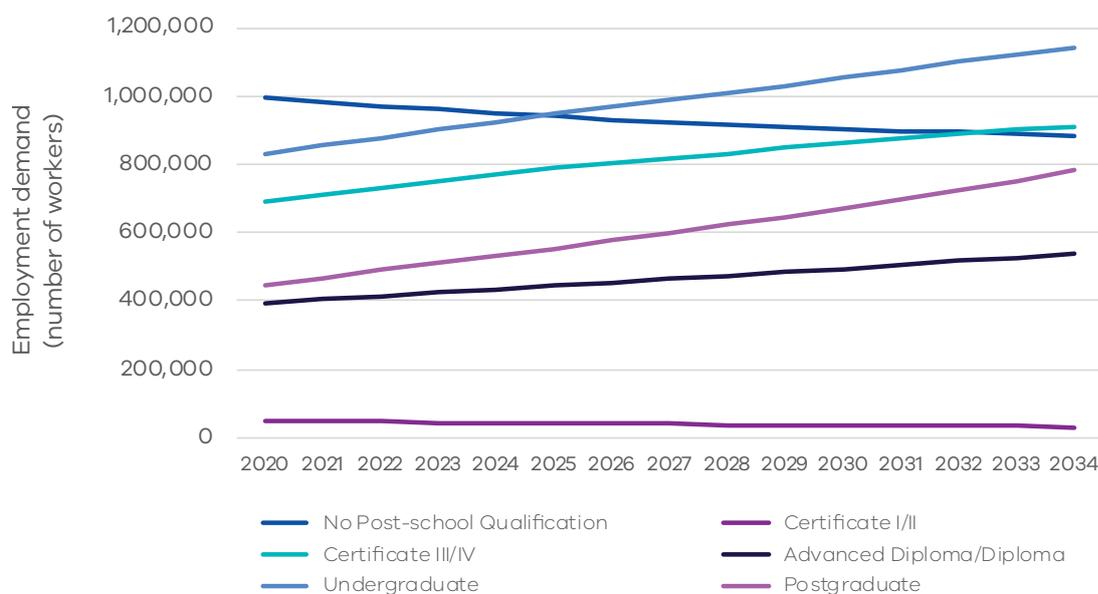
Australian students who have completed post-secondary education are finding it increasingly difficult to find secure employment. In 2015, more than 30 per cent of university graduates were still seeking full-time employment shortly after graduation; this is almost double the rate in 2008. The rate of full-time employment three years after graduation remains below 90 per cent (Challice et al., 2019). In 2019, just under 15 per cent of vocational education and training (VET) graduates were unemployed following course completion (National Centre for Vocational Education Research [NCVER], 2019).

The employment rate among university-educated adults in Australia is only two percentage points higher than among those with a vocational qualification, representing one of the smallest differences across OECD countries (OECD, 2019a). Additionally, the supply of university-educated workers in Australia has outpaced demand, with around 30 per cent of university-educated individuals working in jobs that do not require a degree.

1.2.2 Growing demand for vocational skills

Employment forecasts predict that occupations requiring a VET qualification are likely to grow by around 40 per cent over the next 15 years (see Figure 2). These occupational roles include personal carers, early childhood carers, education aides, information and communication technology support technicians, plumbers and electricians (Brotherhood of St. Laurence, 2019). As these occupations require a physical presence, they are also less likely to be disrupted by technological change.

Figure - 2 **Forecast employment demand by skill level, 2020–2034**



Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2019)

1.2.3 Equipping students for a changing world of work

Changes to the labour market will increase demand for post-secondary education. As the economy responds to technological advances, globalisation and other changes, the demand to re-skill will increase as new jobs are created and others become automated (Heath, 2016).

The future of work for young Australians will be characterized by flexibility and continuous change in how, what and where young people will work. The three key forces that will shape the future of work are: automation: ever-smarter machines performing ever-more human tasks; globalisation: our workforce going global and the global workforce coming to us; and collaboration: many jobs, with many employers, often at the same time.

Foundation for Young Australians (2015, p. 11)

While technological change has been continuously transforming employment, 'the speed with which automation technologies are developing today, and the scale at which they could disrupt the world of work, are largely without precedent' (Manyika, 2017, p. 2). Despite this, only a small number of jobs are likely to become fully automated; most jobs will require a change in skills required to do them (World Economic Forum, 2016).

AlphaBeta found that less than one per cent of jobs are lost each year due to technological change; instead, most of the displacement occurred within roles. This finding means most roles will change, and more people will have to work with technology (Select Committee on the Future of Work and Workers, 2018). While this may benefit some workers, others will face greater wage pressures and less job security. In particular, it is likely that young people will be disproportionately affected by technological change as most entry-level jobs in occupations are likely to be highly affected by automation (Foundation for Young Australians, 2015).

Technological change will also create new roles. Stakeholders consulted for the Review raised the need for senior secondary programs to prepare students for a changing workforce:

It is vital that we prepare young people for a rapidly changing world shaped by daunting economic, technological and social challenges. Emerging conditions—primarily the impact of COVID-19, the loss of manual ‘entry level’ jobs and the precariousness of employment—demand that we provide a broad repertoire of options for young people approaching the end of their secondary schooling.

Brotherhood of St. Laurence, submission

There is increasing commentary on the need for students to develop a broad range of cognitive and non-cognitive skills, such as communication, creativity, problem-solving, cultural awareness and critical thinking (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2018), in addition to foundational skills in literacy, numeracy and science (Heath, 2016):

Foundational skills like literacy, numeracy, and digital skills are baseline requirements for every worker as more human capabilities are increasingly becoming integral to the work people are expected to perform. Uniquely human qualities that cannot be coded into digital technologies like empathy, resilience, teamwork, critical and creative thinking, and complex problem-solving are in increasing demand, and education providers must strive to foster these qualities in each and every student.

Australian Industry Group (Ai Group), submission

1.2.4 Completing senior secondary has never been more important

Completing Year 12 is an important precursor to many life outcomes and ‘the minimum level of education attainment for successful participation of young people in further study and work’ (Lamb & Markussen, 2011, p. 1). On average, students who do not complete senior secondary have poorer employment, social and health outcomes (Lamb & Huo, 2017). Early school leavers tend to transition to ‘dead-end jobs, which offer no progression and training and therefore limited chances to progress through the labour market via either training or in-work progression’ (Birdwell et al., 2011, p.18). Additionally, employment outcomes of female Year 12 completers are better than that of both female and male early school leavers, even when these early school leavers later re-engage in vocational education (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2016).

Victoria’s secondary school retention rate has increased from 81 per cent in 2010 to over 87 per cent in 2019 although the growth rate has slowed since 2016 (ABS, 2020b). While encouraging, this retention rate remains far from optimal. In recognition of the importance of education in addressing inequality and disadvantage, in 2015 the Victorian Government set a target of halving the proportion of early school leavers by 2025.

1.2.5 Bias towards university education

Despite growing demand for vocational skills and positive employment outcomes for vocationally trained students, there is a general widespread bias towards university education.

Students often have a poor understanding of vocational pathways—only 14 per cent of surveyed students reported having a good understanding of vocational pathways, compared to 49 per cent who reported having a good understanding of university pathways. Seventy-four per cent of the students did not consider an apprenticeship or traineeship when they finished school. This imbalance is reinforced by school staff and parents who promote university pathways over vocational pathways (Shipley & Stubley, 2018).

Additionally, there is general confusion about the appropriate qualifications for intended career paths. Gore et al. (2017) found that nearly two-thirds of students who aspire to a career requiring a VET qualification wanted to go to university.

Many stakeholders raised concerns that some people believe those with high career aspirations require a university education. McCrindle research found that ‘four in five parents (79%) would prefer their children to go to university after leaving school rather than undertake a vocational training pathway’ (Wyman et al., 2017, p. 5). These preferences have steered students who might have been better served by a VET pathway towards university.

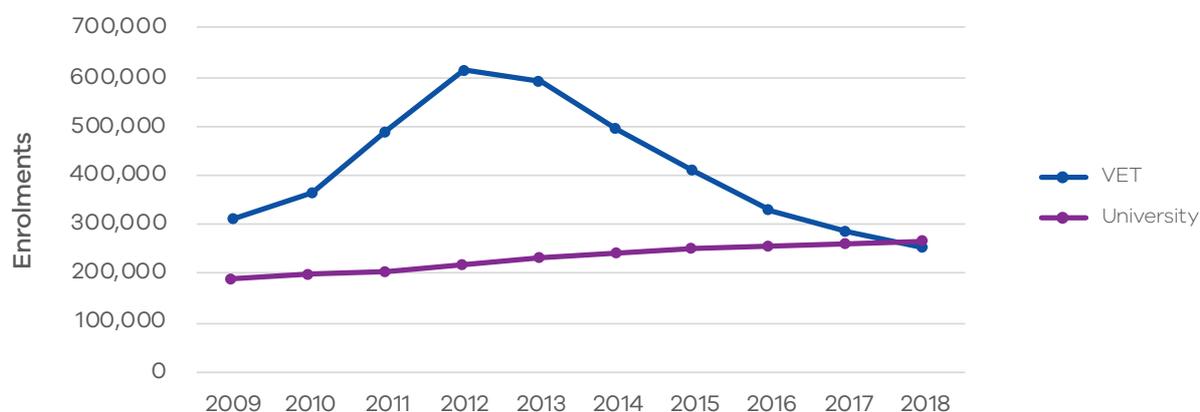
While university degrees lead to higher wages on average, there are students who would have had better employment outcomes from a VET qualification (Norton et al., 2019). Given the greater costs of a university pathway, students should be better informed about pathways and qualifications appropriate for their career aspirations.

The overemphasis on academic success in traditional subjects has led to a lack of exposure to vocational options even when students may be better suited to, and have better work outcomes, within these pathways.

Ai Group, submission

In the last two years, the number of 15- to 19-year-olds studying VET in Victoria fell from 121,620 to 114,169 (DET, 2020f). In contrast, Victorian university enrolments have grown by almost 40 per cent in the past 10 years (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2020a) (see Figure 3).

Figure - 3 **VET and university enrolments, 2009–2018**



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment (2020a), DET (2020f)

Given the current labour market challenges and the disparities between post-secondary education intentions and actual employment outcomes, reform is clearly needed to support young people in senior secondary education and transitions to post-secondary education and work.

2

The purposes of vocational and applied learning in senior secondary education





Senior secondary education is immensely important, occurring as it does at a unique, critical stage in each young person's life. As it is the last phase of compulsory schooling, senior secondary education must endeavour to equip each student for the wider world. It presents the last real opportunity to prepare all students well and ensure they are on the best possible track to achieve their goals and attain personal and professional success throughout their adult lives:

The senior years of schooling are a critical transition point for young people—emotionally, socially and educationally. These years should provide all students with the high-quality, relevant and engaging education and support necessary to complete their secondary school education.

Education Council (2019, p. 14)

Victorian students live in a rapidly changing world that is driven by globalisation and unparalleled technological advancement. The OECD identifies the emerging global economic, political, social and technological 'mega-trends' as 'globalisation, democracy and citizenship, security, ageing [populations] and modern cultures' (OECD, 2019b, p. 11). Young people are living in a world that is increasingly characterised as complex and multifaceted, with increased human mobility, shifting global economies, widespread misinformation, declining trust in government and challenges to political legitimacy, growing political and social unrest, security challenges (stemming from climate change and resource depletion, terrorism and cyberthreats), digitisation, regional and national inequalities, issues of identity and changing social mores.

If students are to be prepared and resilient, and be innovative and active citizens in a very interconnected and unprecedented world, education must 'evolve to continue to deliver on its mission of supporting individuals to develop as persons, citizens and professionals. It must remain relevant to continue to shape our children's identity and integration into society' (OECD (2019b, p. 13).

Education—including senior secondary education—must therefore adapt to ensure these students can forge their own successful pathways once they complete compulsory schooling.

2.1 History of senior secondary education

Compulsory primary education for all was introduced in the 1870s in Victoria, and for the first 100 years of its introduction the perceived role of secondary education was to largely sift and sort students for clearly defined destinations. University—and the generally academic preparation for it—was for the few. Vocational education was narrowly defined, targeted to specific occupational skills and only for those who needed to operate at prescribed levels.

Over the course of the 20th century, the school leaving age was periodically raised to reflect the increasing demands of a more sophisticated workforce, and curriculum and certification offerings were successively broadened to reflect the need for a broader skill set in the workforce.

In 1985, the Ministerial Review of Postcompulsory Schooling (the Blackburn Review) observed that senior secondary schooling has:

purposes somewhat different in emphasis from those of the [earlier] years of schooling ... arising from being at the point where schooling meets the wider community, from differences in aptitude and interest within the student group and from the age of students themselves ... [and that] this phase of schooling stands at the interface with further study in postsecondary institutions, with employment and with full legal citizenship.

Blackburn (1985, p. 12)

The Blackburn Review recommended that the curriculum in upper secondary be oriented towards the next stage of students' lives, and that students should be able to take more responsibility for their own learning.

Over the past 40 years, governments have been working to retain a very high proportion of students so they complete senior secondary schooling. This focus has led to various reforms to senior secondary certification, and most notably in Victoria with the introduction in 1991 of a single certificate—the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). However, the lack of clear pathways in the original VCE to non-university destinations drove poor student retention.

The Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria (Kirby Review) found that as a program, the VCE was limited in its suitability for the whole senior secondary cohort. Indeed, for many students the VCE was not a 'passport either to employment or to continued education leading to employment' (Kirby, 2000, p. 64). Appendix C further outlines the history of senior secondary in Victoria.

The 1991 reform was followed by the introduction of VCAL in 2003. Creating a second senior secondary qualification ensured vocational pathways were available to all students, thereby improving participation in senior secondary.

2.2 Purposes of senior secondary education

Senior secondary education has various purposes, many that are shaped by its proximity to adult life. These purposes benefit individuals, communities, the economy and wider society, and need to reflect and adapt to disruptions and developments in the broader community as well as globally. Many debates on these purposes and their competing definitions have transpired over many generations.

At its most fundamental, the purpose of education is to prepare students for life. The OECD noted that education 'needs to aim to do more than prepare young people for the world of work; it needs to equip students with the skills they need to become active, responsible and engaged citizens' (2018, p. 4).

The OECD's view aligns with that expressed in the Mparntwe Education Declaration, which is the latest in a series of 'Goals of Australian Schooling' statements designed to provide directions for all Australian jurisdictions and school sectors. Beginning with the Hobart

Declaration in 1989, followed by the Adelaide Declaration in 1999, Melbourne Declaration in 2009 and most recently the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration in December 2019, these statements have expressed the goals of schooling in terms that make the old dichotomies of theoretical versus applied, vocational versus academic learning, no longer tenable. The Mparntwe Education Declaration has two interconnected goals (Education Council, 2019, pp. 3, 6):

- Goal 1: The Australian education system promotes excellence and equity
- Goal 2: All young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.

It also aligns with the Victorian Government's vision for an education system that 'provides every student with the knowledge, capabilities and attributes that will see them thrive throughout their lives, to have the skills that industry needs, and that employers expect' (DET, 2019a).

Therefore, this single broad purpose must be articulated in the curriculum and certification so as to provide the best opportunity for all young people to access courses of study in ways that responds to their disparate personal goals, aspirations, achievements, abilities, interests and challenges.

This Review adopts as the fundamental purpose of senior secondary education that outlined in the Mparntwe Education Declaration, which states that senior secondary education should equip:

young people with the skills, knowledge, values and capabilities to succeed in employment, personal and civic life ... [and] The senior years of schooling should provide all students with high quality advice, support and experiences to make informed choices about their future and smooth the initial transition to further education, training or meaningful employment. This includes providing careers advice so that students with their families can make choices about their subject selections and post-school pathway.

Education Council (2019, p. 14)

Musset (2019, p. 13) noted that senior secondary education has the following different and varying missions:

to lay the foundations for the next levels of education; to allow for immediate participation in the labour market; to provide all students with sound basic skills; to prepare for adulthood and for participation as a citizen in society.

This Review considers the fundamental purpose of senior secondary is to prepare all students—regardless of their interests, abilities or aspirations—for post-school education or training and, ultimately, employment as well as success in personal and civic life.

Many commentators and stakeholders consulted for the Review share this position, with stakeholders emphasising the aspiration that every learner should be ready to thrive and succeed once they leave school.

This position does not mean that every student should be doing an identical program at senior secondary level—far from it. There needs to be a range of options for achieving this fundamental purpose, taking into account all sorts of individual differences, including personal abilities, aspirations, achievements, interests, challenges and the like. Students

should be empowered to make choices that reflect their needs and interests and be supported in their individual post-school transition. But these options should be framed in an inclusive approach or framework that recognises the value, and indeed the need, for all students to have access to the opportunity to learn and acquire knowledge, skills, attributes and capabilities that draw from both academic and applied learning, from both general and vocational learning.

2.3 Vocational and applied learning serves the purposes of senior secondary education

Vocational and applied learning in senior secondary serves the same purposes as those of senior secondary education:

the objective of VCAL should not be different from education and schooling, which is meant to provide a livelihood (via knowledge/skills) for a successful living and good citizenship.

Parent, online survey

Most stakeholders agreed that the fundamental purpose of VCAL, VDSS and SBATs is to facilitate and prepare students for successful post-school pathways (including transitioning to the workforce, going on to further education and training, as well as succeeding in personal and civic life). This view was shared by the range of different stakeholders who were consulted, including students, senior secondary teachers, VET and VCAL coordinators, career practitioners, VET and SBAT providers and trainers, and school leaders.

Many stakeholders, including students themselves, expected these pathways to achieve the fundamental purpose by, at the very least, enabling students to explore potential careers and develop technical and employability skills for the future:

to get students job ready with skills and understanding for work, to get students to be community minded to become useful members as they move into adult life, to be resilient and accepting of structures and systems in education and society that require effort and striving to achieve.

VCE and VET teacher, online survey

Many consultation responses to the Review emphasised VCAL's role in preparing students for life in general post school. For example, one VCAL teacher stated that:

the primary objective of VCAL is to help these teenagers become socially competent so that they can make a positive social contribution and have the skills to live a fulfilling and productive adult life. To this end, courses should emphasise the acquisition of transferable skills (personal, social and practical) as well as an overall conceptual understanding of their marketability in the modern, changing workplace.

VCAL teacher, online survey

The Victorian TAFE Association stressed that it is important to recast senior secondary as a broad platform for learning rather than solely for studying to attain a job, especially considering the enormous utility of learning to learn, learning to love trade and skills:

Vocationally oriented learning should be highly regarded for the preparatory role it can play in the transition from school to tertiary education and/or employment. It is vital that VET and VCAL not be regarded as isolated pathways to employment, but that they sit within a comprehensive senior secondary learning program.

Victorian TAFE Association, submission

Stakeholders expect VCAL, VDSS and SBATs to develop transferable skills (including literacy and numeracy) and personal qualities (such as confidence and a sense of purpose) and to create lifelong learners who positively contribute to and engage with community.

The Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry also highlighted that, alongside work-based learning, VCAL has an important role:

not only in equipping young people for entry into the world of work, but providing them with the functional competencies (literacy, numeracy, technology skills and 'soft' skills like effective communication, interpersonal and self-management) needed to participate in the economy and society more widely.

Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, submission

2.4 Specific purposes of vocational and applied learning support the fundamental purpose

Vocational and applied learning serves a range of different purposes that all contribute to the fundamental purpose to prepare all students for success in post-school education, work and life. These purposes include student engagement, supporting students with disability and additional needs and preparing students for specific career paths.

Some stakeholders claim that the multifaceted objectives of vocational and applied learning can be at odds with each other. For instance, the objective of a successful post-school transition into employment, personal and civic life can set high expectations of students, and conflicts with the objective of re-engaging some students. This latter objective recognises that some students will enter their senior secondary years with relatively low levels of prior achievement and motivation. Given such student circumstances, it is reasonable that forms of vocational learning incorporate a re-engagement strategy with the ultimate aim that students achieve the competences prescribed for the course.

These apparent tensions are a reflection of the various challenges that vocational and applied learning is tasked to address, a task that requires it to meet individual needs of students on the one hand while always keeping an eye on the fundamental purpose of senior secondary. Unsurprisingly then, the purposes of vocational and applied learning will be prioritised differently depending on the stakeholder. In truth, however, the realisation of both education's overarching goals and each student's successful post-school transition requires that all these 'purposes' interact with one another; it also requires that these purposes can be prioritised differently to respond to the individual needs of each student.

2.4.1 Engaging students in learning and improving student retention

Engaging students in education and retaining them until the end of Year 12 is important because it is found to be inherently beneficial for students.

However, rather than being a standalone purpose, engaging and retaining students should be viewed as one strategy for getting students on (or reconnecting them with) their pathways. The VCAL is an attractive pathway for engaging or re-engaging students who are not otherwise thriving in middle years and senior secondary, as it enables students to personalise their learning, follow their interests and explore horizons beyond classroom settings. Many students recognise this, including the 2016 VCAL Student of the Year, who stated that 'VCAL was the ideal way for me to not only stay in school but to achieve so many incredible things' (Chatfield, 2016).

A significant proportion of stakeholders, including students and school leaders, pointed to the retention and engagement of young people in an educational setting as a key purpose of vocational and applied learning in senior secondary. Some VCAL educators emphasised that:

the primary objectives for VCAL, VET and SBATs should be a [student's] continued presence in a supportive school environment

VCAL coordinator, online survey

Students emphasised that VCAL and VDSS are valuable tools for maintaining their engagement in education:

I did not achieve or feel connected and motivated during my time in VCE which is why, through effort and encouragement from peers and teachers alike, I switched to VCAL where I've already completed more work in a month than I did in an entire term of VCE. VCAL is something that's changed the way I've learned and my attitude towards school.

Current VCAL student, online survey

Engagement and retention are important, especially from educators' perspectives, because students benefit significantly from remaining in education until the end of Year 12. According to one pathways coordinator:

Research indicates that the longer students stay connected to formal education structures the better their long-term socio-economic, health and happiness indicators are. Teachers [and/or] education providers are often the constant in a young person's life and provide stability as well as preparing students for adult life.

Pathways coordinator, online survey

It is generally understood that a successful post-school pathway is 'necessarily preceded by the successful engagement of students with learning' (te Riele, 2014, p. 49) and that engagement and retention are fundamental to facilitating successful post-school transitions (Lamb & Huo, 2017). If students remain and are engaged in senior secondary education, they are more likely to pursue and are better prepared for a successful post-school pathway.

2.4.2 Supporting students with disability and additional needs

Vocational and applied learning pathways are extremely valuable for students with additional needs (e.g. students with disabilities) in both mainstream and specialist settings.

Foundation VCAL, which can include a VET component, enables students to develop a range of skills and provides opportunities to achieve genuine vocational outcomes. Foundation VCAL gives students:

the skills to engage long term with their local communities post school. So many of the learning outcomes included in VCAL are based on the employability skills that are necessary for our students. Feedback from TAFE and employers indicates that the VCAL students are well prepared to enter further study, apprenticeships and the workforce.

Principal, special school

Many stakeholders from specialist school settings strongly endorsed the Foundation VCAL program and, during consultations for the Review, expressed appreciation for the way it enables individualised learning and tailored programs, facilitates work readiness and recognises student achievement.

The certificate offers students with disability and additional needs something tangible to work towards and sets them on a post-school pathway that may otherwise be unavailable. In a submission to the Review, the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry acknowledged that:

[s]pecial schools that transition high proportions of their students direct from school to work are setting their students up for independent futures

Vocational and applied learning serves students with disability and additional needs well. However, this fact alone should not detract from their suitability for a wider array of students, nor divert from their fundamental purpose—to prepare *all* students to embark on an appropriate and sustainable pathway:

applied learning is not only necessary for students in Specialist schools, but for a percentage of students in all schools. Every student is entitled and requires a suitable pathway that matches their learning needs and interests.

Ashwood School, submission

2.4.3 Preparing students for careers in specific industry areas

Some stakeholders in industry, employment and training sectors interpret vocational training narrowly, believing that VDSS or vocational training is directly linked to employment and should set students on a path to a specific occupation or job. For example, one VET trainer stated that VCAL, VET and SBATs 'should be preparing students for the workforce, with skills and knowledge on industry-grade equipment and procedures' (VET trainer, online survey).

Such an employment purpose suits students who have already chosen a specific vocation post school. For example, a student consulted for the Review and who wants to be a builder,

saw VCAL as ‘an accelerated pathway’ that would enable him to finish school with a completed Certificate III in Building and Construction, and quickly transition to employment.

For stakeholders who subscribe to this view, an unsatisfactory outcome might be a senior secondary student who studies VDSS as part of their senior secondary schooling because of general interest rather than for a specific career goal, and who does not go on to work in the industry post school. In addition, such a view holds that students should only be completing a Certificate II in Equine Studies if they intend to work in a related industry.

This narrower employment-centric interpretation undervalues the transferable skills in the training packages. It is a stark contrast to stakeholder perceptions of VCE units as well as the attitudes of most school staff. For instance, if a senior secondary student enrolled in a VCE chemistry subject does not go on to further education and training or employment in a science-related field, this is generally not considered an unsatisfactory outcome.

O’Connell and Torii (2016, p. 76), quoting Clarke (2012), reported that:

by focusing narrowly on skills acquisition for a particular occupation or trade, [VET in Schools] students miss out on the opportunity to develop the broader capabilities needed throughout life ... [s]ome [VET in Schools] stakeholders find that the narrow focus on job-specific skills fails to address the ‘broader educational development needed to support ongoing training and career growth’.

Most school staff consulted for the Review agreed there is value in students undertaking VET subjects as part of a rigorous general education. For instance, one school career practitioner acknowledged that VDSS helps ‘to expose students to the world of work’, shows them what it is like to be an employee and learn employer expectations, gives ‘them access to employment pathways’, shows them aspects of an industry they have an interest in and helps them ‘make informed decisions about that industry and their future in it’ by ‘getting their hands dirty and feet wet in the real world’ (Career manager, online survey).

School staff generally agreed that all VET subjects offer a unique experience, both in applied learning and exposure to workplace culture and expectations that are not available in VCE and school-developed subjects. Schools recognised that VDSS subjects are valuable as part of a general education program because they are of intrinsic interest and provide access to workplace-related learning, as well as providing a specific vocational pathway for some students.

2.5 The purposes are not sufficiently translated in program delivery

The purposes of vocational and applied learning programs need to be clearly specified to inform program delivery. Despite broad agreement across all relevant policy documents on the purposes of senior secondary schooling—to support successful post-school transitions into employment, personal and civic life—there is insufficient clarity on how Victoria’s existing senior secondary offerings (particularly the VCAL) achieve this fundamental purpose.

In the case of some programs, the connection between the agreed purpose, public perceptions and on-the-ground delivery of Victoria’s senior secondary programs are tenuous. The lack of clear official guidance outlining and differentiating the purposes and principles of the different senior secondary pathways has also hindered the translation of purposes into practice. The policy and curriculum guidance on the purposes and principles of VCE and VCAL that are provided by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) lack the detail that is available for their senior secondary certificate counterparts in other Australian jurisdictions. A helpful outcome of this Review for schools and the broader community would be to have a clear and full exposition of the underlying purposes and principles of Victoria’s senior secondary qualifications.

The complexity, confusion and mixed understandings of what VCAL, VDSS and VCE deliver and how they relate to the fundamental purpose of senior secondary have significant implications for not only the viability of pathways offered through these programs but also employer and student engagement in them:

Students, parents, employers and other members of the community are unclear of the purpose of vocational and applied learning in schools and how it prepares students for life after school. As a result, perceptions towards VCAL are often negative and in some instances, this extends to VETIS and SBATs. These perceptions can affect students’ decision-making about their school and post-school pathways as well as resource decisions made by schools.

Parents Victoria, submission

The Review notes that stakeholders who are closely involved in successful VCAL programs are more likely to demonstrate a clear understanding of the link between the purpose of vocational and applied learning in senior secondary and their VCAL program. At a micro level, providers who run high-quality programs, such as Narre Warren South P12 College and Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education, Inc., appear to have the strongest and clearest understanding of the purpose of vocational and applied learning and, therefore, of what constitutes a good program outcome.

In contrast, confusion about program purpose appears most evident among general commentators or educators who have little experience with running VCAL. It is noteworthy that while it can be difficult to find people (other than VCAL teachers and coordinators) who truly understand the VCAL program, it is relatively easy to find people who hold strong opinions about it. This discrepancy—understood by only a few and strong views held by many—points to a key challenge for the program’s public image, which we examine in Chapter 3.

2.6 A dual qualification framework exaggerates differences and promotes relative status

Separate senior secondary programs, however well intentioned, have tended to reinforce outdated stereotypes and dichotomies of academic versus vocational learning, theoretical versus applied learning. The fundamental purposes of education are the same for all students on a senior secondary pathway, whether that be through the VCE or VCAL. Both pathways share a common goal—a successful post-school transition—but provide different means to get there.

The issue with having separate VCE and VCAL pathways is that it exaggerates perceptions of difference and relative status, inadvertently sends messages about the intended outcomes of each pathway and, by implication, the characteristics of those students undertaking them.

Consigning vocational and applied learning to an alternative program (in this case, VCAL and/or VDSS) inevitably positions it as the second choice to the 'main' program (i.e. VCE). The existence of two separate certificates reinforces assumptions and perceptions that are unhelpful and largely untrue: that one form of learning is less valued, that one qualification requires lower aspiration, is less in rigour and expects less of students, and that a vocational pathway is for only one type of student.

Vocational and applied learning should be valued in the same way as academic and theoretical learning. There are inherent connections between them. Together, they provide strong foundational education for all senior secondary students.

The VCE and VCAL already contain a mixture of each of these aspects of learning, although they may differ in approach to starting points, emphases, and in the balance of different studies and units within their programs. Vocational and applied learning enhances a student's senior secondary education by inspiring them, consolidating their acquired knowledge, bolstering their learning outcomes and propelling them into future learning endeavours. Unlike 'traditional academic learning', vocational and applied learning gives students the opportunity 'to apply their knowledge and skills in situations with real-world relevance' (O'Connell & Torii, 2016, p. 77)—opportunity that is increasingly important if students are to be prepared for Victoria's rapidly changing job market.

It is entirely appropriate, and indeed, necessary, for senior secondary certification to provide different options that emphasise various elements of academic and vocational, theoretical and applied learning. The design challenge is to do so in a way that maximises opportunities for individual students to undertake a program best suited to their needs while delivering on the broad goal of preparing all students for a successful transition.

2.7 Sharpening program focus to support successful transitions

Coherent and consistent communication that clearly articulates the direct links of the program to the fundamental purposes of senior secondary is important.

However, it is also crucial for providers to be able to demonstrate how their program delivery and student outcomes are connected to these purposes. Without demonstrable links, there is a lack of recognition or consistency in what a 'successful' outcome looks like for students undertaking vocational and applied learning, and no agreement on what should be measured to evaluate whether VCAL, VDSS and SBATs are achieving their broader purposes. The connections between programs—including their delivery and outcomes—and the purposes of senior secondary education should therefore be made more explicit for all stakeholders. This can be done, for example, by justifying actions and reporting on outcomes in terms of the fundamental purposes.

It is vital that all senior secondary programs, including vocational and applied learning programs, support and are seen to support the fundamental purposes of senior secondary education. The Review noted in Chapter 2.6 that the dual certificate model appears to have only increased the gap between VCAL and VCE in public opinion, although both certificates in fact have a shared purpose. What is required is a single, overarching framework that provides appropriately differentiated components to meet the needs of the whole cohort but will allow flexibility and permeability of post-school destinations.

The findings and recommendations of this Review will strengthen the focus of vocational and applied learning programs to support successful post-school transitions. These recommendations include defining what a successful post-school pathway is and re-imagining the Outcomes Framework for vocational and applied learning pathways to enable better understanding of whether these programs are achieving their fundamental purpose (see Chapter 11).

3

A new
vocational and
applied learning
pathway





The VCAL was introduced to ensure vocational pathways are available for all students and to:

provide the skills, knowledge and attributes to enable students to make informed choices about pathways to work and further education. Personal development, students' interests and pathways for senior secondary students, in the context of applied learning, underpin the design of VCAL ...

VCAA (2019, p. 15)

For many students in the Victorian senior secondary system, VCAL is an important pathway to further education, training and employment. Since its introduction in 2002, both student uptake and the number of VCAL providers have grown significantly. Enrolments have increased 32 per cent over the last 10 years to nearly 25,000 in 2019. VCAL is now delivered by 469 providers across the state. Additional VCAL trends are outlined in Appendix D.

VCAL has notable design strengths, and many providers deliver a high-quality program that empower students for successful post-school transitions. Many advocates recognise the program's huge value and potential. In consultations across the state, the Review encountered many students, teachers, senior secondary providers, school leaders, VET trainers and employers who both supported the program and wished that more people could appreciate its considerable benefits. Positive feedback from community members who have been exposed to successful and well-run VCAL programs highlights the need to preserve those elements that have proven to positively benefit students and advance the purposes of vocational and applied learning.

Opportunities exist to strengthen the design and delivery of VCAL to raise the quality of the programs.

3.1 Current VCAL practices

There are many examples of high-quality VCAL programs, and retaining their strengths is important in the design of any future certificate.

Notwithstanding the existence of high-quality programs, a significant critique of VCAL is that there is considerable variability in the quality of VCAL programs across the state. Inconsistent program quality suggests that VCAA quality assurance is not as effective as it should be.

Further, stakeholder consultations highlighted that variable program quality is a reflection of both limitations in the design of the qualification itself, and poor implementation and delivery by some providers.

A consequence is that lower-quality programs detract from some of the excellent programs that are being delivered.

3.1.1 Good VCAL practices

The Review visited numerous providers who deliver high-quality VCAL programs and noted the common elements in their delivery (see Table 1). During the consultations, stakeholders highlighted that many providers of high-quality programs have had to learn to do so from the ground up with little system support.

Table 1 - Common elements of good VCAL practice

Element	Description
Leadership support for the VCAL program	<p>Leadership believes in the mission of applied learning and is committed to it</p> <hr/> <p>Strong support from leadership to resource the program</p> <hr/> <p>VCAL program is given priority status in relation to staffing and timetabling</p> <hr/> <p>Senior leadership representation within the VCAL team, such as learning specialists, leading teachers and assistant principals</p> <hr/> <p>Allocation of specialist and other learning support staff to the VCAL program</p> <hr/> <p>Allocation of dedicated VCAL spaces within the main school</p>
Staffing that shapes student learning	<p>Students have appropriate levels of access to wraparound supports and services (e.g. mental health support, career education and other support services)</p> <hr/> <p>Providers focused on re-engagement have a high staff to student ratio</p> <hr/> <p>Dedicated staffing resources such as VCAL coordinators, pathways and transitions staff, and teaching staff with industry and teaching experience</p> <hr/> <p>Established communities of practice and cluster networks provide networking opportunities for staff and enable resource sharing</p>
A critical mass of VCAL students	<p>Most high-quality programs have a critical mass of senior secondary student cohort taking VCAL; however, there are some successful programs that have smaller proportions of VCAL students</p> <hr/> <p>A critical mass of VCAL students contributes to an inclusive student culture and minimises stigma associated with VCAL</p>

<p>High-quality and personalised curriculum with links to real-life skills</p>	<p>VCAL classes are personalised and structured to adapt to student interests and current events; effort is made to make the VCAL strands, work placement and VET coherent</p> <hr/> <p>Internal student assessments beyond 'Satisfactory'/'Not yet complete' grading to provide timely feedback and encourage students to extend themselves</p> <hr/> <p>Strong links with industry, and most high-quality providers have good working relationships with their Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN)</p>
<p>Celebration of success with students, parents and the community</p>	<p>Clear and consistent messaging around VCAL, how it works and what is required for a successful outcome</p> <hr/> <p>Student success in VCAL is celebrated throughout the community</p> <hr/> <p>An established internal culture in which VCAL is seen as an equally important and valid pathway to the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE)</p>
<p>Community-focused programs</p>	<p>The notion of community service and citizenship is actively encouraged</p> <hr/> <p>Students are encouraged and supported to develop a sense of social responsibility, such as through community projects</p>
<p>Opportunities for students to experience VET and applied learning in the middle years of schooling</p>	<p>Provision of multiple student opportunities to experience applied learning prior to Year 11 (e.g. through work experience placements, vocational tasters and industry-related micro-credentials such as first aid certificates)</p> <hr/> <p>Meaningful conversations with students and families about pathways are supported</p>
<p>Support for students to choose the most suitable program based on interests and career goals</p>	<p>Schools who know their students and have effective preVCAL pathways education can support their students to enrol in the most suitable program</p> <hr/> <p>In some settings, students are required to apply for entry into the VCAL program and attend interview for admission; being prepared for a work readiness program is particularly pivotal to acceptance into programs</p>

Student experiences of VCAL

During consultations with stakeholders, the Review spoke with current and former students about their VCAL experiences. Many were able to articulate how the VCAL program supported their career pathway. The students consulted were mostly graduates of high-quality programs delivered by school and non-school senior secondary providers (NSSSPs), and their overwhelmingly positive feedback reflects this.

Several themes were highlighted in these consultations:

- **Exploration of pathways:** the flexibility of VCAL enabled students to explore various pathways and change direction when necessary. Work placements provided students with real insights into their workplace and were a source of motivation. A former student attributed the work placement as 'giving her the edge' she needed to apply for her current position.
- **Interactive way of learning:** students enjoyed the interactive nature of tasks and their relevance to 'real life'. Having choice and control over aspects of their learning was also highly valued.
- **Influence of VCAL teachers:** students frequently talked about the positive influence that their VCAL teachers had on their experience, which they believed was key to their success and completion of VCAL. The importance of staffing VCAL with teachers who understand the principles and practice of applied learning was also mentioned.
- **Sense of achievement:** the reflective practices in VCAL enabled students to see their personal and academic growth. The program gave students direction, kept them connected to education and, in some cases, placed them 'back on track'. One student commented that 'VCAL helped me discover what I could do and what I was capable of'.
- **Successful transitions to further education:** several former students commented that completing VCAL gave them the confidence and self-belief to explore different directions and pursue further study and training.

Most consulted students associated VCAL (and VDSS) with the learning of useful skills, and saw it as essential to their future pathways.

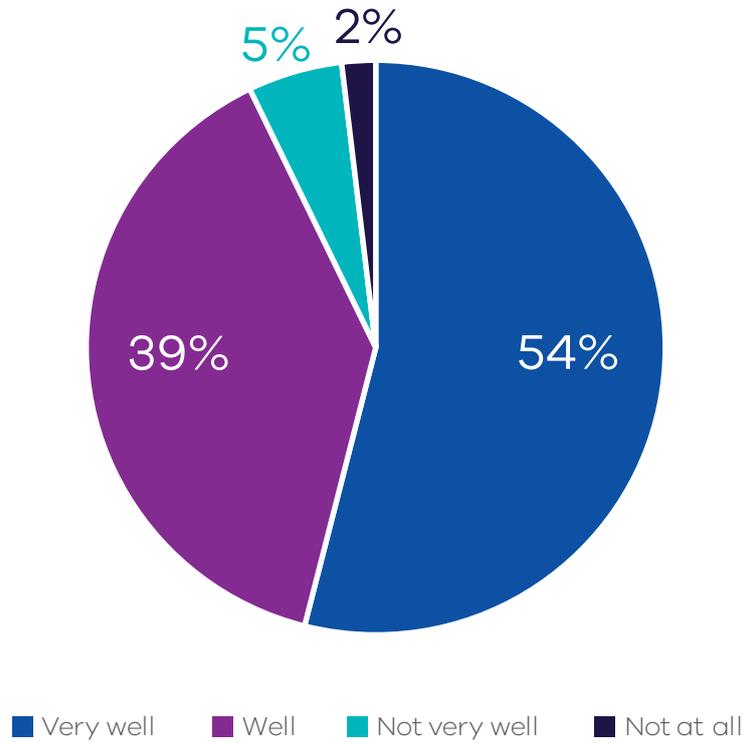
I love VCAL, best way to learn!

VCAL student, online survey

Ninety-three per cent of the students who responded to the Review's online survey agreed that VCAL had prepared them 'well' or 'very well' for further education and/or work (see Figure 4). Over 80 per cent of students rated their VCAL program as either a 'four' or 'five' out of five and around 90 per cent of students said they would recommend VCAL and VDSS to other students.

While the online survey data does not encompass all Victorian senior secondary students and their parents' views, its results indicate that those who are engaged in high-quality VCAL and VDSS programs recognise their value.

Figure - 4 **Student ratings of VCAL effectiveness in preparing them for further education and/or work**



Source: Engage Victoria, Department of the Premier and Cabinet (n.d.)

Many students who responded to the survey agreed that the VCAL program had given them a heightened sense of independence and the confidence to actively realise their preferred pathway. For example, one student commented that 'in my opinion VCAL has been very helpful. It has helped prepare me for the future' (online survey). Likewise, another student stated that 'when I complete my year 12 program, I feel that I will be ready for the future that is to come'. A third student declared that 'I now feel confident to go out in the workforce' (online survey).

CASE STUDY 1:

Narre Warren South P-12 College

Narre Warren South P-12 College is a large government school in South East Melbourne with about half of their senior student cohort enrolled in VCAL. They have long been regarded as an example of outstanding VCAL practice, evident in the number of VCAA's VCAL Achievement Awards that have been granted to both students and staff of the College.

VCAL has been a core component of the College's program since its inception, with sustained principal class leadership to ensure VCAL was never seen as the 'other' certificate. This leadership has established a strong culture: the College's Honour Wall features VCAL award winners as well as VCE high achievers, the student leadership team consists of both VCE and VCAL students, and the facilities for VCAL and other vocational learning programs are well resourced and centrally located in the large school grounds.

The VCAL teaching team has been strategically developed and refreshed periodically, ensuring a breadth of experience and approaches. This staffing practice promotes student–staff relationships, as there is likely to be someone in the team that a student can connect with. Staff changes are proactively managed and are intended to bring more teachers into the VCAL program while also protecting staff from burnout that can accompany relationship-focused applied learning. The teachers are all advocates of their students and the program, and are passionate about the role of VCAL in developing the current and future skills that students need.

A common refrain across the College—from its leaders, teachers and students—relate to pathways and destinations. Students, both in VCAL and in the middle years of schooling, can articulate their desired destination—some being specific to a job and some being more general, such as a way of working—and how their learning in VCAL will help them on that path. They share the understanding that the desired destination should shape student decision about their senior secondary pathway, not their intelligence or ability. Many students acknowledge that pressure to complete the VCE came from outside the school but were comfortable in their senior secondary choices because they understood how the VCAL would help with their aspirations for the future.

Source: School visit

3.1.2 Poor VCAL practices

No provider sets out to deliver a low-quality program. However, both stakeholders and previous research identify a range of poor practices in the implementation and delivery of VCAL.

Stakeholder consultations highlighted that there is little central or system support for developing and delivering VCAL programs, which contributes to a diverse range of low-quality programs.

Some poor practices are unintended consequences from the design of the qualification. Others arise from a lack of understanding of what is required for effective implementation (outlined in Table 1) or from a perception within the school that VCAL is inferior relative to the VCE—a perception that has influenced the way some schools deliver their programs.

The Review's attention was drawn to evidence of poor practices, identified both by stakeholders and in previous research, including:

- **Limiting student choice of enrolment in VCAL:** teachers reported the negative impact on student motivation and behaviour when students are forced to study VCAL against their wishes (Valad Solutions, 2018). In addition, stakeholders advised that there was reluctance in some schools to enrol students with disability and additional needs or students from refugee or migrant backgrounds into VCE, instead using VCAL as a default option for these student cohorts. Such a practice fuels the perception that VCAL is a 'dumping ground' and detracts from the efforts of other providers to create a high-quality program.
- **Fast-tracking students through VCAL programs:** this is done using carry forward credits and delivering the minimum viable product to ensure that the student completes VCAL. This practice is concerning because students may not be adequately extended in their learning.
- **Allocating teachers to VCAL as an allotment filler, sometimes against their wishes:** Debrincat (2015, p. 244) observed that VCAL is sometimes seen as 'dumping ground' for teachers who have struggled with the VCE and teachers can be reluctant to teach VCAL because of status issues. Research indicates that 38 per cent of teachers started teaching VCAL at the request of the school principal—more than double the figure for those who sought to teach VCAL on their own initiative (16 per cent) (Debrincat, 2015; Sheehan, 2014). Stakeholders provided the Review with examples of VCAL units being taught by multiple teachers across the week.
- **Allocating resources that inadequately reflects the additional needs of the VCAL student cohort:** VCAL students have a diverse range of learning needs (as well as social and emotional needs) that is not always considered in the implementation and resourcing of VCAL. Some teachers reported that they had students with mild disabilities and significant learning difficulties for whom additional support was not provided (Valad Solutions, 2018).
- **Transferring students out of VCE and into VCAL late in the school year:** this practice can leave students ineligible to complete a senior secondary qualification, particularly if the student has not completed VET requirements for an Intermediate or Senior VCAL. It also means VCAL teachers have to cope with the constant movement of students into their classes (Valad Solutions, 2018).
- **Delivering a VCAL program over three or four days (including the VDSS component):** while this allows more time for structured workplace learning (SWL) or other employment, there is often no expectation that students attend school if they are not working. Such delivery is common in smaller non-school adult and community settings, in which such a program is considered a full-time course by providers in these settings (VRQA, 2020a).

- **Giving students minimal agency in their studies:** this practice occurs when VCAL programs are often the same for all students, and little or no choice is given in terms of VET certificates. This practice affects student attendance and engagement with their VET studies, and is more common in smaller NSSSPs (VRQA, 2020a).
- **Delivering ineligible programs for which students are not enrolled with the correct mix of subjects to enable completion of a VCAL certificate:** given the complexity of VCAL pathways, enrolling a student in an ineligible program is always a possibility. Providers are encouraged to run an eligibility report upon student enrolment and any time an enrolment is changed. Providers who do not run eligibility reports whenever an enrolment changes can risk having students enrolled in ineligible programs.



Finding 1

There are many high-quality VCAL programs delivered by Victorian secondary schools but too much variability in the quality of VCAL practice.

3.2 Public and stakeholder perceptions of VCAL

An almost universally held view among stakeholders was that the current standing of VCAL as 'not the VCE' was damaging the perceptions, status and value of the certificate. Despite successive improvements to VCAL since its introduction, there was a persistent sense that VCAL will always be defined by what it is not.

Perceptions of VCAL are hugely important as they can influence whether a student enrolls in the program, how strong the program is, whether the student will be supported and whether they will succeed.

Overall, stakeholders associated with high-quality programs were more likely to be positive about VCAL. For example, many VCAL leaders and students were passionate advocates of the program, particularly when their school has a high-quality offering. While parents and guardians of prospective VCAL students (many of whom are initially unfamiliar with the VCAL program) tend to regard it initially with a degree of scepticism and reluctance, they can be convinced of its merit once they see their children thrive.

However, during stakeholder consultations the Review heard countless times about the stigma attached to VCAL. There is substantial evidence that most perceptions of VCAL 'from afar' are negative, and these perceptions colour public confidence in and reduce willingness to engage with the program. In schools where VCAL is treated more as an afterthought, both VCAL students and educators often face judgement and are patronised by their non-VCAL senior secondary peers, parents, teachers and other community members:

VCAL is perceived as a low-level program for struggling students and is often branded as 'babysitting' for some students who are not interested in school.

VET and VCAL teacher, online survey

Although the VCAL students consulted in the Review were generally positive about their chosen program, they were also often aware of its negative reputation. Some students reported that before having to make a choice about their senior secondary certificate, they were heavily influenced by this negative reputation. When asked about their perceptions of VCAL, Year 10 students described the program as:

Easier ... for dummies ... for trades and apprenticeships ... because it's easy ... the kids that do it are 'dumb' so we don't want to do it ... My parents won't let me do it.

Student consultation

Some schools have been found to actively discourage students from undertaking VCAL, especially if the student is believed to be capable of undertaking the VCE (Debrincat, 2015). Many school staff consulted in the Review highlighted that there are significant numbers of students who would be better served by a VCAL pathway but opt to study VCE (often unscored) instead because of the stigma associated with the former:

VCAL is not seen as equal... Students too often opt for an unscored VCE even though the pathway is not recommended by the school ... [and] when this occurs, more often than not a non-scored VCE program results in much poorer post-school outcomes.

Principal, stakeholder roundtable

The Review observed that school staff perceptions of VCAL differed depending on individual school leadership and on how much it prioritises and openly supports VCAL. Its reputation tends to fare worse in schools for which vocational learning is not prominent or valued, such as schools that use the VCAL program as a 'dumping ground' for more difficult or underachieving students, so that VCE classes can be freed up to concentrate on students more likely to achieve higher study scores:

Schools and teachers are the VCAL's biggest problem. It is used to hide students who are perceived to be discipline problems and low academic achievers.

VCAL curriculum leader and teacher, online survey

Additionally, even schools with high-quality programs and strong leadership reported that their community continued to hold negative views of VCAL:

Despite all our silverware, the VCAL brand is 'stained' and needs rebranding and relaunching.

Principal, stakeholder roundtable

Employer peak bodies are aware of the 'pejorative stereotypes of VCAL students and the program itself' (Ai Group, submission). They also acknowledge the impact that negative perceptions of vocational and applied learning pathways have on students' career aspirations and future career preferences.

Despite this, employer peak bodies recognise the benefits of pathways offered by VCAL, not only for workforce growth and demand but also because they lay the foundational skills and knowledge required for active economic and social participation in society (Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, submission).

However, this view is not shared by all employers. Some schools reported that local employers perceive VCAL negatively, actively encouraging students to complete the VCE instead. Limited school–industry engagement and communication hinder employer understanding of VCAL and its requirements.

Many stakeholders reported that poor student perceptions of VCAL may be driven by parents who do not necessarily understand the VCAL program and its viable pathways (stakeholder roundtable).

The public understand the academia structures behind VCE because generally they all went through that type of schooling—regardless of how successful they are or weren't at it ... it's what they know. They do not know what VCAL structures are so in their ignorance they assume to the negative. It's a very hard perception to break in parents.

VCAL coordinator and teacher, online survey

Parents also indicated that terminology used in VCAL can be confusing, hindering their engagement with their children's pathway decisions:

I know there are a few choices, I'm mixed up to tell you the truth. It's confusing.

Parent, focus group

Their reported experiences are corroborated by research, which has found that 'parents in general did not know enough about the VCAL program to make an informed judgement' about it (Debrincat 2015, p. 232).

The Review heard a general desire for accessible information and visual material about VCAL to dispel confusion and inform meaningful decision-making (Catholic School Parents Victoria, submission).

The views and opinions of parents and guardians can significantly influence student career choices. Dommers et al. found, for example, that 'the negative attitudes of parents prevented some young people from enrolling in vocational training' (2017, p. 23). Most Australian parents have high aspirations for their children and would prefer that they transition to university (Wyman et al., 2017).

General stigma affecting vocational and applied learning pathways is a key systemwide barrier that is likely to influence student decision-making about vocational and applied learning.

Drivers of poor perceptions

A variety of different factors drive and perpetuate negative perceptions of VCAL specifically and of vocational education generally:

- A preference for VCE and university pathways pervades many Victorian schools, colouring the views of students, teachers and staff in leadership positions. As most teachers, career counsellors and school leaders are VCE and university graduates, the university pathway is their lived experience. Further, many school principals and school leaders have never taught VCAL. Whether conscious or not, the view of VCE is that it is the 'default position'. Without specific central support and clear directive, the VCAL is unlikely to be understood or promoted.

- There is limited recognition of VCAL in the media and in many schools, especially against the background of general preoccupation with the VCE and the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) system.
- VCAL is widely 'perceived as a low-level program for struggling students' (VCAL and VET provider, online survey). Such a view reflects poorly not only on the student cohorts who are over-represented in VCAL and VDSS (e.g. low socio-economic, rural and regional and Indigenous students as well as students who are not academic achievers), but also on the VCAL program itself.
- The complexity, variable quality and status of VCAL as 'not the VCE' further entrench its public image and tarnish the program's reputation.
- Victoria's dual certificate framework significantly contributes to the perceived inferiority of VCAL. A dual certificate system encourages individuals to position the VCAL program as an alternative offering to senior secondary students that, compared to the default option (i.e. VCE), falls short. The different label of 'VCAL' inherently contributes to the perception that it is a second choice. Without correcting these perceptions, community attitudes are unlikely to shift even if the inherent qualities of VCAL are demonstrated.

Many other factors influence VCAL's reputation, including limited recognition of its benefits and achievements in the public domain, negative stereotyping of its student cohorts, program complexity (which exacerbates parental confusion and poor understanding), poor VCAL practices and inadequate accountability for it.

However, even if these individual issues were to be addressed, Victoria's flawed senior secondary certificate design reinforces public perceptions that vocational pathways are inferior and entrenches VCAL as the lesser program. This view was shared by many stakeholders consulted for the Review.



Finding 2

Poor public perceptions of VCAL are entrenched and are unlikely to improve as long as we have a dual senior secondary certificate framework that positions it as 'second best' compared with the VCE.

3.3 Design and delivery of VCAL

The Review consulted widely on both the strengths of VCAL and opportunities for reform. While stakeholder support for VCAL and the current certificate is strong, opportunities to strengthen outcomes were also identified.

This section outlines the strengths of the current qualification as well as the opportunities to improve its design and delivery.

3.3.1 VCAL strengths

Stakeholders highlighted a number of strengths of the current VCAL qualification that should be retained:

- the strand structure
- its opportunities for integrated learning
- its flexibility
- its focus on work readiness
- its development of workplace capabilities
- the community engagement and partnerships that are possible.

Strand structure

There is strong support among stakeholders, including providers and school leaders, to retain VCAL's strand structure. The strand structure supports students to undertake an appropriate breadth of learning that includes core literacy and numeracy skills and employability skills. It also provides a coherence to the VCAL program and a framework for successful program development and delivery.

Recent research found that the 'four strands are well aligned with the knowledge, skills and capabilities that are being identified for success and to help graduates overcome the barriers identified in the new work reality of the future' (Foundation for Young Australians, 2018, as cited in Valad Solutions, 2018, p. 76).

Opportunities for integrated learning

VCAL teachers highlighted that a key strength of VCAL is its ability to integrate learning outcomes within and across strands to support student learning and extension. Integrated learning encourages student engagement and provides a real-world model of learning, as opposed to a strictly siloed approach to subjects:

you must maintain the ability of the course to integrate curriculum. It's one of VCAL's real strengths. Students are so much more engaged when their literacy and numeracy, PDS [Personal Development Skills] and WRS [Work Related Skills] have real-world applicability. The point that these are genuine skills that ensure employability and engagement in various aspects of real adult life are brought home in a practical way that's so much more powerful to these kids than classroom bound English/Maths.

VCAL teacher, online survey

Research in the United Kingdom has also demonstrated that embedded language, literacy and numeracy support within vocational learning improves student retention and success rates and contributes to less tangible outcomes such as learner self-confidence (Casey et al., 2006).

Consultations with students indicate that students in high-quality VCAL programs with an integrated curriculum were readily able to make links between the strands, which in turn helps them to build connections with their post-school pathway.

CASE STUDY 2

Mentone Grammar

Mentone Grammar's school leadership introduced VCAL into its senior secondary program to ensure that all its students had a pathway to graduation. While the program remains small, it has become a crucial element in the breadth of education offered at the school.

The strategy taken by the school's VCAL program was to conduct projects that brought the rest of the school to them. A significant project was the design and construction of a pizza oven that would be located at the centre of the school grounds, which was continued by the ongoing provision of pizza days to students and staff. The program gave VCAL students responsibility for the whole project—planning, budgeting, completion, service and communication—using it as a means to develop and demonstrate their employability skills.

The dedicated teaching team, led by a passionate and committed VCAL teacher, focused on developing student independence and understanding of their pathway while they learned across the breadth of VCAL strands. The teachers and the students are advocates of VCAL in the broader community, and are instrumental in helping teachers, parents and other adults in the Mentone community understand the purpose and potential of vocational and applied pathways. Such advocacy is particularly important as VCAL providers in the area are few and community sentiment and networks appear to favour a more traditional approach to senior education.

Source: School visit

Flexibility

High-quality vocational and applied learning considers the needs of individual learners. VCAL's flexibility was highlighted by stakeholders as a strength for several reasons, including:

- it can be personalised and enables students to individualise their pathway
- it can be delivered in, and tailored to, many different contexts
- it can be adapted to students' learning needs and integrates learning with student interests
- it caters for a broad range of student abilities and interests and can accommodate students' changing circumstances.

The VCAL qualification rules allow students to create a program that incorporates VCAL, VCE and VET subjects (including further education qualifications) so that they can explore and tailor pathways aligned to their interests, strengths and aspirations.

However, some VCAL providers cannot offer the same flexibility in the subjects offered due to registration requirements that limit their ability to deliver VCE units.

Students can complete a VCAL certificate or individual subjects over a period of more than 12 months, which enables them to learn and achieve at their own pace:

A key strength of vocational and applied learning is that it offers students the flexibility to pursue their interests, and to work at a pace that meets their needs. This flexible pace is particularly beneficial for students whose participation and engagement in learning may be impacted by their experience of homelessness, family violence, neglect, abuse or other trauma, mental ill health or disability.

Victorian Council of Social Service, submission

VCAL's flexibility, however, is not always realised. Valad Solutions (2018) found that the most common implementation of VCAL gave students little choice, if any, in their subjects for a VCAL program. While a choice of VCE and VET studies is provided by some schools, many students consulted for the Review indicated that there was little or no choice as to how their certificate was constructed. However, students indicated they were given choice about the level of topics, themes or work placements, and in how work was completed and assessed.

CASE STUDY 3

Ballarat High School

Ballarat High School's VCAL program is housed in flexible learning spaces and staffed by passionate, committed teachers. Their VCAL program has evolved over many years, and is attributable to stable and consistent school leadership, a focus on developing a program that meets the diverse needs of their students and a commitment to brokering students' steps into the world of work.

Strong community partnerships have been developed in the broader Ballarat community to ensure students have opportunities in industries of interest. It is an expectation that if students are not engaged in a workplace for a minimum of one day a week, they are engaged with learning at school. This expectation is enforced and ensures that no placement does not equate to a day off from school. This has seen the number of students without a placement plummet as there is a shared understanding, between students, parents, teachers and employers, that workplace learning is valuable and essential in developing 21st century employability skills.

VCAL Student Leaders were passionate about the role of VCAL in keeping them at school and engaged in their education. They spoke about being disconnected from school prior to VCAL, to the point of not wanting to enrol in a Year 11 program at all, and that they came to enrol in this flexible program because the teachers were able to engage with them.

VCAL students wanted to share their positive experience with others and are leading the redesign of the way that the VCAL program is celebrated and promoted in the Ballarat High School community. Plans for parent expos as well as gallery walks for younger students were initiated at the annual camp, with the aim of developing a broader understanding of what actually happens in a VCAL program and how VCAL, and the VET undertaken, can lead to a destination of choice.

Source: School visit

Focus on work-based learning and work readiness

A feature of high-quality vocational and applied learning is its focus on work-related learning. This focus is apparent in many facets of VCAL, including the Work Related Skills Strand and its associated units and VET qualifications. Although SWL is not a mandatory requirement of VCAL, it is highly recommended by the VCAA.

Research shows that as well as developing critical skills for life and work, work-based learning is linked to increased school completion rates, better employment prospects and higher wages. In addition to being interesting and valuable for students, work-based learning complements other learning (Dommers et al., 2017). Industry exposure provides young people with a realistic understanding of their potential career pathway (Brooks et al., 1995; Klatt et al., 2016) and improves access to labour markets in which work experience is often a prerequisite for many jobs (Committee for Economic Development of Australia [CEDA], 2016).

That work-related learning is a key strength of VCAL, has also been corroborated in stakeholder consultations:

Another key strength of vocational and applied learning is access to on-the-job experience and industry exposure. Students gain an insight into potential career pathways, while learning practical skills that they can apply to future studies, training or work.

Victorian Council of Social Service, submission

Students can engage with employers and industry as part of their VCAL and get to integrate on-the-job experience with secondary schooling, through arrangements such as SBATs or an SWL arrangement. Such opportunities to integrate experience and learning provide students with insight as to potential career pathways while still at school:

VCAL is a foot in the door to where you want to go.

Former VCAL student, stakeholder meeting

By linking secondary school learning with the development of work readiness skills, VCAL provides a clear pathway to post-school destinations.

Community engagement and partnerships

A commonly identified strength of VCAL is its ability to connect students to their communities and foster partnerships. Students engage with the community, for example, through community projects and charity-related activities, and build citizenship skills and develop social conscience.

These activities also support the development of skills, capabilities and qualities required for successful transitions to personal and civic life, as well as employment. Applied learning programs such as VCAL often connect students with those community partners, organisations and individuals outside their school who provide opportunities for relevant real-world learning experiences (Pridham & Deed, 2012). Industry and community partnerships play an important role in supporting students to develop technical skills, technical expertise and the opportunity to experience industry infrastructure, enabling them to achieve better educational and transition outcomes (Klatt et al., 2016).

As the delivery of VCAL can take place in a variety of settings, including community and workplace settings, VCAL providers work in partnership with the community and industry to provide authentic learning opportunities. The Review heard that students benefited a great deal from the real-world applications of learning that comes from working with partners and the community.

Development of workplace capabilities

VCAL nurtures capabilities that are indispensable for a modern workforce. These capabilities include resilience, creativity, problem-solving and critical thinking. According to stakeholders, these capabilities are 'front and centre' in the Work Related Skills and Personal Development Skills strands, and VCAL 'enables young people to acquire "in-demand" technical, foundational and "soft" personal skills' (Brotherhood of St. Laurence, submission).

Stakeholders also considered that the likelihood of these capabilities being developed through VCAL was higher than through VCE, particularly in VCE programs without a VET component.

Aligning with parental desire for their children to attain 'life skills' for the future, vocational studies are thought to best deliver this, particularly over VCE which is instead believed to help progress children to a university entrance score via theory-based learning and not preparing them for life after study.

Di Marzio et al. (2020, p. 7)

The development of workplace capabilities is particularly important to prepare students for the future world of work as well as to succeed in personal and civic life.

CASE STUDY 4

Hallam Senior Secondary College

Hallam Senior Secondary College is committed to providing vocational and applied learning opportunities for all students, whether through a VCAL or VCE program. The school has an almost 50/50 split of VCAL and VCE students and school leadership anticipate that this will shift as more students enrol in the VCAL program over the coming years. The College is also the base for the Head Start program and houses the main campus of the Hallam Valley Trade Training Centre.

As a senior secondary college, Hallam is committed to working more effectively with feeder schools in the area so that students are better informed about their choices when they enrol into the College's Year 10 program. A range of possible actions are being explored and this may include Hallam leaders and teachers supporting feeder schools with career exploration programs or the development of a taster-style program in Year 9. The College's experience of working with feeder schools highlights the unique challenges of all senior colleges seeking to support students to make significant decisions without the benefit of knowing these students through their middle years of school.

The school has clear aspirations in the vocational learning space: to work more strategically with local industries to ensure that there are clear and consistent pathways into meaningful work and further training, to ensure that teaching approaches and physical resources of the school are aligned with key identified industries and to be cognisant of developing those skills that are relevant for industries (for example, practical trades today require skills in mathematics and technology that may not have been required a generation ago).

To provide broader exposure to potential pathways and allow exploration of interests without committing too early, students are encouraged to undertake two VET programs over their three years at the College. They are also encouraged to complete their SWL in multiple locations, again with the aim of providing diverse exposure to inform student decision-making.

Source: School visit



Finding 3

The strengths of the current design of VCAL should be incorporated into a new vocational specialist pathway, namely, its strand structure, opportunities for integrated learning, flexibility, its focus on work-based learning and work readiness, its opportunities for community engagement and partnerships, and its development of workplace capabilities.

3.3.2 Opportunities for reform

Both research and stakeholder consultations highlighted a number of opportunities to strengthen VCAL's design and delivery to improve student engagement and achievement.

Design issues

Stakeholders identified a variety of design issues with the current VCAL certificate that could be improved or simplified in a reformed VCAL certificate. These design issues are outlined below.

Level structure

The three-level VCAL structure was designed to allow for the broadest cohort of students to participate in VCAL and to provide for movement between these levels as relevant knowledge, skills and attributes are gained. There is some stakeholder confusion about the learning demands of each level and how students can progress through them over the course of their schooling.

The three-level structure, when combined with other VCAL design features, has led to unintended consequences.

The most significant of these consequences is the ability to carry forward credits from one level to the next. In a mainstream context, this has resulted in some students acquiring an Intermediate or Senior VCAL certificate in less than one year—a result that is inconsistent with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), which provides that the volume of learning typically associated with a senior secondary certificate of education qualification is two years.

Carry forward credits

There was stakeholder support for the removal of carry forward credits, particularly among school stakeholders:

VCAL Numeracy and Literacy credits should not carry over from certificate to certificate. Students should have to meet outcomes for each strand for each certificate.

Career practitioner, online survey

Carry forward credits were introduced to support student re-engagement with education and to encourage them to stay in school education for a further year. Another rationale for these credits was that students could use carry forward credits so they could undertake more workplace learning and VET studies in their final year of education.

While this intended use does occur in some programs, a common impact is that students who have VCAL credits from the level below may have reduced workload in their final year. As noted in Chapter 3.1.2, the carry forward credits system has led to some poor practices by providers. For example, providers delivering the minimum viable product can enable their students to qualify for the certificate or use carry forward credits so that students finish early and can leave before the end of the calendar year. This unintended use of carry forward credits has also been enabled by weaknesses in curriculum design, such as duplicated learning outcomes across the VCAL levels and the absence of a clearly sequenced curriculum.

Stakeholders suggested that carry forward credits could arguably be interpreted as 'double dipping' because units completed for one VCAL certificate level can also be used for the certificate level above. In addition, they stated that carry forward credits are a source of confusion for teachers who are new to building VCAL programs.

Curriculum rigour

Teachers, parents and carers also raised concerns that the expected literacy and numeracy competencies in the VCAL curriculum are too low, which affects student decisions to take VCAL and reinforce preconceived notions about the program:

Some of the literacy tasks are ridiculously simple and can be finished off too quickly. They do not encourage deeper understanding because what we're asking from them is just so brief.

VCAL teacher, online survey

Similarly, feedback from employers suggested that the literacy and numeracy components of VCAL could be strengthened to support pathways, including careers in traditional trades:

For example, VCAL students are forced by inadequate timetabling into basic maths and English subjects. Carpentry students should be completing specialised maths appropriate for future development, including accounting and technical mathematical areas that suit the career. English should be broadened to include looking at contracts and reading practical guides such as contracts and manuals.

We need kids coming out with a better level of maths. Otherwise they can't handle the electrical apprenticeship schooling.

Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, submission

Valad Solutions (2018) found that, rather than adopting an intervention strategy to develop foundational skills, some VCAL teachers avoided the teaching of reading and writing when teaching literacy, focusing instead on oral tasks. This was particularly evident in the case of students who lacked confidence and proficiency. Some teachers viewed such an approach as being consistent with the philosophy of applied learning and permissible by the flexibility of VCAL assessment, which does not require student demonstration of writing skills.

In contrast, in VCE students are required to read and write in almost every study undertaken. Such an approach in VCAL is likely to compound underachievement rather than ensure students graduate with at least the necessary functional literacy and numeracy skills to participate in society.

Lack of guidance and professional support for VCAL teachers

VCAL curriculum units are written as outcomes-based documents rather than detailed study designs. While this allows the tailoring of programs to local contexts and to the needs of a student cohort, VCAL teachers can find it challenging to develop content—particularly those teachers new to teaching or new to teaching VCAL.

Stakeholder feedback suggests there is also a lack of central support from the VCAA, for example, in the way of quality guidance and exemplars to assist teachers with interpreting the VCAL curriculum and developing its content.

The VCAL curriculum does not have the same level of detail as that of VCE study designs. Teachers of VCAL units, such as Work Related Skills or Personal Development Skills, are also particularly restricted because there is limited VCE or F–10 equivalent curriculum available.

In addition, VCAL teachers—particularly those employed by providers of smaller VCAL programs—do not enjoy the same level of collaborative support that F–10 and VCE teachers have in schools or across school networks. For example, VCAL teachers may not be involved in Professional Learning Communities and faculty coordination may be more limited. A 2018 study found that about 42 per cent of VCAL teachers were not part of any faculty or learning domain group at their provider (Valad Solutions, 2018). Indeed, in many professional development (PD) settings VCAL is a teaching and learning area that is not included in structural arrangements for collaborative professional discussions. This is a particularly important gap given the importance of teacher capability in designing and delivering VCAL programs.

Course repetition

It can be hard to distinguish between the three VCAL levels in terms of their complexity or demands. Further, their learning outcomes are often repeated with minor adjustments to each level and only the elements for each level showing any difference in complexity:

In its efforts to not be overly prescriptive, the VCAL curriculum structure has developed a set of outcomes that are quite general and repetitive, and not obviously different between the levels. Descriptions are full of educational jargon and largely inaccessible to the general public (parents) or students. These outcomes allow great flexibility but are also a weakness as they are quite vague.

Career counsellor and VCAL teacher, online survey

Repeated learning outcomes is an issue for students who undertake more than one level of VCAL. For example, if a student completes Personal Development Skills Foundation Unit and progresses through Intermediate and Senior VCAL, they may learn the same skills multiple times (see Appendix E for an example of unit learning outcomes across the three levels).

While repeated demonstration of the same skills and growing complexity over the years can be a strength, in some schools different VCAL levels are taught in the same classroom, with the only distinction being the assistance provided to students across levels. In small schools, this may mean that students sit through the same class in subsequent years, risking their disengagement and leaving school.

Assessment and reporting

The Review heard that VCAA advice to schools about assessment is unclear and that school-based assessment practices can lack rigour. VCAA guidance states that '[s]tudents must be observed to demonstrate achievement of a learning outcome on more than one occasion and in different contexts to ensure the assessment is valid, reliable, fair, flexible and efficient' (VCAA, n.d., Assessment of learning outcomes, para. 4). However, the ambiguity of VCAA guidance has led to a common interpretation that students are required to demonstrate achievement of a learning outcome three times (otherwise known as the 'three-task rule').

Although this interpretation of the VCAA guidance has been retrospectively addressed by the VCAA, it does highlight the need for the VCAA to be more proactive and clear in its communications, and to centrally organise and provide professional learning sessions targeted to VCAL teachers.

In the current reporting of student achievement in VCAL, there is no room to demonstrate achievement that is higher than the minimum standards. For their individual VCAL units, students receive either a 'Satisfactory' (S) or 'Not yet complete' (N) on their Statement of Results. A failure to recognise higher levels of achievement does little to benefit either the student or their future employers:

The current grading system of satisfactory or unsatisfactory credits may not provide future employers with adequate information about the student—i.e. whether they have excelled or where they need to improve. This doesn't necessarily motivate students to showcase their skills and strengths.

Catholic Schools Parents Victoria, submission

In addition, available data for the providers is restricted to numbers of students achieving 'S' or 'N' for the units and the certificate. It does not provide a complete picture of student achievement in VCAL.

The Review heard examples of data collection and outcomes reporting undertaken by some schools that have incorporated more detailed assessment and recording of their VCAL programs to motivate students and provide more information to parents, employers and the school community.

Program complexity

Program complexity discourages new providers from delivering VCAL, influences the quality of program implementation, and contributes to it being poorly communicated to students, families and other stakeholders.

Stakeholders highlighted concerns about the complexity of the VCAL structure, strand and eligibility requirements. Several features, like carry forward credits, were also specifically identified as adding complexity to the program.

In recent research on the implementation of VCAL, VCAL practitioners advised that the minimum requirements for VCAL are more complex to grasp than those for the VCE:

The graduation requirements of the VCE can be explained in two sentences compared with two lengthy paragraphs for the VCAL.

Valad Solutions (2018, p. 44)

This complexity has resulted in inconsistent messaging and description of VCAL across the system. A review of VCAA's VCAL documentation alone found at least six different descriptions of the VCAL qualification. Different providers also outlined the program requirements differently, although some have developed simpler ways to explain them, such as by using diagrams and visual representations (Valad Solutions, 2018).

A strength of VCAL is its flexibility and ability to be tailored to individual needs. But if the intricacies of its requirements are not fully understood, there is a risk that ineligible VCAL programs are created. For example, although there are two VCAL Literacy Skills units for each level, only one meets the strand eligibility requirement (with the other only contributing as a general credit).

Further, any eligibility issues are often not raised until November when final results are entered into the Victorian Assessment Software System (VASS), which can leave students ineligible for the certificate.

The VCAL award levels—what underpins achievement at each level and the differences between them—are not well understood by industry and community stakeholders. As observed previously, such haze negatively affects its reputation. Stakeholders may confuse Foundation VCAL learning outcomes for the rigour of the entire certificate.

Indeed, in an effort to clarify confusion and increase awareness and understanding of student achievement in VCAL, some schools have designed their own reporting systems:

We are trying to increase our communication through more detailed reporting so employers can see what a student actually has to do to gain their certificate.

Current VCAL teacher, online survey

Many stakeholders reported that program complexity compounds poor perceptions of VCAL by parents, students and the broader community (see Chapter 3.2).

Recommendation 1 (see Chapter 3.4.1) proposes to remove some of the complexity in the current design of VCAL.



Finding 4

There are opportunities to strengthen vocational and applied learning pathways, such as by increasing the rigour of the curriculum, enhancing its assessment and reporting, and reducing its complexity.

Issues with VCAL delivery

Stakeholders identified a variety of issues related to the delivery of VCAL that should be addressed to improve the quality of VCAL programs.

Inconsistent quality assurance

Stakeholders raised concerns about the VCAA's quality assurance (QA) process and its impacts on public perceptions of VCAL. There was strong support for an enhanced QA process and clear, quality resources and guidance for VCAL teachers and providers, such as exemplar QA templates, to support provider participation in the QA process.

Limited accountability for program quality can place VCAL's value into question. Low-quality VCAL programs reinforce negative perceptions and erode the reputation of vocational and applied learning pathways. It only takes one program to be poor in quality or delivery to undermine VCAL reputation generally, as all VCAL programs get painted with the same broad brush. Perceptions of VCAL can become generalised: individuals familiar with one school's poorly implemented program can believe that all schools run the same sort of program. Some stakeholders suggested that it is possible to

prevent schools from providing substandard delivery by increasing accountability ... The problem is not VCAL or VET or applied learning versus VCE ... the problem, where there is one, is of poor teaching/delivery and a lack of administrative support propagated by a lack of systemwide accountability. Low rigour allows teachers and schools to deliver low quality courses that have eroded the applied learning 'brand'.

VCAL teacher, online survey

Participation in the annual VCAL QA process is a requirement for authorisation to deliver VCAL and is based on providers submitting a QA template for requested VCAL units. This QA process is managed by 13 regional QA panels made up of experienced VCAL practitioners. Most panel convenors and members are tasked with ensuring VCAL programs are compliant, with little compensation and limited time release from their full-time teaching roles.

The VCAL QA process should be the primary means for VCAA scrutiny of program quality. However, the existing QA process does not enable such scrutiny and misses key opportunities for professional learning, networking and resource sharing between providers.

The requirements for the QA process can escalate based on the category of the provider, and the provider category is assessed by the panel without external validation or testing. Providers who have their template validated in the first instance (Category 1 providers) are not required to fully participate in the QA process. These providers do not have to provide evidence of student learning and are not required to attend QA meetings. There is no way of validating or testing whether the capacity to write a compliant template is consistent with evidence of student achievement (Valad Solutions, 2018). For those providers required to provide evidence of student learning (Category 2 and 3 providers), there is no statewide moderating process for the assessment of this evidence.

The QA process does not foster consistency across the state. There is little consistency of practice between QA panels (including when meetings are held), the level of feedback given on QA templates, the various interpretations of what is required for the QA process, and the quality expectations of providers. The VCAA only directly oversees a limited number of providers, which leads to limited central knowledge about the quality of provision across the state.

Some panels have extended their role by delivering VCAL-focused professional learning. However, this is not consistently delivered across the state. While PD is important, more clarity on the purpose of the QA process and its panels is needed. Members of the QA panel, as expert practitioners, may be suited to delivering professional learning programs but doing so should not be confused with their quality assurance role.

System prioritisation

Stakeholders identified a number of examples to demonstrate that the Department and the VCAA prioritise and value VCE over VCAL, referring to where investment is directed as well as which outcomes are measured and prioritised. This perceived and, in some cases actual, inequity is also echoed in public narratives of senior secondary pathways that focus on the VCE.

Specific examples of system prioritisation of the VCE include the following:

- Senior secondary education and the VCE are often conflated. This occurs for several reasons, such as the fact that more senior secondary students are enrolled in VCE, public discourse on senior secondary outcomes centres on the VCE, and there is broader community familiarity with the VCE. The result of such conflation is that VCAL is generally excluded in discussions about senior secondary education and VCE is prioritised as a senior secondary certificate. This prioritisation, in turn, limits the public 'airtime' VCAL receives and entrenches community perceptions of VCAL as inferior.
- Recent initiatives to broaden subject offerings for senior secondary students have related to VCE rather than VCAL. For example, the VCE Collaboration Fund seeks to broaden VCE subject offerings for rural and regional students and the VCE Expansion Project supports virtual access to VCE subjects. Similar initiatives for VCAL have not been funded.
- The VCAA's VCAL Unit has not had a corresponding increase in the number of permanent personnel despite the growth in VCAL uptake by providers. In contrast, staff numbers in other areas of the VCAA, such as the VET Unit, have increased to reflect growth in enrolments. This discrepancy means that the level of support for VCAL providers has become increasingly inadequate and disproportionate to program uptake over time.
- The practice of reporting of VCE student outcomes is significantly more explicit (with reports made available) than that for VCAL student outcomes: this imbalance is evident in public discourse and in budget measures. The system signals what it values through the outcomes that it chooses to measure and report on. In many cases, student and school performance is measured primarily by VCE outcomes.
- VCAL coordination funding was introduced to recognise that a high-quality VCAL program requires additional administrative and logistical support, over and above that required for the delivery of a high-quality VCE program. This support includes engagement with VET providers, employers and community partners and requires additional effort to build strong relationships. From 2012, the VCAL coordination funding was withdrawn in the government sector. The withdrawal of this funding signalled the level of Departmental priority assigned to VCAL vis-à-vis the VCE.

These signals send a message to providers, students and parents that VCAL is an inferior pathway to the VCE, and place the availability, quality and reputation of vocational pathways at serious risk.

Lack of leadership and leadership support

Strong leadership support for the VCAL program is a common feature of high-quality VCAL programs. However, stakeholders reported that many leaders are not prioritising VCAL. A lack of leadership support can be a barrier to improving VCAL programs. For example, stakeholders reported situations where VCAL teachers were not supported by leadership to improve the VCAL program (following engagement with high-quality VCAL providers), and staff reported feeling disempowered to run a high-quality program.

Although the Department has levers to incentivise school leaders to prioritise VCAL and drive improvements in program quality, these do not appear to be its current focus. For example,

in relation to school reviews, many stakeholders reported that the Department's focus was overwhelmingly on VCE student outcomes. One school principal who has participated in three separate school review processes reported that 'at no point have there been any discussions, goals or targets around specific VCAL outcomes' (Current principal).

Lack of central support for program delivery

Providers, including schools and NSSSPs, highlighted funding and resource pressures in the delivery of VCAL. Working with students with complex needs and large class sizes places additional pressures on teachers. Different VCAL funding arrangements between school sectors and across different providers also mean that different levels of support are present across the system.

Dedicated funding for VCAL coordination varies across and within sectors. The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) provides targeted VCAL coordination and per-capita student-level funding to each school and, given its share of enrolments, the sector has higher completion rates. In 2012, dedicated funding for VCAL coordinators in government schools ceased. Research suggests that this has had a negative impact on the quality and administration of VCAL in some areas (Sheehan, 2014).

VCAL coordinators have an important role in developing and implementing VCAL programs (and components of VET delivered to school students) as well as supporting VCAL teachers to deliver these programs. Although some government schools continue to allocate funding to VCAL coordination, this is not uniformly practised across the government sector (Valad Solutions, 2018).

Finally, government school providers identified a lack of Departmental support and toolkits as an issue that affects their delivery of VCAL.

Limited professional learning opportunities

Many stakeholders referred to the limited opportunities for capability building of vocational and applied learning teachers. While their availability varies between and within sectors, in general few professional learning opportunities are dedicated to VCAL teachers and specific resources to support instruction of literacy and numeracy to VCAL students are lacking.

Teachers have indicated that where VCAL PD opportunities do exist but clash with other activities, 'the VCAL would always miss out' (Debrincat, 2015, p. 243). Sheehan (2014) has highlighted the distinct and pressing need to review provision of PD opportunities for VCAL educators, and has called for the theory of applied learning and pedagogical practices to be more widely accessible.

Recent research evidence indicates there will continue to be strong demand for VCAL-related professional learning, due to the churn in VCAL coordinators and the number of VCAL teachers new to VCAL each year. This evidence also indicates there is very little coverage of VCAL in teacher training and, unlike for the VCE, an established history of VCAL practice that a new teacher can draw on or a large team can work with, is lacking in many schools. Similarly, program documentation may be lacking or limited (Valad Solutions, 2018).

Professional learning support for VCAL teachers is particularly important for a couple of reasons. The breadth of the learning needs of relevant student cohorts, such as students with low literacy and numeracy levels, can be challenging. In turn, these needs require a more individualised and flexible approach to the delivery of learning programs.

These considerations place considerably higher demands on VCAL teachers, and require commensurate recognition that appropriate professional learning is necessary

if these teachers are going to be able to meet such demands. In this respect, the Review acknowledges the recent Middle Years Literacy and Numeracy Support initiative to improve outcomes for students in government schools at risk of finishing school without the literacy and numeracy skills needed for future education, training and employment.



Finding 5

VCAL providers should be better supported by the VCAA and the Department to deliver high-quality VCAL programs.

3.4 Strengthening vocational and applied learning in senior secondary

Providers, principals, teachers, students and industry partners stress how crucial vocational and applied learning is for successful post-school transitions to further education, training and employment. This section summarises what a transformed vocational specialisation should look like as well as how its delivery can be effectively supported. These design and delivery reforms to the VCAL will ensure that all students can access high-quality vocational and applied learning programs.

3.4.1 A transformed vocational specialisation

If we are to achieve the purposes of vocational and applied learning in senior secondary, the design of the vocational specialisation should be explicitly aligned with those purposes (outlined in Chapter 2).

Flexible two-year qualification with sequential curriculum

The vocational specialisation should be a two-year qualification with one senior secondary certificate exit point. For students who do not meet the full requirements of the qualification (explained further in Chapter 3.4.2), partial completion of the pathway will be recognised. However, completion of this two-year qualification will enable students to realise its full value.

The two-year vocational specialisation should be embedded as a specialist vocational pathway within the VCE. Chapter 4.1.1 provides further details on this recommendation.

A two-year qualification is consistent with the AQF and aligns with the current VCE structure. The AQF provides that the volume of learning for a senior secondary certificate of education is typically two years. This is not to say that the certificate must be completed within two years, but that it can be incrementally completed over several years. Such flexibility is important, as a move to a two-year vocational specialisation may have negative implications for student completions. Enabling students to complete the certificate at their own pace will ensure that as many students as possible complete a senior secondary certificate and is consistent with the current approach to completing VCE and VCAL.

A sequential curriculum of units in the vocational specialisation, structured in a Unit 1–4 sequence, should be developed for students to progressively build on the required knowledge, skills and attributes to make successful post-school transitions. It will minimise repetition of learning outcomes and enable teachers to deliver and differentiate the curriculum at the appropriate complexity level, with the right level of support. Independence of the learner should continue to be a distinguishing feature of a sequenced curriculum in the vocational pathway.

Course requirements for a transformed vocational specialisation

The course requirements for a transformed vocational specialisation should be modelled on those of the current VCAL strand to ensure that students experience an appropriate breadth of learning. Subject flexibility in how students can meet the strand requirements should also be retained. When the vocational specialisation is embedded in the VCE, high-quality providers will be able to continue to deliver key elements of their existing programs, such as integrating learning outcomes across strands.

Research on high-quality vocational and applied learning programs has noted the importance of connecting theory to application in authentic contexts (Downing, 2017) and that quality vocational and applied learning should strike a balance between knowledge and skills (Broad, 2016). A balance between vocational and academic learning is also particularly important for equipping students for future employment. The OECD's Learning for Jobs (2010) research noted that in many jurisdictions, more and more young people, including students in vocational programs, now expect to enter tertiary and other post-secondary education. This observation means that vocational education needs to be sufficiently flexible: it needs to include both general academic skills as well as practical skills.

Stakeholders in the Review broadly agreed that the current VCAL strand structure provides students with the required knowledge, skills and attributes for a successful post-school transition. They also believed that the structure enables students to learn in a variety of school-based and workplace-based contexts that emphasise different types of vocational knowledge (Poortman et al., 2011):

The strands are spot on (in my view)—literacy, numeracy, personal development and WRS are all key to preparing students for transition.

Former VCAL teacher and VET coordinator

The development of literacy and numeracy skills is a key component of high-quality vocational and applied learning. To enhance the focus on literacy and numeracy within the vocational specialisation, the Literacy and Numeracy Skills Strand should be split into two separate strands. Separating these skills into two strands will remove some complexity in the program requirements and acknowledges the different curriculum focus that each has. This separation will not prevent providers from continuing to integrate literacy and numeracy curriculum elements.

Stakeholders indicated that splitting this strand will also help to strengthen the specialist nature of the curriculum. Separating literacy and numeracy is particularly important given the impending changes to the reporting of literacy and numeracy achievement. The literacy and numeracy curriculum should be redeveloped to directly link to Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) levels and support all students to achieve Level 3 of the ACSF (the level aligned with the General Achievement Test). The introduction of a sequenced curriculum for literacy and numeracy could, for example, position Units 1–2 at Levels 1 and 2 of the ACSF and Units 3–4 at Level 3 of the ACSF.

The curriculum for the current Work Related Skills Strand and the Personal Development Skills Strand would also need to be redeveloped to strengthen the development of core skills while maintaining focus on personal capabilities and employability skills. Unit 1–4 sequences for each curriculum area should be developed to provide students with opportunities to learn and practise key skills, and to offer providers the option of developing and delivering revised programs of learning.

Program components

Students should be able to design a senior secondary program from the following subjects:

- VCE units
- sequential vocational and applied learning units based on the current VCAL curriculum
- new vocational units (as described below)
- components of nationally recognised VET qualifications within the AQF
- approved Higher Education studies.

Eligibility for award of the proposed vocational specialisation

The vocational specialisation should be awarded to students who satisfactorily complete minimum program requirements. The minimum requirement is satisfactory completion of 16 units, which must include:

- three units from the Literacy Skills Strand
- two units from the Numeracy Skills Strand
- two units from the Work Related Skills Strand
- two units from the Personal Development Skills Strand
- at least 90 nominal hours of accredited VET curriculum at Certificate II or above
- at least four sequences of Unit 3–4 studies, one of which must be in Literacy Skills and one of which must be in Personal Development Skills.

The remaining units, as well as units that are over and above the minimum requirements (which should be encouraged), enable the vocational and applied learning pathway to be further personalised to the strengths, interests and aspirations of the student.

For example, Table 2 outlines the program a student who is interested in a health pathway could undertake in the new vocational specialisation.

Table 2 - Example of a vocational specialisation program for a health pathway

First Year	Second Year
Literacy Skills units 1–2	Literacy Skills units 3–4
Numeracy Skills units 1–2	Numeracy Skills units 3–4
Work Related Skills units 1–2	Personal Development Skills units 3–4
VCE-VET Health units 1–2	VCE-VET Health units 3–4
160 hours Structured Workplace Learning	160 hours Structured Workplace Learning

Enhanced assessment and reporting

An assessment scale that recognises higher levels of achievement should be available for vocational and applied learning units 3–4. For example, a three-point (Not yet complete, Satisfactory, Distinction) or a four-point assessment scale (Not yet complete, Satisfactory, Credit, Distinction) would recognise higher levels of achievement.

It is not recommended that enhanced assessment is made compulsory. It would be a position similar to that in the VCE, where graded assessment components are only available for units 3–4 sequences and it is not mandatory for students to undertake scored assessment (although this is encouraged by the VCAA).

Making enhanced assessment available for units 3–4 was widely supported by stakeholders during consultations. For example, a participant at an Area Principal Forum provided that a multipoint scale will provide greater granularity for students and encourage them to excel, as well as strengthening and improving teaching and learning. Some schools already incorporate assessment and more detailed reporting in their VCAL programs, both to promote excellence and to understand student achievement. Graded assessment is also a feature of vocational and applied learning in other jurisdictions (see Case Study 5)

Graded assessments motivate students and reward them for excellence, provide information about the amount and quality of learning achieved, and enable feedback about learning (Thomson et al., 1996). They also have the potential to provide users of qualification results—such as employers and education providers—additional information to make more informed decisions (Newton, 2018). Finally, there is an increased willingness in the broader VET sector to consider graded assessment. Trainers delivering VCE-VET subjects are familiar with this method of assessment, and this practice could be readily extended for broader introduction:

Moderation of assessment of students' work across VCAL provider settings is needed, requiring the VCAA to help establish a common understanding of standards, in order to lift confidence in the quality of provision.

Brotherhood of St. Laurence, submission

Some stakeholders expressed concerns that the introduction of enhanced assessment can risk isolating those students who have chosen this pathway because it does not have external exams. To alleviate these concerns, enhanced assessment should be based on existing teacher-based methods of assessment. To avoid doubt, a shift to external exams is not being recommended.

CASE STUDY 5

Recognising higher levels of achievement in vocational and applied learning

Graded assessment of vocational and applied learning occurs in overseas education systems such as in Hong Kong and England, as well as in Victoria.

Hong Kong

Students of applied learning are graded with an 'attained' or 'attained with distinction' mark. This grading was designed to provide a higher level of rigour in the system and to ensure that applied learning is viewed as equally challenging having a status equivalent to academic learning (CEDA, 2016).

England

As of 2020, 16- to 19-year-olds who undertake technical and applied qualifications need to be graded and have their grades submitted to the Department for Education for inclusion in performance tables. The requirements and minimum standards set by the Department aim to ensure that all technical and applied qualifications offer a respected and rigorous alternative to GCSEs and A levels, and support progression to either learning at the next level or to skilled employment.

The government's Technical Guidance provides that a technical or applied qualification must have a distinction, merit, pass, fail structure or a more detailed grading scale. Awarding organisations are advised to avoid using a 'pass/fail' binary or 'tick box' approach that does not allow students to demonstrate higher levels of understanding' (Department for Education, Government of the United Kingdom, 2017; Newton, 2018).

Victoria

A selection of VCE-VET programs in Victoria have a study score component that is calculated using assessments of students' performance. This calculation is based on two sources: school-assessed coursework and an examination. For each scoring criteria, a numerical five-point rating scale ('1' being base performance and '5' being high performance) is used to determine the level of performance on a task.

Research suggests that 'good' practice in graded assessment incorporates features such as PD of assessors, provision of policy and/or guidelines, provision of exemplars of assessment tools and grading schemas as well as validation processes (Williams & Bateman, 2003).

The VCAA will need to play a stronger role in assessment moderation if enhanced assessment is introduced. Such a role is vital if assessments and grades given by different providers are to be reliable and comparable. A rigorous external moderation process led by the VCAA will also strengthen the validity of the vocational specialisation and improve its status as an equally valued senior secondary pathway.

Development of additional applied units

Industry area-based curriculum for PDS and WRS units (e.g. PDS and WRS units with an automotive or allied health orientation) should be developed centrally by the VCAA. Such a curriculum should not be mandatory for teachers but will provide a ready-made curriculum that teachers can use or further personalise for their students. This developed curriculum will reduce teacher workload and the need to create afresh their own industry-based learning programs every year. Developing this curriculum will also provide VCAA with opportunities to engage industry at a systemwide level—a level of engagement that is unrealistic for individual teachers and providers—to understand the core personal development and work-related outcomes sought by specific industries.

Rapid development in digital technologies, as well as continued technological disruptions, is expected well into the future, making digital literacy critical. Analysis by the UK Digital Skills Taskforce showed that, in future, almost everyone in the workforce will need the ability to use technology to do their job (CEDA, 2015). As citizens need well-developed literacy and numeracy to successfully participate in society, so they increasingly need a well-developed level of digital skills. Digital literacy relates to student's specific use of digital technologies, as well as how they are used for learning across domains (Fraillon, 2020). The foundational importance of this skill is increasingly recognised:

We do not teach literacy only as part of English lessons and nor should we teach digital literacy only within computing classes.

Philbin (2014, p. 45)

Unsurprisingly, a lack of basic digital skills poses significant barriers to a growing number of jobs (Joyce, 2019).

Although digital literacy is increasingly recognised as the third foundational skill alongside literacy and numeracy, currently no Australian curriculum framework measures the achievement of minimum proficiency in digital literacy. For example, unlike literacy and numeracy, digital literacy is not a separate core skill that is measured in the ACSF and is not included in the new reporting requirements for literacy and numeracy skills. The existing VCE Digital Technologies subjects are specialised computing subjects that are not intended to build general digital literacy skills for all students.

Shergold et al. (2020) suggest that jurisdictions should develop minimum digital literacy standards and consideration should be given to whether a national approach to proficiency in digital literacy is warranted. Internationally, digital literacy is becoming increasingly prioritised and recognised:

Digital literacy needs to be a basic competency taught to children. It needs to be included as a core component of school education, both in terms of content and delivery, as distinct from the teaching of specialised ICT, technology and computer science subjects. The workers of the future need to have deep computer literacy.

CEDA (2015, p. 26)

Digital literacy frameworks exist internationally. For example, the European Union's Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (known as DigComp) is one such detailed framework, measuring 21 competencies in five key areas at eight proficiency levels.

Industry stakeholders in the Review emphasised that digital skills are becoming increasingly important in an increasing number of career pathways, including traditional trades.

If students are to have digital literacy skills for the jobs of today and the future, senior secondary education needs to support their development. There is an opportunity to broaden the current VCAL curriculum to enhance focus on digital literacy. Such enhancement should be achieved by introducing new digital literacy units—developed as a Unit 1–4 sequence—that students can take as electives in their vocational specialisation. The elective status of digital literacy units should be reviewed during the creation and implementation of the integrated senior secondary certificate (see Recommendation 9). The integration of digital literacy within existing strand requirements should also be encouraged.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of adequate digital literacy for remote learning, particularly if it becomes a more dominant practice in schools and higher education settings in the future.

Enhanced Statement of Results for all students

A senior secondary certificate, accompanied by a Statement of Results in its current form, does not fully capture a student's strengths, capabilities and achievements. However, the Review notes that reforms to expand reporting of senior secondary achievement are already underway, with impending changes to the reporting of literacy and numeracy attainment for all senior secondary students.

An enhanced Statement of Results would enable all achievements, in and beyond the vocational specialisation, to be recognised. Such a statement should include information relating to individual subjects undertaken as well as other credentials gained (e.g. White Cards and First Aid Certificates).

Consistent with an enhanced Statement of Results, Shergold et al. (2020) made several recommendations relating to the formal capture of a student's achievements during their senior secondary years and beyond. They recommended that students leave school with a Learner Profile that provides a holistic snapshot of a student's academic and non-academic skills. They propose that a Learner Profile incorporates a student's ATAR score (if relevant) and individual subject results, VET competencies and certificates, minimum literacy, numeracy and digital literacy achievements, as well as broader range of capabilities necessary for employment and active citizenship. The learning and experiences inside and outside of school would be captured to encompass work experience (including part-time or casual work), caring responsibilities, volunteering, sports achievements, interests and hobbies.

A Learner Profile is already being trialled in individual schools and in some Australian jurisdictions. For example, the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) Board has introduced the concept of a 'learner profile' to transform the SACE into a living document and provide a student profile that can be demonstrated to others, including employers, industry and universities, to say 'this is who I am as a learner and a person' (Shergold et al., 2020, p. 54).

Further to a student's Learner Profile, Shergold et al. (2020) also recommended a digital Education Passport that will enable young people who have left school to continue to progressively capture all learning and experiences from both formal and informal education and through training opportunities. The Education Passport embeds the notion of lifelong learning and supports individuals to communicate their achievements as they move between pathways and change careers. An Education Passport would include formal qualifications and transcripts, demonstrated skills and attributes, micro-credentials and other credentials, PD, workplace experiences and references.

An enhanced Statement of Results would also be available for students who do not exit school with a completed vocational specialisation; that is, students who have not fulfilled all certificate requirements (see Chapter 3.4.2) or who are undertaking a Foundation Pathways Certificate (see Chapter 5.3).

Parents and carers consulted for the Review were supportive of this reform, noting that it would be beneficial for every student to have a full spectrum of their learning and skills represented, not just academic achievement. This reform should also be extended to VCE students.

Enhancing the Statement of Results will require back-end changes to the VASS to enable additional details to be recorded.



RECOMMENDATION 1

The VCAA should create a new vocational specialisation that is embedded within the VCE and has the following design features:

- a sequential curriculum for vocational and applied learning units
- course requirements that are based largely on existing VCAL strand structure to maintain an appropriate breadth of curriculum
- enhanced assessment and reporting for vocational and applied learning Units 3–4
- new digital literacy units developed in a Unit 1–4 sequence
- tailored industry-based curriculum for Personal Development Skills and Work Related Skills units
- an enhanced Statement of Results for all senior secondary students.

3.4.2 Recognising Intermediate level achievement

The transformed vocational specialisation will have significant implications for those students who may have exited with an Intermediate VCAL. Reforms relating to Foundation VCAL are outlined in Chapter 5.3.

There is longstanding evidence of the significant value and benefit of supporting all students to complete Year 12 or its equivalent (see for example, Lamb et al., 2004 and Dommers et al., 2017). However, while completing the equivalent Senior VCAL should be the goal, not all students will be able to achieve this. Some students will leave school before the end of Year 12.

Leaving before the end of Year 12 may be in the best interests of some students; for example, a student enrolled in VCAL but exits the school system before the end of Year 12 to pursue a full-time apprenticeship. Stakeholders consulted for the Review overwhelmingly agreed that this should be considered a positive student outcome. Chapter 11 further examines vocational and applied learning outcomes.

In addition, there are significant numbers of students—typically among the most disadvantaged student cohorts—for whom completion at an Intermediate level is a substantial achievement and provides a valuable pathway to further training, education and employment. The flexibility of the current VCAL enables students to take units at their own pace: they have two years within which to complete the Intermediate level subjects. Allowing these students to leave the secondary school system without acknowledgement of what they have achieved would undervalue their efforts.

Although these students will be ineligible for a senior secondary certificate, the Review recommends that achievement at the level equivalent to Intermediate VCAL should continue to be acknowledged through the enhanced Statement of Results. Such acknowledgement will provide more information for students and others on the full range of their achievements, such as completed micro-credentials. Additionally, there is also opportunity to recognise achievement at the level equivalent to Intermediate VCAL, including individual subjects completed, as a micro-credential.

This recommendation is consistent with the findings of both the Blackburn Review and the Kirby Review, which considered that partial certification should be awarded for partial completion. As Blackburn stated, partial completion provides ‘a basis on which later credits towards the Certificate can build’ and has other benefits in terms of completing a certificate over a longer time and for those changing future plans over the two years (1985, p. 37).



RECOMMENDATION 2

Intermediate level achievement should be recognised in an enhanced Statement of Results for students who partially complete senior secondary qualification and are early school leavers.

3.4.3 Ensuring adequate support to deliver the vocational specialisation

For vocational and applied learning programs in senior secondary education to be of high quality, their delivery requires the necessary information, support, resources and oversight at the system level. VCAL providers should be centrally and better supported to deliver quality programs. Appropriate central support will also reduce variability in program quality across providers.

Making leadership accountable

While senior secondary outcomes are important, the Department and other sectoral peak bodies should seek to progress conversations with school leaders on how all students can make successful post-school transitions. In these conversations, the importance and value of vocational and applied learning pathways need to be re-emphasised and impressed upon school leaders:

A significant attitudinal change is required by school leaders and educators. The way we speak about VCAL, resource it, treat the students and staff and the recognition given are all powerful messages about how the program is perceived.

Former VCAL teacher, online survey

School leaders should be accountable for the outcomes of the full cohort of their senior secondary students. Vocational and applied learning pathways in government schools should be incorporated into existing processes such as school reviews, Annual Implementation Plans and Principal Class Performance and Development Plans to facilitate this accountability and make vocational and applied learning pathways a focus of discussions with Area Directors and Senior Education Improvement Leaders.

Recommendations for a new vocational specialisation and the more support for the delivery of quality vocational and applied learning (Recommendations 1, 3–6) will also signal the importance of the qualification and facilitate broader discussions with leadership about student achievement and how it should be defined. For example, enhanced assessment and reporting will provide granular student achievement data that can be drilled down to inform whether increased VCAA support to deliver applied learning is needed, the nature of that support and whether in-school pathways coordination can lift the status of these pathways within schools.



RECOMMENDATION 3

The Department's performance framework for senior secondary education should make explicit reference to student achievement in recognised vocational and applied learning programs to support the delivery of high-quality programs.

Strengthening quality assurance processes

Strengthened QA processes to review and approve course offerings should apply across all VCAL providers and statewide consistency of quality standards in VCAL provision built in. A consistent and rigorous quality assurance framework for all provider types will lift standards, and external accountability checks will support consistency of VCAL delivery.

The QA process should be centralised through the VCAA, with dedicated staff responsible for developing and managing the QA process. Such centralisation should remove duplication in process that can arise across 13 different QA panels, and should minimise burden on current panel members who often manage a full teaching workload in addition to their QA responsibilities.

Centralised strand-specific QA panels comprising experts of each strand should be established. Templates for units should be submitted centrally and be accompanied by

evidence of student work in all cases. Such a process will ensure that each QA template is considered by the panel with relevant expertise in the strand. Strand-specific QA panels should leverage their expertise on existing QA panels and ensure that this expertise is appropriately acknowledged.

A centralised QA process can also facilitate statewide sharing of resources and the building of a central repository of innovative and good practice by providers. It will also enhance PD and networking opportunities for VCAL practitioners, particularly those who are new or less experienced with delivering VCAL.

Increasing VCAA capacity to support delivery of applied learning

The VCAA's staffing resources need to be increased to promote the delivery of high quality applied learning programs. In addition, as the owner of the VCAL qualification, the VCAA needs to be adequately resourced to provide the necessary cross-sectoral support required to implement the redesigned vocational specialisation.

Stakeholders consulted for the Review acknowledged the excellent support they receive from VCAA's VCAL Unit, but highlighted that its staffing resources have not increased in line with increases in VCAL enrolments:

The current staffing levels within the VCAA VCAL unit have remained the same over the last 18 years. (In 2002 there were 80 students in a pilot and 3 VCAA VCAL staff, with current VCAL enrolments approaching 24,000, there are still only 3 VCAA VCAL staff.)

Victorian Applied Learning Association (VALA), submission

The resourcing of VCAA to support the delivery of vocational and applied learning pathways should be increased in line with what it currently receives to provide staff support for the VCE. This alignment sends a signal that VCAL is equally valued and reduces the risk that VCAA support for VCAL gets diluted.

In 2021, VCAA's initial efforts may concentrate on curriculum development, design changes to the VCAL and the first stages of cross-sectoral program implementation. The implementation support provided by VCAA may include increasing support for quality assurance panels; providing practical implementation support programs for providers (e.g. programs on how to put a high-quality program together); and providing professional learning opportunities for VCAL practitioners and school leaders (see Chapter 12 for further implementation advice).

Without sufficient support for program implementation, the benefits of a redesigned vocational specialisation are unlikely to be fully realised and program quality will remain variable. The Review believes that implementation support should come directly and centrally from the VCAA rather than through other professional learning opportunities. Increasing VCAA resources for this specific purpose will facilitate this.



RECOMMENDATION 4

The VCAA should provide additional support to deliver vocational and applied learning pathways, in the form of centralised and enhanced quality assurance processes, assessment moderation and the provision of implementation support programs and professional learning opportunities for VCAL providers and teachers.

In-school pathways coordination

Delivery of vocational and applied learning programs is more complex and entails greater administrative workload than that of a standard VCE program; therefore, schools should be adequately resourced to take on this additional load:

Particularly due to the nature of the cohort, there is more supervision, tracking of progress, pastoral work, contacting parents, intricate planning, booking activities and more than is necessary for a VCE class. Members strongly stressed the importance of this role to the success of the program. For VET coordination, the same applies.

Independent Education Union Victoria Tasmania, submission

Additional resourcing for schools to coordinate vocational and applied learning programs would help to address this imbalance and enable the strengths of the program to be more consistently realised.

For example, the Review heard that work-based learning was a strength of VCAL, but schools faced many logistical challenges, including building relationships with employers and working within school timetable constraints. At a roundtable in Melbourne, one school stakeholder hypothesised that every school would say that they want more interactions with industry, and a person responsible for pathways coordination would support making these connections.

These views were similarly shared by employers who were supportive of schools being more active with sourcing work placements and finding the right industry fit for interested students. Support for in-school pathways also provide industry with opportunities to engage with schools through a key contact.

However, one stakeholder observed that many schools 'still do not really understand the essential role of the VCAL Coordinator' (Independent Education Union Victoria Tasmania, submission). Schools also reported that their current resourcing does not always enable them to adequately support students off-site, although they retain a duty of care for students on work placements. The result of insufficient support for in-school pathways can be a reduction of work-based learning activities for students, including work experience typically undertaken prior to senior secondary (see Chapter 10.3.2).

Additional support for pathways coordination was widely supported by stakeholders, including government schools.

In-school pathways coordinators should be funded by the Department to facilitate vocational and applied learning programs, including VET and work placements. Pathways coordinators will complement the important role of career practitioners in supporting students to make informed decisions on post-school pathways. For example, they will increase school capacity to work with VET clusters and LLENs to enhance student exposure to work-related and work-based learning, and will work with local employers to improve school–industry connections (see Chapter 9).



RECOMMENDATION 5

The Department should fund in-school pathways coordinators in government schools to reduce the administrative burden associated with delivering high-quality vocational and applied learning programs.

Improving access to and quality of professional learning opportunities

The effectiveness of an education system depends critically on the quality of teaching and learning in the classrooms, workshops, laboratories and other spaces in which education takes place (Lucas et al., 2012). Vocational teachers are a major influence on the quality of student learning and achievement. Ultimately, any effort to improve vocational education will be intimately associated with improving the quality of the workforce (Lloyd & Payne, 2012).

High-quality vocational and applied learning teachers can personalise learning to meet the needs of a diverse student cohort and have a deep appreciation of the different types of learning (Blake & Gallagher, 2009; Imperatore & Hyslop, 2017). Research suggests that vocational and applied learning teachers need additional and specific pedagogical tools to successfully engage students in meaningful, authentic learning experiences (Debrincat, 2015; Schultz, 2012).

Stakeholders were supportive of increasing access to professional learning opportunities that improve the construction and teaching of VCAL programs. They also identified professional learning in specific areas as being particularly helpful, such as applied learning pedagogy, competency-based assessment, re-engagement strategies, strategies for teaching literacy and numeracy, interpretation of eligibility reports, and students with complex needs (e.g. students experiencing anxiety and trauma).

The Review acknowledges the Victorian Government's recent investment in PD for VCAL teachers to improve applied learning in government secondary schools. Aligned with the goals of the reforms recommended by the Review, opportunities for PD in vocational and applied learning should be extended to all school leaders to both promote the quality of offerings in vocational and applied learning across the state and improve perceptions of VCAL pathways. Incorporating substantial and inspiring components of vocational and applied learning pathways into all existing professional learning initiatives for senior secondary school staff will ensure that staff members—especially school leaders—can appreciate and understand the benefits of these pathways and will therefore be more inclined to promote them to their students. If this content is incorporated into existing professional learning opportunities, such as the Principal Preparation programs run by the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership, the legitimacy of this pathway is underscored and the risk that it is seen as an 'optional' learning component is reduced.

The focus of any new or existing investment in professional learning needs to be on the provision of practical support for schools, including both teachers and school leaders, to develop and deliver high-quality VCAL programs. PD should be led by expert practitioners who have adequate time release to prepare for and run sessions, or entail:

learning coaches (or similar) in each area to specifically support VCAL providers in helping to establish, maintain and support VCAL curriculum design and delivery in schools.

Current VCAL coordinator

Like current PD opportunities for VCE teachers, the aims of PD in vocational and applied learning should be cross-sectoral to promote consistency of delivery, expand practitioner networks and provide broader exposure of good practice across providers.

Creating more PD opportunities in VCAL, run through the VCAA or the Department—like that currently available for VCE, will also remove pressure on the QA process to be a core aspect of professional learning. In 2018, some VCAL liaison teachers on the QA panels reported that they were experiencing stress because they were unable to respond to and meet the expectations of VCAL teachers.

Increasing VCAA capacity to support the delivery of applied learning programs will also enable it to take on a leadership role in relation to professional learning in this space.

Many stakeholders who were consulted for the Review supported the earlier integration of applied learning pedagogy in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses. There was concern that early career teachers are expected to take a role in the construction and delivery of vocational and applied learning programs, and yet are inadequately prepared for this.

Although early career teachers will be supported to learn pedagogy and skills through mentoring and observation in the school context, the Review supports the integration of applied learning pedagogy and awareness of senior secondary provision in the core structure of ITE courses.

However, any changes to ITE courses are unlikely to occur in the short-to-medium term and they may not apply across the full range of providers. Concentrating reform efforts on professional learning for in-service teachers will enable swifter responses to target areas of concern—including those identified through a strengthened QA process—and enable teachers to learn from those who are currently delivering high-quality programs.

The Review notes recent moves to explore the inclusion of an applied learning method in ITE programs and welcomes the findings of this work.

Enhancing the availability and accessibility of information on industry pathways

To inform student decision-making in senior secondary and broaden their understanding of industry pathways, fit-for-purpose information on industry pathway options should be available for providers, families and students.

There is a vast amount of information available about jobs and education and training pathways, but this is often hard to navigate and reliable and complete information can be difficult to locate (Joyce, 2019). Stakeholders suggested that the pathways available to VCAL students are not well understood.

We have a major shortage of young people entering our industry (Listed Skills Shortage) as students are not educated about our industry as a pathway.

Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, submission

Further, people who support students to make career decisions, such as career practitioners and parents and carers, may be less aware of the variety of options available and may hold outdated views of the employment market (see Chapter 10.3.1).

The Department should develop guidance for providers on broadly defined ‘occupational fields’ that set out the knowledge, skills and attributes required for that field (and related fields), rather than guidance on specific jobs. For example, if a student is interested in commercial cookery, they should be supported to build the learning foundation needed for a successful pathway into the tourism and hospitality industry (Clarke, 2013). Such guidance could be refined in partnership with industry and further education and training providers, to ensure that students are leaving secondary school as prepared as they can be for their chosen destination and can respond to the expectations and requirements of post-school destinations.

Indicative subject groupings for particular occupational fields should be articulated clearly for providers, students and their families to enable them to build a coherent study plan for a particular occupational field (Joyce, 2019). The subject groupings should integrate

traditionally academic and vocational subjects to encourage complementary program selection and, where possible, include a range of subject options to choose from to promote student agency. Indicative subject groupings will support student decision-making in senior secondary, inform career education and enable students to develop the knowledge and skills to make a successful post-school transition.

For example, for a student interested in construction or engineering fields, the relevant pathway would guide them to selecting a range of mathematics subjects along with some vocational technology subjects. This vocational pathway would support them to build knowledge and skills that would be relevant to them, regardless of whether they choose to go on to enrol in a university engineering degree or take up an apprenticeship in carpentry.

Joyce (2019, p. 96)

To promote entry into employment areas that are forecasted to have skills shortage or identified as priority growth areas, guidance on their related occupational fields could be prioritised for development by the Department. The Department should also continue to update guidance in response to industry requirements and produce guidance as new occupational fields or skills shortage areas emerge. Such guidance builds on the Review's career education recommendations to provide career practitioners and teachers with more labour market data to support student decision-making.

Within each occupational field there will be many and varied career pathways. For example, a career in allied health has a range of study options available, from the Certificate III in Allied Health Assistance right through to postgraduate study. Further, each level will open up different career opportunities. It has been observed that students (and other influencers of student career decisions) would benefit from understanding what the career options are in a chosen occupational field, and from having its diverse pathways made more explicit (Clarke, 2013). Increasing student awareness of the pathways available also increases their awareness of and capability for navigating higher-level VET qualifications within occupational fields.

The clearer alignment of a student's career aspirations and planned post-school education will support them to complete the required qualification level and minimise the risk that they are over- or under-qualified (Joyce, 2019).

Stakeholders were supportive of providing more information about career progression pathways to inform student decision-making:

so that young people can be both aspirational about their futures, and make informed decisions that align with their strengths and interests

Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, submission

Guidance on industry pathways could be enhanced with information on expected employment outcomes, career progression options and expectations relating to salaries and conditions. Such guidance can help to promote positive perceptions of vocational and applied learning pathways, dispel some unwarranted stigma and make connections between school and employment more explicit, which can in turn motivate and engage students:

[for example] an industrial electrician can earn 200,000 per year—why isn't this being yelled from the rooftops?

VCAL teacher, online survey



RECOMMENDATION 6

To support the delivery of vocational and applied learning programs across all school sectors, the VCAA and Department should:

- improve the quality of, and access to, professional learning in vocational and applied learning for both teachers and school leaders
- provide students, families and providers with enhanced information and guidance about industry pathways that include indicative subject groupings for particular occupational fields.

3.4.4 Addressing entrenched perceptions

Improvements to vocational and applied learning pathways at a systemwide level should be accompanied by the promotion of the new senior secondary certificate and its renewed pathways through all avenues and with all stakeholders (those within the profession and in broader community). The Department and VCAA should champion this new promotional strategy to transform perceptions, circulate accurate information, and strengthen and celebrate the enhanced product—the innovative senior secondary reform package. In short, a cultural shift needs to be initiated from the top:

A significant attitudinal change is required by school leaders and educators—the way we speak about VCAL, resource it, treat the students and staff and the recognition given are all powerful messages about how the program is perceived.

Former VCAL teacher, online survey

Clear and concise explanatory information should be provided to schools, students and parents. This information can be conveyed perhaps through bulk emails, a social media campaign and/or in-person or virtual information sessions.

A renewed promotional strategy should recognise, celebrate and reward schools for vocational outcomes as much as academic ones:

A PR exercise generated by the Department would be helpful around promoting the program through clear messaging, including some success stories of which there are many.

School visit

For example, the VCAA and the Department could consider whether eligibility for senior secondary awards (e.g. the VCE Leadership Awards) should be broadened to include all senior secondary students.

A wider promotion and celebration of student's successes within the broader community are required. In order to change parent and public perceptions, our educational leaders need to validate the program through their endorsement and vocal support.

Career practitioner, online survey

The focus of such a promotional campaign should be not only on informing stakeholders about the reforms but also on driving cultural change. Vocational and applied learning is 'not second-class', 'just different' (VCAL teacher, online survey).



RECOMMENDATION 7

Implementation of the new senior secondary reform package should be accompanied by a promotional campaign to drive cultural change and address entrenched perceptions of vocational pathways.

4

A single
senior secondary
certificate





Exemplary VCAL programs are instructive for what is required to deliver a high-quality program. A significant critique of VCAL is that there remains wide variability in the quality of VCAL programs—an unacceptable performance given Victoria has been implementing them for 17 years. It is clear that poor practice—both as a result of the design of the qualification itself as well as the lack of support in its delivery—is adversely affecting its quality for students, public perceptions of VCAL and of vocational and applied learning more broadly.

The Review has made substantial recommendations for a new vocational specialisation (Recommendation 1) and recommendations to boost support for schools and non-school secondary providers (NSSSPs) to improve the quality of vocational and applied learning delivered across the board.

However, while the recommended enhancements will build on the quality of the program offering, substantial reforms to the senior secondary framework are needed to overturn ingrained perceptions that currently plague vocational learning. Substantial reforms are also required to consolidate VCAL as a pathway of equal legitimacy and deserving the same respect as the VCE.

4.1 Reforming the senior secondary certificate

VCAL was introduced in 2003 as a separate senior secondary certificate to provide a more flexible senior secondary option for all students. The intent at the time was to overcome the limitations of the original VCE so that together, the VCE and VCAL are suitable for the entire cohort of senior secondary students and to open up new pathways for students uninterested in pursuing the VCE. The Review has heard from students and providers across the state about the positive impact that the VCAL has had on their lives and how profoundly proud they are of this qualification.

Notwithstanding the many positive accounts and experiences of VCAL by students and providers, the Review heard how the separateness of VCE and VCAL has led to the VCAL being seen as ‘the other’ and defined by what it is not. Over time, the VCE and VCAL have become stereotyped as academic and theoretical versus vocational and applied, respectively, which has unhelpfully narrowed the perceived scope of both programs. Artificial distinctions between the certificates have contributed to an unbalanced public discourse about and negative perceptions of VCAL. Successive improvements have been made to the VCAL since its introduction; however, it was made clear to the Review that as long as there are two certificates VCAL will always be defined by its not-the-VCE status.

The Review has identified that there is value in moving to an integrated single certificate framework of vocational specialisation in the VCE. This proposition has the support of a large majority of stakeholders consulted, including the providers who currently deliver high-quality programs. An integrated single certificate will build on the current successes of VCAL and what has been learned over the last 17 years, lift its reputation and solidify its position as an equally legitimate and respected senior secondary pathway. Under a single senior secondary certificate, all students who complete the requirements of the certificate will be awarded with the VCE. Completion of a core offering of vocational and applied learning subjects will be one way of achieving the VCE.

Chapter 1 observed that the labour market impacts of COVID-19 are likely to disproportionately affect young people, making it more important than ever for senior secondary students to develop the necessary vocational knowledge, skills, capabilities and qualities to support their post-school transition. An integrated single senior secondary certificate enables greater personalisation of pathways, promotes student agency and increases flexibility and subject choice for students. It will provide all students with a genuine and identifiable vocational pathway that is aligned with their personal strengths, interests and post-school aspirations; it will ensure students are exposed to the learning most relevant for their next step. An integrated single certificate provides a strong foundation to repudiate the unhelpful false dichotomies surrounding the dual certificate framework and to challenge existing status and perception issues of VCAL. An integrated single senior secondary certificate could be the reform that shifts the dial on retention rates.

Moving to an integrated single certificate will take considerable time. Implementation should be staged by prioritising those proposed reforms that support as many students as possible to access high-quality vocational pathways. Much of the delivery support can commence immediately, including providing schools with more support. Designing the vocational specialisation could also commence immediately.

Aspects of the reforms, while staged, could also commence concurrently to support timely implementation. For example, design work on an integrated certificate could occur while the VCAL is being redesigned and accredited.

4.1.1 Embedding the specialist vocational pathway in the certificate

The recommended reforms to improve design and improve delivery of a new vocational specialisation should be embedded in a single VCE certificate framework. The ambition of the reforms in Chapter 3.4 is to create a sought-after senior secondary program for students so that, when embedded in the VCE, it becomes a preferred VCE pathway.

The rationale for embedding VCAL

There are both in-principle and practical reasons for embedding vocational specialisation within a single certificate framework, including repudiating false dichotomies, emphasising that all students are on a vocational pathway and challenging perception issues.

Repudiate false dichotomies

The current dual certificate framework, with separate requirements for VCAL and VCE, continues to promote unhelpful and false dichotomies between vocational and academic learning, and applied and theoretical learning.

Vocational learning is not as highly valued in some schools as academic learning (Dommers et al., 2017) and because its 'stigma is real' and counterproductive, 'public perception and values need to shift' (Melbourne Inner East principals' briefing).

Without doubt, VCAL is seen by many as being an inferior senior secondary certificate and suffers from 'a problem of low esteem'. Parents, students, and schools themselves tend to view the applied pathway as less prestigious and valuable compared to the academic pathway that leads to university. It is often viewed as an option only for students at risk of disengaging from school rather than an option for all students to pursue a productive and fulfilling career.

Inner Northern Local Learning and Employment Network, submission

Vocational and academic learning are not diametrically opposed: together, they are the basis of a strong general education for all senior secondary students. Given the range of capabilities that students will need to participate in the future workforce, vocational education and training in conjunction with academic learning makes sense (CEDA, 2016). Research suggests that as in the 'real world', vocational and academic learning in schools can be complementary and mutually reinforcing:

by connecting demanding technical education to challenging academics, career and technical education transforms both domains. Academic subjects acquire authenticity and real-world meaning; technical content becomes grounded in scholarship and intellectual rigor.

Hoachlander (2008, p. 27)

Similarly, applied and theoretical learning are both present in VCE and VCAL programs. Stereotyping and bifurcating the VCE and VCAL pathways, as academic and theoretical versus vocational and applied, further entrenches these artificial distinctions and distorts the purposes of both programs.

Further, the argument for keeping the VCE and VCAL pathways apart is becoming less appropriate in the context of post-school transitions. For example, the separation of these pathways is being undermined by a broadening of university selection criteria and increased awareness of alternate pathways into university. While the ATAR route continues to be a primary selection route, Senior VCAL also provides a pathway into university: this might be direct entry into university (e.g. through folio evidence) or indirect entry via a higher-level VET qualification that articulates to a bachelor's degree.

Given the current economic climate and changes to the university sector, it is likely that the selection criteria will continue to broaden. A single certificate framework reflects the practicality that all senior secondary pathways, whether VCE or VCAL, can lead to all post-school options.

Recognise all students are on a vocational pathway

Repositioning vocational specialisation within the VCE will also emphasise that all students, including those undertaking VCE, are on a vocational pathway.

The VCE must continue to enable the high-ATAR university pathway for particular vocations and there is no suggestion that this should or would change just because a vocational pathway is embedded in the certificate.

Embedding a specialist vocational pathway within the VCE also highlights the reality that students completing VCE and VCAL can transition into the same industry pathways. For example, in the health and human services pathway, students may transition into a Certificate III, Certificate IV, diploma or bachelor's degree, depending on their strengths, interests and aspirations.

Dispel misperceptions and correct biases

In many cases, without prompting by the Review, stakeholders suggested moving to a single certificate framework as a way to reposition vocational and applied learning as an equally valued pathway, improve its status and address perception challenges. Negative perceptions of VCAL are detailed in Chapter 3.2.

A single certificate framework was supported by a large majority of stakeholders, including providers that currently deliver high-quality programs.

Promoting equality between the two pathways and increasing the recognition of vocational and applied learning pathways does not mean that the distinct character of VCAL will be lost. Instead, the Review's recommendations seek to build on the strengths of the VCAL in ways that appropriately empower students suited to these pathways to undertake VCAL and that remove the generalised social stigma that can hinder students:

I was a VCAL snob, but only a few months into the program I can see that it is a brilliant choice for my son. He is a very smart boy, but he was so unhappy in a traditional classroom. The VCAL program has changed our lives and the school component is so much more relevant and engaging than VCE.

Parent, online survey

VCAL students consulted for the Review also highlighted that they saw themselves doing the same thing as VCE students but were just doing it in a different way. Students were generally supportive of the notion that they would be recognised for completing the same certificate:

The VCAL program is very useful and needs to be pushed as a valid alternative to going to university—parents and teachers need to push it harder because students (like me) who don't want to go to university get left to flounder because it's still not seen as a respectable option.

VCAL student, online survey

Unfortunately, the ways in which individuals and organisations perceive VCAL are influencing student (and family) decisions to enrol in the program, whether VCAL is delivered or prioritised by a school, how high-quality the program itself is and whether the student will be supported and succeed.

For many students, a specialist vocational pathway will be the most appropriate pathway based on their strengths, interests and post-school aspirations. Students should not be making decisions that could significantly affect the success of their post-school transition and ultimate career choices on the basis of the perceived reputation of the qualification.

In addition, the relative higher-level status of VET and university is reflected in how schools look at vocational and academic pathways. A 'VET-is-second-rate' attitude aligns with schools' push for university pathways post-school, with many schools 'encouraging their students to aim to go to uni, and TAFE tends to be the second choice' (Dommers et al., 2017, p. 25).

The design of senior secondary education in Victoria (and Australia) is structurally biased, moving overwhelmingly to the attainment of a senior secondary certificate of education that is, on the whole, focussed on the preparation of students for university entrance. Non-university offerings, such as vocational education and training or the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning are often perceived and presented as a lesser alternative for those unable (or unlikely) to access university higher education.

Victorian TAFE Association, submission

A societal shift in attitudes is required to ensure all students can feel free to consider higher-level VET pathways. This shift needs to happen to support key growth areas that rely on higher-level VET qualifications and to improve perceptions about the quality of vocational and applied education and their associated employment outcomes:

Vocational training, and particularly VCAL, is undervalued. Too often VCAL is regarded as 'lesser' than VCE or merely as a 'second chance option'. It suffers from the same bias—in favour of university pathways and professions—that so hinders VET in general.

Brotherhood of St. Laurence, submission

A single secondary certificate that promotes 'academic' and 'vocational' pathways as equal, is a step in the right direction towards recognising university and higher-level VET pathways as legitimate options.

Implementation considerations

Embedding VCAL in a single certificate could be done in conjunction with the design of vocational specialisation and delivery of improvements (outlined in Chapter 3.4). This would be similar to the process that was used when the current VCE was implemented. Between 1987 and 1991, the five senior secondary certificates were incorporated under the same qualification framework (the VCE), while the new two-year VCE certificate was designed and piloted. The five senior secondary certificates were then phased out. Chapter 12 details the implementation timelines.

Completion requirements

The completion requirements for the transformed vocational specialisation, as proposed in Chapter 3.4.1, are broadly consistent with the existing requirements for VCE completion. Students who satisfactorily complete the requirements for the vocational specialisation would be eligible to receive the VCE. A comparison of the minimum course requirements for VCE and the transformed vocational specialisation is outlined in Table 3 below.

Table 3 -Relationship between VCE and the vocational specialisation

VCE minimum requirements	Vocational specialisation minimum requirements
Completion of 16 units	Completion of 16 units
Three units from the English group, including a Unit 3–4 sequence	At least four sequences of Unit 3–4 studies, either VCAL units or relevant VCE units: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● one of which must be for Literacy Skills ● one of which must be for Personal Development Skills.
At least three other sequences of Unit 3–4 studies, which can include further sequences from the English group	Must include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● three units from the Literacy Skills Strand ● two units from the Numeracy Skills Strand ● two units from the Work Related Skills Strand ● two units from the Personal Development Skills Strand ● at least 90 hours of VET Certificate II or above.

Recognition of the specialist vocational pathway

To recognise students who have completed the course requirements for the specialist vocational pathway, they should receive an appellation on their certificate with details in their Statement of Results, in the same way as VCE-Baccalaureate currently works. The appellation, such as 'Specialist vocational', will provide further information about the senior secondary program that the student has undertaken and provides an additional form of recognition for those students who have completed the demands of studying a vocational pathway. A separate appellation will also enable providers to publicise how many students complete the specialist vocational pathway. This data can also be collected at a system level.

Registration implications of embedding the vocational pathway

An unintended by-product of embedding the vocational specialisation within a single certificate framework may be to increase the administrative registration requirements for those providers who currently deliver the VCAL only. Work will need to be progressed by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) to review VCE registration processes and introduce a new registration category for those providers who will deliver the vocational specialisation only.

A similar situation arises in the current context with some schools and providers registered to deliver specific VCE units, but not the whole VCE and some VCE providers not authorised to deliver VCAL at all. The VRQA will need to begin refining the VCE registration processes in 2021 to ensure that all providers will be registered to deliver the vocational specialisation by 2023. Further detail on next steps is available in Chapter 12.



RECOMMENDATION 8

The vocational specialisation should be embedded within the VCE. The VCAA should recognise students who complete this pathway using an appellation on the senior secondary certificate.

4.1.2 Integrating the senior secondary certificate

Once the VCAL is successfully embedded as a specialist vocational pathway within the VCE, there is an opportunity to fully integrate the senior secondary certificate. An integrated senior secondary certificate will enable students to personalise pathways and promote student agency, increase flexibility and subject choice for all students, and further reduce the stigma associated with vocational pathways.

Personalise pathways and promote student agency

In an integrated senior secondary certificate, all students will be able to specifically tailor their pathways to their interests, strengths and aspirations. Rather than making a choice between two distinct pathways that offer different subject options, students will be able to create an optimal subject grouping to ensure they are exposed to the most relevant learning for their desired post-school pathway. It is also advantageous for students who are less certain about their post-school pathway while still at secondary school. By taking a broad range of subjects, they can continue to develop their core literacy and numeracy skills while exploring alternative pathways. Students may also feel less pressure to choose the 'right' pathway.

The ability to personalise pathways is also important for adapting to the skills required in new growth areas and in emerging industries. Students, supported through proactive career education, will be able to respond and shift choices to ensure they are undertaking the right mix of subjects for their desired post-school transition.

In addition, rather than being provided with a defined group of subjects to choose from for VCE or VCAL, the integrated design enables more student choice and agency in their senior secondary pathway. If students can make decisions regarding the pathway that best suits their strengths, interests and aspirations, this may also serve to increase motivation and engagement in their studies.

An integrated certificate will also address some of the poor delivery practices that were outlined in Chapter 3.1.2. For example, if all students were enrolled in the same certificate, late movements of students between pathways would not occur and students would be empowered to choose subjects instead of being placed in a pathway against their wishes.

CASE STUDY 6

International Models

The Review investigated international approaches to vocational pathways in senior secondary education. Broadly, two models tend to be used: separate 'academic' and 'vocational' streams or 'integrated' pathways.

Integrated vocational and academic pathways

Several jurisdictions have integrated vocational and academic pathways within their senior secondary frameworks.

Hong Kong

Hong Kong's senior secondary school model showcases an integrated approach to applied learning across the entire senior secondary qualification. All senior secondary students undertake compulsory career education as well as a core curriculum of four subjects: English, Maths, Chinese and Liberal Studies, with the option of two or three electives. Hong Kong's model integrates applied learning into the core offering, electives and students' extracurricular options. Students receive grades for their applied learning to ensure that it is well regarded, of high quality and rigorous.

Its applied learning offering includes a focus on career-related competencies developed in a vocational learning context. Its applied learning components are designed to enable its senior secondary students to experience and appreciate broad industry areas, rather than train for specific career pathways, and develop general capabilities in vocational settings. Schools are encouraged to connect with employers and coordinate site visits and, where this is not possible, some simulate workplace environments to incorporate work-based experience into their vocational learning program.

New Zealand

In New Zealand eligible students completing their single senior secondary certificate can achieve a Vocational Pathways Award (the Award). The Award is recorded on their Record of Achievement and signals that they have the foundation, skills and knowledge needed for further study or employment in an industry (or multiple industries). It acknowledges that a student's achievement relates to the learning or skills that employers are seeking in an industry and signals a student's readiness for entry into higher-level VET.

Ontario, Canada

Ontario's Specialist High Skills Major program (SHSM) allows students to undertake a vocational senior secondary program in an occupational area while also attaining the Ontario Secondary School Diploma. These programs have been credited with raising secondary school completion rates from 68 per cent in 2004 to 86 per cent in 2017.

Contextual learning forms an important part of the program, with subjects contextualised to the SHSM sector in which the student is specialising. Flexibility is another fundamental characteristic of the program, with students given the option to shift between pathways. Students develop 21st century skills using the Ontario Skills Passport, a free web-based resource that students use to learn about essential skills and work habits that are transferable. Students in the program can complete high school with industry certification and then go on to further education, begin an apprenticeship or enter the workforce.

Separate academic and vocational certificates

The Review is aware of several highly regarded specialised vocational pathways that are mainly found in northern Europe. These pathways are typically based on longstanding approaches to separate streams of education at middle secondary level, high levels of investment from industry and government, strong pathways to a robust manufacturing sector and a cultural commitment to a separate but equal status vis-a-vis university pathways.

Notwithstanding these particular contextual factors, many of these systems are facing similar challenges to Victoria's in terms of perceptions and the need for continuing high levels of investment.

The potential for the Swiss VET system to see declines in enrolment experienced by the German and Danish VET systems is a real concern for Swiss government and industry leaders alike. The Review recognises the high standing of vocational education in these countries, but considers that the underlying structural and economic conditions on which they are based do not apply in Victoria and would be extremely difficult and unnecessary to replicate.

Switzerland

VET is the more common post-compulsory school pathway in Switzerland, with around two-thirds of Swiss students choosing the vocational upper secondary program. Students usually undertake a 34-year apprenticeship program combining part-time school-based learning and in-company training. Apprenticeships are well regarded and available in most industry sectors, including employers such as banks and insurance companies. Substantial industry engagement ensures that Switzerland's upper secondary vocational programs are responsive to labour market needs. Switzerland's pathways are permeable, enabling students to move between vocational and academic pathways. Many students enrol in university following their apprenticeship.

Germany

Germany's dual VET system has well-articulated pathways, strong support from schools, employers and government to meet labour market demand. Secondary students choose between general or vocational programs following compulsory

general education. A range of upper secondary vocational programs feed into Germany's VET system, ranging from shorter programs in vocational schools, programs providing general upper secondary and vocationally oriented education, and specialised programs that build upon initial vocational training.

Finland

Finland's education system is designed on the principle that all pathways should include progression to higher levels of education. The upper secondary vocational education system has strong partnerships between the ministries of Education and Economic Affairs and Employment, unions, industry and universities. Vocational teachers have appropriate degrees plus at least three years of work experience in the field. Vocational teachers are trained in pedagogy and teaching practice.

England

England is moving towards a dual system through the development of a separate technical education pathway known as 'T Levels' to sit alongside the well-established 'A Levels'. T Levels are two-year courses that have been developed in collaboration with employers and businesses so that the content meets industry needs and prepares students for work. They will offer students a mixture of classroom learning and 'on-the-job' experience during an industry placement and will provide the knowledge and experience needed to open the door into skilled employment, further study or a higher apprenticeship.

Sources: Department for Education, Government of the United Kingdom (2020); European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (2019); Hippah-Schneider and Huisman (2018); Hoffman and Schwartz (2015); National Centre on Education and the Economy (2020); New Zealand Council for Educational Research (2018); New Zealand Qualifications Authority (n.d.); O'Connell and Torii (2016).

Increase flexibility and subject choice for all students

Recent reviews have highlighted the need for students to have a greater opportunity to combine academic and vocational learning and subjects in secondary school and identified the value in providing wider learning opportunities for all students (Masters, 2020; Shergold et al., 2020). An integrated single certificate framework allows for the greatest level of flexibility and permeability between the two existing certificates, with all students able to 'mix and match' all senior secondary subjects. International jurisdictions such as Hong Kong, New Zealand and Ontario (Canada) have integrated vocational and academic pathways within their senior secondary frameworks (see Case Study 6).

Here in Victoria, there was also broad support from principals, employers and other stakeholders for increased flexibility between the VCAL and VCE, and for greater subject choice:

A more integrated VCAL curriculum is needed to provide students with a more diverse suite of soft and technical skills that meet the needs of industry, now and into the future. Every student should be engaged with a broad, rigorous, high quality senior curriculum that combines academic, vocational and applied learning in ways tailored to meet their needs, aptitudes and aspirations.

Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, submission

Although the VCAL program allows students to choose from VCAL, VCE and VET subjects, Valad Solutions (2018) found that most students have little or no choice as to how their certificate was constructed. An integrated single certificate will offer flexibility for students taking the specialist vocational program to take additional subjects that may not have fitted within their provider's typical VCAL program.

An integrated certificate (that does not have a mandatory VET requirement) removes the risk that students will be forced to take an irrelevant VET subject solely to meet the requirements of the certificate. TAFEs reported that because of a lack of access to a range of VDSS courses, schools endeavoured to enrol their students in whichever VDSS course was available. This resulted in students being enrolled in courses they had no interest in and, therefore, resulted in low completion rates. Other schools reported students were unable to access suitable VDSS courses, which would leave them ineligible to complete Intermediate or Senior VCAL. These students were instead enrolled in Foundation VCAL so that they could meet course requirements that may not have appropriately reflected their achievement level.

For example, a student strongly expresses an interest in a career in video game development and identifies a course at a Melbourne TAFE they want to do after finishing school. If the school does not offer any VDSS courses that relate to video game development, it may be more engaging and relevant for this student to study VCE subjects in Visual Communication Design and Digital Technologies to enable them to build the knowledge and skills that they need. Students would be able to study these VCE subjects instead of VDSS in an integrated certificate.

As subject choice expands, enhanced information on industry pathways (Chapter 3.4.3) and career education will be vitally important to ensure students are on pathways that are in line with their aspirations.

Reduce stigma and enhance status of vocational pathways

In an integrated certificate, there is an opportunity to promote the relevance of vocational and applied learning for all students. All students, not just those in the specialist vocational program, should be seen as being on a vocational pathway to further education, training and eventual employment. The risk that a hierarchy of pathways is created within the single certificate is diminished as all students will be able to formulate their own vocational pathway.

Under an integrated single certificate, all students will be able to choose from the full range of subjects, which should reduce silos between VCAL and VCE students that are currently present in some schools. Such integration should also reduce some of the perception issues that VCAL students may have with doing the VCE. Many students studying VCAL hold poor perceptions of the VCE and very much prefer VCAL (e.g. 46 per cent of the VCAL students surveyed for the Review chose to do the VCAL program because VCE did not appeal to them). Some described the VCE as 'for students who don't know what to do when they finish school' (VCAL student, school visit).

Providers with high-quality VCAL programs have been successful in minimising the distinction between students taking VCAL and those taking VCE. The aim for all providers should be to not distinguish between senior secondary school students: an integrated single certificate would facilitate this.

Although the path to success would be different for each student within that framework, the achievement of the certificate would have a more collective commonality, thus improving the reputational issues of VCAL.

The Gordon TAFE, submission



RECOMMENDATION 9

The VCE should be a fully integrated certificate with an embedded vocational specialisation. Under this single framework, all students will have access to all components of the single certificate framework. The VCAA should develop a comprehensive plan to facilitate the transition to a fully integrated certificate.

4.2 Single certificate considerations

While moving to an integrated single certificate will be beneficial in many respects, there will be implications for the VCE and this change may give rise to other risks, including the loss of an identifiable vocational pathway, possible impacts on student retention and the reputation of VCE.

4.2.1 Implications for the VCE

The remit of the Review was not to consult on, or make recommendations, relating to the VCE. However, by its very nature, embedding a vocational specialisation within the VCE certificate and moving towards an integrated certificate will provide the opportunity to explore changes to the VCE.

The Review has identified some key implications that could be considered by the VCAA in relation to the VCE.

Access to vocational and applied learning subjects

The VCAA could consider what access VCE students not undertaking the specialist vocational pathway should have to vocational and applied learning units, once this pathway is embedded in the VCE. These units would further support such students to develop employability skills and other essential capabilities, if they choose. The availability of these units could also facilitate an enhanced unscored VCE pathway, as these subjects develop work readiness skills and support post-school pathways.

While not the subject of the Review, stakeholders were supportive of VCE students being able to take VCAL units, such as Personal Development Skills, because these units benefit all students:

You may be surprised how many VCE students want to do [PDS and WRS] to improve their employability.

VCAL teacher, online survey

To promote the uptake of vocational units by VCE students in the broader secondary program, the VCAA could hold discussions with the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre on whether these units could be included in the calculation of the ATAR, as VCE-VET units and unscored VET units at Unit 3–4 level currently are. Counting these units in calculation of the ATAR could provide additional incentive for VCE students to undertake vocational subjects that support their post-school pathway (e.g. Personal Development Skills or Work Related Skills).

Mandatory numeracy requirement

The recommended vocational pathway retains a numeracy requirement for successful completion, similar to the current VCAL. This retention recognises that numeracy skills are a core part of human capital, support the development of other knowledge and skills and play a key role in a person's wellbeing (Shomos & Forbes, 2014). Higher numeracy skills are associated with positive labour market outcomes, including a higher probability of labour force participation and a lower probability of unemployment. There is also a positive relationship between numeracy skills and wages/earnings (Stanley, 2008).

These findings are particularly important given the impending changes to the separate reporting of literacy and numeracy achievement based on a substantially revised General Achievement Test, which is aligned to Level 3 of the Australian Core Skills Framework. This level is regarded as entry-level performance in literacy and numeracy.

The VCAA could consider whether a numeracy component should be compulsory in the VCE to support the development of these foundational skills:

In light of the implementation of Literacy and Numeracy testing in 2021, should there be a compulsory component of Literacy and Numeracy required for all students as part of their senior secondary certificate? ... this might be at odds with the current VCE structure where Mathematics is not a mandated requirement for the award of the VCE.

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, submission

Over the last five years, more than 90 per cent of VCE completers successfully completed at least two units of mathematics. With the introduction of a Unit 1–4 sequence for VCE Foundation Mathematics, the number of maths units that VCE students complete may also increase. For example, more students may complete Units 1–2 and progress to Units 3–4.

Relationship between VCAL and VCE units

An integrated certificate provides an opportunity to refine and consolidate existing VCE and VCAL units that have significant overlap. Consideration will need to be given as to whether vocational literacy and numeracy units as well as VCE English and Mathematics units (including VCE Foundation English and Foundation Mathematics) continue to exist, or whether they should be consolidated. If both sets of units continue to exist, their respective status in meeting graduation requirements will need to be considered as well as whether vocational literacy and numeracy units should contribute to the calculation of the ATAR.

In addition, the VCAA guidelines for the development and review of VCE and VCAL units, which currently share some characteristics but also have principles and development processes unique to each certificate, would need to be reviewed to ensure that all units in an integrated certificate are developed under a common and comprehensive set of principles and procedures.

4.2.2 Risks of an integrated certificate

Stakeholders raised several risks relating to the creation of an integrated single certificate.

Loss of an identifiable vocational pathway

Some stakeholders suggested that an integrated certificate devalues vocational and applied learning pathways because a distinct applied learning certificate or pathway is not available. Concerns were also raised that VCAL might be absorbed into the VCE and lose the identity that many students and teachers are so proud of.

The Review's recommendations seek to retain and build on VCAL's strengths and are not intended to lose VCAL's distinct character. Within the integrated certificate, the Review supports the retention of the certificate appellation for students completing a specific grouping of vocational subjects (in a similar way to the VCE-Baccalaureate). This appellation would ensure that an identifiable vocational specialisation continues to be recognised and minimises the risk that vocational and applied learning pathways are devalued.

Schools could continue to promote awareness of the vocational specialisation to ensure that it remains visible to students.

Impact on student retention

A number of stakeholders raised concerns that VCAL students will not want to be perceived as doing the VCE, which risks disengagement and associated retention challenges. There was also concern that if VCAL no longer exists, many students would no longer be engaged in education and their post-school transitions would be more precarious.

The recommendations of the Review do not seek to remove the VCAL. Rather, they aim to improve the vocational pathway so that it becomes a preferred path for students to achieve their senior secondary certificate. Students will also receive an appellation on their VCE certificate that acknowledges the completion of the vocational pathway. In an integrated certificate, students will continue to be able to, and should be encouraged to, build their program around a similar group of vocational and applied learning units.

It is important that any communications regarding the creation of a single certificate makes it clear that the strengths of the VCAL are retained. Provided that this is done successfully, the Review considers that the risk that students will disengage just because they are receiving a VCE certificate rather than a VCAL certificate is low.

A clear communications strategy will ensure students understand the range of options and pathways available within a single senior secondary certificate. Recognising partial achievement through an enhanced Statement of Results will also allow students who do not complete a full senior secondary certificate to obtain a record of all their achievements.

Retention of VCE value

Stakeholders have also commented that the integration of VCAL and VCE may have potential negative ramifications for the reputation of VCE.

It must be emphasised that none of the recommendations in this Review propose changes to existing VCE studies. Any potential risks to VCE reputation will be minimised if improvements to the design and delivery of VCAL successfully address misperceptions about the value of vocational and applied learning pathways. These risks can also be managed by strong and clear communication about the continuing strength and rigour of existing VCE studies, which will not be affected in any way by the inclusion of an additional pathway. An enhanced Statement of Results will make it very clear to all end users the nature of the particular pathway taken by each VCE graduate.

Moreover, while the Review acknowledges these risks, they should also motivate the Victorian Government, the Department and VCAA to ensure that the required attention and effort is given to improving the design of the vocational pathway as well as to adequately supporting all providers to deliver high-quality programs.

Lifting the quality of programs, supporting students to have successful post-school transitions and broader reforms in the higher-level vocational learning space will, over time, lead to changes in perceptions. An integrated certificate will benefit all students, including VCE students who will have access to vocational and applied learning subjects.

5

Foundation VCAL





The Foundation VCAL certificate is important for some student cohorts to develop the knowledge and skills they need to make successful post-school transitions. Foundation VCAL recognises achievement, re-engages students with education and introduces them to an applied learning pathway.

In a reformed senior secondary system, it is vital that an exit point at the equivalent of Foundation VCAL continues to be formally recognised. Limitations in the existing qualification should be addressed through the development of a new Foundation Pathways Certificate. This qualification should be promoted as a pathway into a senior secondary certificate for students in all settings, as well as a pathway into further education and training and directly into employment. It will also support students to build the skills, capabilities and qualities required for success in personal and civic life.

5.1 Primary uses

The current Foundation VCAL has three primary uses in Victorian schools and NSSSPs—as a completion certificate for students with disability and additional needs, for students re-engaging with education—usually as a pathway to further study, and as a pre-vocational program for students in Years 9 and 10.

5.1.1 Students with disability and additional needs

Foundation VCAL plays an important role as a completion certificate that recognises achievement of students with disability and additional needs in specialist and mainstream settings. It provides a credible pathway for many of these students into further education and training or directly into employment:

The Foundation VCAL program offers a wonderful alternative to [Year] 11/12 students in special schools. The ability to adapt the VCAL curriculum to the students' interests ensures they are engaged and the focus on preparing them for life after school ensures that VCAL remains relevant.

VCAL teacher, online survey

Foundation VCAL provides a framework for teachers to develop and deliver appropriate learning programs and sets expectations relating to curriculum and assessment. Its flexibility around completion timelines suits specialist settings, with students able to take multiple years to satisfactorily complete the certificate. The flexibility of the curriculum also enables teachers to 'develop units of work that are appropriate and engaging for their student cohorts' and that 'fosters student's self-esteem' (Hume Valley School, submission).

Specialist school stakeholders advised that the VCAL framework has assisted with increasing parental and community expectations of what students can achieve and is a significant improvement on the individual provider-developed certificates that were previously awarded to students.

Stakeholders reported that the focus on work readiness is essential for students who need additional support to enter and remain in the workforce. Foundation VCAL also connects students with the wider community and assists in identifying options for post-school transitions:

So many of the Learning Outcomes included in VCAL are based on the employability skills that are necessary for our students.

Ashwood School, submission

In some specialist settings, stakeholders indicated that the non-senior secondary status of Foundation VCAL is not critical. For some students, the core objective is transitioning into the workplace rather than the attainment of a secondary school certificate. Stakeholders also highlighted the importance of having a qualification that is used in all settings rather than something specifically designed for students with disability and additional needs.

5.1.2 Students re-engaging in education

Foundation VCAL is also commonly used for students re-engaging in education and provides an access point for students who have already disengaged from education or are at risk of disengaging. Re-engagement is an important step on the continuum towards successful student post-school transition.

The foundational knowledge and skills acquired through the VCAL strands also support 'bridging the gap' between the Victorian Curriculum F–10 and senior secondary education for some students and provides a clear pathway between the two.

Stakeholders, including NSSSPs, report that time flexibility remains important for students reengaging with education; it is not uncommon for students to take over two years to complete Foundation VCAL. These students are supported to remain engaged and are able to keep working until they meet the required outcomes. Stakeholders advised that some of their students would be unlikely to remain in education settings without Foundation VCAL.

5.1.3 Pre-vocational uses

Foundation VCAL is also used as a formal qualification or as a school-based 'pre-CAL' program for students in Years 9 and 10 to build familiarity and engagement with applied learning pathways. It serves as a preparation point for students to progress through to Intermediate or Senior VCAL.

The VCAA changed its policy in 2015 to allow schools to use VCAL as an alternative curriculum design for students in Year 10. This policy was intended to enable greater attention on the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy, and enable better access to the senior secondary curriculum. Valad Solutions (2018) found that a key motivation for introducing a Foundation VCAL program for Year 10 students was to cater for students who lack adequate literacy and numeracy skills to successfully complete a Year 10 program.



Finding 6

Foundation VCAL plays an important role in recognising achievement of students with disability and additional needs in specialist and mainstream settings, re-engaging students with education and introducing students to an applied learning pathway.

5.2 Issues with Foundation VCAL

Stakeholders reported that there are design, status and reputation issues with Foundation VCAL.

5.2.1 Design issues

The limited number of accredited Foundation VCAL curriculum units makes it more challenging for students to complete an eligible Foundation VCAL program. As there are less Foundation VCAL units available, students need to satisfactorily complete at least three VCE, VET or Intermediate units to complete the requirements for the Foundation VCAL certificate.

For example, unlike Intermediate and Senior VCAL, both of which have two Numeracy Skills units, there is only one Numeracy Skills Foundation unit. In addition, for those providers who are only registered and authorised to deliver VCAL, students will not be able to incorporate VCE units into their certificate:

At the Foundation level, there are 2 modules each for Literacy, PDS and WRS but only 1 for Numeracy. This means that at the Foundation level, the student must achieve 3 credits from VET hours ... So basically, the students doing the lowest level of VCAL are being asked to do the most VET hours, which are more difficult than the VCAL Foundation work.

Ashwood School, submission

Some stakeholders have also reported confusion about the level of support allowable to meet learning outcomes in Foundation VCAL. At Foundation level, knowledge and employability skills development is supported by a strong emphasis on literacy, numeracy and preparing students for future learning. Foundation VCAL requires teachers to provide close supervision, support and direction to students.

The nature and level of teacher support is not specified in the VCAL curriculum, but to support teachers to develop an understanding of the differences in expected teacher action and student independence between the levels, the VCAA has published suggested learning tasks at each VCAL level. The VCAL QA process also plays a role in supporting teachers to develop an understanding of each level's demands.

5.2.2 Status issues

The status of Foundation VCAL as a senior secondary certificate is contentious. Foundation VCAL is certified by the VRQA as a senior secondary certificate. The *VCE and VCAL administrative handbook 2020* states 'The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) is a senior secondary certificate of education recognised within the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)' and '[t]he VCAL is accredited and issued at three award levels' (VCAA, 2019, p. 15).

However, Foundation VCAL is not commonly recognised as a senior secondary certificate by schools and education authorities. For example, Year 12 completion rates reported by the Department do not include Foundation VCAL completions. Foundation VCAL is broadly pitched at Level 1 of the AQF, whereas senior secondary certificates sit at around Levels 2–3 of the AQF. It is also aligned to Level 2 of the ACSF, which is below the expected standard of a senior secondary certificate (Level 3 of the ACSF).

There has been long-term debate on the status of Foundation VCAL being a senior secondary certificate. Foundation VCAL would be at level 2 in the ACSF, which does not match the expected standard of a Senior Secondary qualification, as such the current Foundation level of the VCAL should not be considered a Senior Secondary qualification.

VALA, submission

5.2.3 Reputation issues

The differences between the current VCAL levels and what underpins achievement at each level are not well understood by industry and community stakeholders (see Chapter 3.3.2). This lack of clarity leads to a conflation of the outcomes and competencies of Foundation VCAL with those of Senior VCAL.

In addition, the misunderstanding by some stakeholders that Foundation VCAL only caters for students with disability and additional needs has led them to report that this has had a negative effect on the reputation of VCAL overall. For example, in some schools Foundation VCAL has become the default program for students with disability and additional needs:

Foundation VCAL is often used to retain students with significant cognitive impairments and this reflects on the rest of the VCAL packages.

Pathways Leader, online survey

5.3 A new Foundation Pathways Certificate

A formally recognised foundation-level qualification needs to be retained to support some student cohorts—including students with disability and additional needs in specialist and mainstream settings and students re-engaging with education—to develop the knowledge and skills they need to make successful post-school transitions.

Building on the important role that Foundation VCAL currently plays, the development of a new Foundation Pathways Certificate provides an opportunity to strengthen the foundation-level qualification and to promote it as a pathway into a senior secondary certificate for students in all settings. It will also provide a pathway into further education and training as well as directly into employment, and support the development of skills, capabilities and qualities for success in personal and civic life.

A new certificate pitched to Level 1 of the AQF (the level equivalent to Foundation VCAL) should be created to ensure that students continue to be formally acknowledged for what they have achieved and have access to meaningful learning programs that can bridge the gap between Victorian Curriculum F–10 and senior secondary education.

The Foundation Pathways Certificate should be available for delivery by all education providers, including in mainstream and specialist school settings and NSSSPs, and is intended for use as an applied learning program for students aged 16–18 years who are unable, or not yet able, to access senior secondary education.

Stakeholders were supportive of continuing to recognise achievement at the level equivalent to Foundation VCAL:

it would be important to consider how the role currently played by Foundation VCAL could be maintained, so that the learning achievement of students could still be recognised through an accredited framework, and their progress duly acknowledged and celebrated.

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, submission

The proposed name for the certificate reflects feedback from stakeholders, particularly specialist school stakeholders, that there should be as much continuity as possible between the current name and the new name, as well as a stronger focus on providing a pathway into the senior secondary certificate, further education and training, and employment.

To serve as a genuine pathway qualification, students will need to successfully complete the Foundation Pathways Certificate requirements to be awarded the qualification (detailed below). Successful completion recognises that students have attained the foundational knowledge and skills they need to transition into the senior secondary certificate, as well as into further education and training and employment.

Having completion requirements for the Foundation Pathways Certificate is crucial to its credibility. If all students automatically qualified, for example, on the basis that they have completed 12 years of education, there is a significant risk that it would not adequately set students up for a successful transition into the senior secondary certificate and it could be seen as a 'token' award that students would not be motivated to achieve. It would also provide limited information for education and training providers and employers regarding the level of student achievement.

The Review notes that the recommended approach contrasts with those of some other Australian jurisdictions. For example, Queensland's Certificate of Individual Achievement is an official record that students have completed at least 12 years of education and met the requirements of their individual learning plans (see Case Study 7). However, the Foundation Pathways certificate should balance appropriate recognition of achievement of students with disability and additional needs with ensuring the certificate is suitable for most if not all student cohorts in Victoria.

For students who do not successfully complete the Foundation Pathways Certificate requirements, an enhanced Statement of Results will reflect their achievements (detailed further below). We believe that the proposed new Foundation Pathways Certificate provides a superior form of recognition of students who meet its requirements.

Further, the status of the Foundation Pathways Certificate needs to be clear. That is, it is preliminary to a senior secondary certificate but will provide a clear pathway into senior secondary certificate, further education and training, and employment.

CASE STUDY 7

Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement

The Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement (QCIA) recognises and reports the achievements of senior secondary students who are on individualised learning programs. Students must satisfy criteria to be eligible for the QCIA, including being nominated by the principal of the school as well as the completion of at least 24 semesters of schooling.

The QCIA is an official record that students have completed at least 12 years of education, and also provides students with a summary of their demonstrated skills and knowledge. Educational achievement is recorded in two ways: the Statement of Achievement, which provides an overview of the student's demonstrated educational achievements; and the Statement of Participation, which includes the activities the students has undertaken (e.g. school camp, choir)..

Source: Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2020)

5.3.1 Redesigned curriculum and new vocational units

A redesigned curriculum for Foundation Pathways Certificate units, based on existing Foundation VCAL units, should be developed. This curriculum needs to provide a clear pathway into the sequential curriculum developed for the senior secondary certificate, and build on the fundamental knowledge, skills and attributes to support successful transitions into the senior secondary certificate, further education and training, and employment. Expected levels of teacher support should be clarified through curriculum and associated guidance.

New vocational and applied learning units should be developed to ensure that the Foundation Pathways Certificate has a balanced focus between building core foundation literacy and numeracy skills and building the skills that students will need to succeed in their chosen pathway. These units could include new applied learning units in areas of industry demand, such as digital literacy (see Chapter 3.4.1) and visual communication skills, units focused on building work readiness and workplace capabilities, as well as the development of an additional numeracy unit (to ensure two units are available). Vocational units that prepare students for accredited VET study could also be developed.

It is important for there to be a sufficient number of Foundation Pathways Certificate units to give providers and students choice in how the learning program is created, provide opportunities to stretch students in their learning, as well as to enable further alignment with student interests, strengths and aspirations. A sufficient breadth of available Foundation Pathways Certificate units will also remove the pressure on providers and students to complete multiple VET units to be eligible for the Foundation Pathways Certificate.

Program components of the Foundation Pathways Certificate

To ensure a breadth of learning, students should be able to design a program from the following subjects:

- redesigned vocational units based on current Foundation VCAL curriculum (including an additional numeracy unit)
- new Foundation Pathways Certificate vocational and applied learning units
- components of nationally recognised VET qualifications from within the AQF.

Consideration should also be given as to whether students enrolled in the Foundation Pathways Certificate should be able to access units from the reformed senior secondary certificate (e.g. Unit 1–2 sequences). Such access would provide further opportunities for students to personalise their pathways, demonstrate their strengths and ensure adequate extension opportunities.

Eligibility for award of the Foundation Pathways Certificate

The Foundation Pathways Certificate should be awarded to students who complete minimum program requirements. Minimum program requirements should be the satisfactory completion of at least 10 units, which must include:

- at least one Literacy Skills unit
- at least one Numeracy Skills unit
- at least one Work Related Skills unit
- at least one Personal Development Skills unit
- at least one unit that has a focus on developing industry skills, which may include accredited VET curriculum and new vocational and applied learning units.

Minimum program requirements can be completed over several years to ensure the certificate continues to cater for the broadest range of students possible.

The Foundation Pathways Certificate structure is based on the existing Foundation VCAL strand structure, with a broadened Industry Skills Strand requirement.

Providing flexibility in the VET curriculum is particularly important for some students who will undertake this certificate and enables a more individualised approach to learning program design. However, there will need to be equivalence between VET curriculum and other units that focus on developing industry skills, for example, through a required minimum number of hours:

At this Foundation level, a range of opportunities need to be available to students from the perspective of a flexible, person-centred approach. This level of flexibility could include reviewing the required 100 hours of VET activity. For example, removing this requirement for those students for whom this may not be conducive to supporting their wellbeing, particularly if they need to attend an off-site RTO without the familiarity and support of their usual learning environment.

Victorian Council of Social Service, submission

The Foundation Pathways Certificate should include appropriate VET opportunities for all students, including Certificate I courses. The completion of Certificate I level courses also serves as a path to those Certificate II and III courses that will be required in the senior secondary certificate.

Specialist school stakeholders raised the lack of funding for Certificate I VET courses, which are set at the appropriate level for some Foundation VCAL students. The funding of Certificate I courses should be considered, although the Review notes that this funding should be limited to students enrolled in the Foundation Pathways Certificate. A funded Certificate I is unlikely to act as a strong incentive for schools to enrol students in the Foundation Pathways Certificate when it is an inappropriate pathway for them.

Enhanced Statement of Results

Students undertaking the Foundation Pathways Certificate should also receive an enhanced Statement of Results (see Chapter 3.4.1 for detail in relation to the senior secondary certificate). An enhanced Statement of Results will enable all achievements within, and beyond, the Foundation Pathways Certificate to be recognised, and include information relating to individual units as well as other credentials gained (e.g. White Cards and First Aid Certificates).

The provision of an enhanced Statement of Results will require back-end changes to be made to the VASS to enable additional details to be recorded.

5.3.2 Continuity between the Foundation Pathways Certificate and the senior secondary certificate

Maintaining continuity between the Foundation Pathways Certificate and the reformed senior secondary certificate will be important for its positioning as a genuine pathway into the senior secondary certificate. The knowledge and skills obtained in the Foundation Pathways Certificate will need to align with and sequence into the senior secondary certificate (with new sequential curriculum) to support students to successfully transition between them.

Continuity could be supported by adopting the same naming conventions for units (e.g. Work Related Skills – Foundation Pathways and Work Related Skills units 1–4), similar to the current naming of units in the three VCAL levels. Implementation should also be supported by VCAA guidance and messaging about the role and status of the Foundation Pathways Certificate and a clear articulation of its relationship with the senior secondary certificate.

5.3.3 Implementation considerations

Initial legal advice has been sought in relation to the creation of a new Foundation Pathways Certificate. This advice suggests that an amendment to the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* will be required to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the VRQA and the VCAA to allow the new qualification to be appropriately accredited and awarded. The timelines for implementation will need to accommodate this legislative change (see Chapter 12).



RECOMMENDATION 10

A new Foundation Pathways Certificate should be created to formally acknowledge student achievement at the AQF level equivalent to Foundation VCAL and to facilitate pathways to the reformed senior secondary certificate, further education and training, and employment.

6

Senior
Secondary
Provision





The quality of senior secondary provision, as well as the availability of a range of provided options, are key factors in retaining students until Year 12 completion or equivalent. Early school leavers commonly cited that they 'did not like the school/teachers; not interested in going' (16 per cent) and 'school was not for me/not a good environment; I was not learning' (nine per cent) as 'push' factors for leaving school early (DET, 2020e).

To ensure students have successful post-school transitions and to lift retention rates, all students must be able to access to programs appropriate for their circumstances. The Victorian education system needs to start thinking differently about how this can be facilitated. The bottom 10 per cent of students are unlikely to remain in engaged in education if we continue to do more of the same.

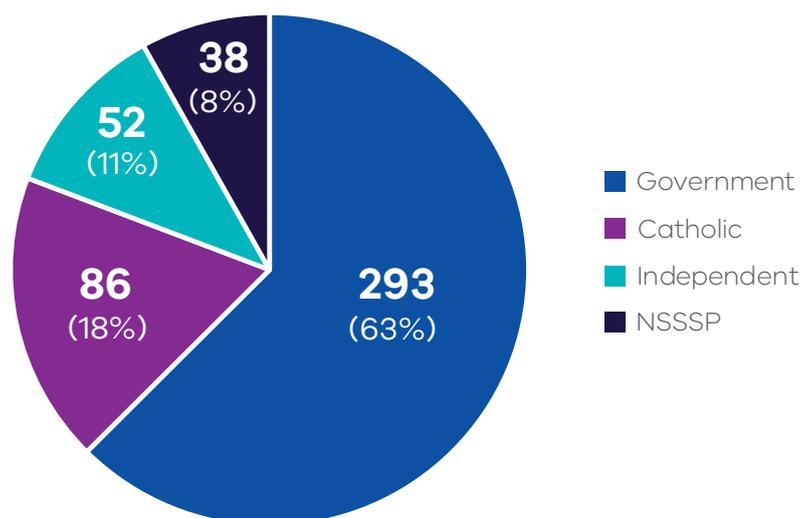
The recommendations in Chapters 3 and 4 will support the enhanced delivery of vocational and applied learning programs. This chapter focuses on ensuring all students have access to appropriate vocational and applied learning programs.

6.1 VCAL provision landscape

The VCAL is delivered in a variety of settings, including government, Catholic and independent schools and NSSSPs such as TAFEs and Learn Locals. It is delivered in 431 secondary and senior secondary schools—293 government schools, 86 Catholic schools, 52 independent schools and 38 NSSSPs (see Figure 5). These different settings cater for different student interests and needs, and as such, are all vital to supporting and increasing student retention in Victoria.

Figure - 5
Distribution of VCAL provision by sector, 2019

Source: VCAA (2020)



6.1.1 Schools

VCAL is delivered in all school sectors, including government, Catholic and independent schools in both mainstream and alternate settings. About 72 per cent of senior secondary schools offer VCAL.

Specialist programs

Some schools specialise in VCAL programs with a specific vocational pathway focus. For example, Ranges TEC specialises in building and construction, engineering, furniture making, horticulture, hospitality and electrotechnology. Harvester Technical College runs a VCAL program across four trade areas (see Case Study 8). Specialist providers successfully integrate learning through a vocational lens and provide students with relevant and engaging learning experiences.

CASE STUDY 8

Harvester Technical College

Harvester Technical College (HTC), located in Melbourne's outer western suburbs, operates as a VCAL-only campus that is part of Sunshine College.

HTC offers specialist VCAL programs for students in Years 10–12 in four trade areas: Engineering, Electrotechnology, Carpentry and Plumbing. VCAL is combined with a Certificate II pre-apprenticeship. Students are grouped in classes by their trade, which allows teachers to create an engaging curriculum themed to the VET trade they are studying.

Not only are students learning the hard skills of a trade in VET, it is being complemented by learning about the industry, materials and where they come from in VCAL ...

Students experience the immediate relevance and connection between the VCAL skills and the vocational skills of their VET programs.

Harvester Technical College, submission

HTC's Trade Training Centre supports the delivery of high-quality integrated VCAL programs and VET onsite. SWL is an integral part of HTC programs, with students undertaking two-week blocks each semester. While students are off-site, staff use the time to maintain their skills and update their industry currency.

Students are required to apply to HTC and attend an interview prior to being accepted. This entry requirement has helped to shift perceptions of VCAL, and the VCAL program at HTC is now seen as a highly sought-after course that provides successful pathways to long-term careers.

The overwhelming response from parents is that they were nervous about their child enrolling in a HTC program but find that it was a great decision.

Harvester Technical College, submission

HTC attributes their strong outcomes to the integrated programs. Fifty-seven per cent of their students went on to secure an apprenticeship, 17 per cent continued in TAFE or other post-secondary education and 22 per cent were in 'meaningful employment'. Over 2017–2018, first-year apprenticeship completion rates were also significantly higher for students who studied at HTC compared with the state and national average.

Source: Harvester Technical College, submission

Alternative VCAL programs

In addition to mainstream school delivery, some schools run alternative VCAL programs for young people who have disengaged or are at risk of disengaging from education. Some alternative programs also seek to support a student's pathway back into mainstream schooling.

Alternative VCAL programs include:

- programs within mainstream schools, for example, electives, extracurricular activities or replacement of regular classes for part of the school week
- separate alternative programs, including separate schools and campuses, and separate programs governed by a mainstream school (usually referred to as flexible learning options or FLOs)
- programs within TAFEs and community providers that are governed by a mainstream school.

6.1.2 Non-school senior secondary providers

VCAL is also delivered by a range of NSSSPs, including TAFEs and dual-sector universities, Learn Locals and privately owned organisations. These providers play an important role in re-engaging students in education and supporting retention, and were frequently referred to during the consultations as a 'second chance' for students.

NSSSPs have been successful at supporting some of Victoria's most disadvantaged young people to complete senior secondary and transition into further education, training and employment:

Brotherhood research shows that of these, small specialist providers—educational institutions dedicated solely to VCAL—are very well placed to realise the VCAL's potential, particularly for disadvantaged 'high needs' cohorts. They are able to concentrate all their energies on tailoring the program to the cohort's needs and developing innovative applied learning pedagogy.

Brotherhood of St. Laurence, submission

Students may undertake VCAL at an NSSSP for several reasons, including poor experiences with school, a preference for an adult learning environment, and other personal and health circumstances.

One NSSSP stakeholder indicated that 'non-school VCAL delivery is a key support to many young people who are seeking an alternative setting, with engagement in learning and support levels critical to student success' (Chisholm Institute, submission).

TAFEs have also reported that students appreciate undertaking VCAL at TAFE because they have strong connections and engagement with industry, interact with the community and provide a more flexible program.

Share of enrolments

NSSSPs have a small but significant market share of VCAL provision. In 2019, TAFEs and Learn Locals represented around 14 per cent of total VCAL enrolments. However, the number of VCAL enrolments in TAFEs has declined by 31 per cent over the period 2014–2019 (VCAA, 2020).

There also appears to be strong demand in some areas for NSSSP VCAL provision, with several NSSSPs consulted as part of the Review indicating that they had long waitlists for

their VCAL courses. It is likely that demand for programs at NSSSPs will increase as more young people struggle to enter the post-COVID-19 labour market and choose to remain in senior secondary education for longer.

Student cohort characteristics

VCAL students at NSSSPs are likely to have high levels of disadvantage including a range of personal, social and emotional as well as learning and resource needs and financial hardship (VRQA, 2020a). TAFEs that run standalone VCAL programs indicate that students with the greatest personal and learning challenges, including prior disengagement from school, often end up at TAFE (Victorian TAFE Association, 2017). Other NSSSPs also emphasised that a significant proportion of their VCAL student cohort experience multiple disadvantages (including mental health, alcohol and drugs, financial and family difficulties, and homelessness) and require additional support services to achieve positive learning outcomes.

A recent report by the VRQA found that many students attending NSSSPs were under 17 years of age, with students as young as 14 attending. Students younger than the standard senior secondary school age are typically enrolled in Foundation VCAL programs. There were also high levels of students leaving mid-program, with one NSSSP that had lost almost 50 per cent of its students, as well as significant student churn throughout the year (VRQA, 2020a).

Quality of program delivery and student outcomes

Many NSSSPs, including those consulted for the Review, are clearly dedicated to delivering positive outcomes for their students. However, a recent strategic review of NSSSP provision commissioned by the VRQA identified some concerning delivery practices that adversely affect the quality of provision and student outcomes (see Chapter 3.1.2).

DET analysis indicates that approximately only half of those students who exit a government school to study VCAL at TAFE go on to complete their VCAL certificate (VCAA, 2020). There is also wide variability among NSSSPs in relation to unit completion rates. Across a sample of 15 NSSSPs delivering VCAL, the percentage of VCAL units completed ranged from a low of 18 per cent to a high of 96 per cent (VRQA, 2020b). Low completion rates are likely being driven by student cohort challenges rather than the programs themselves.

6.1.3 Providers of Indigenous-focused VCAL programs

Indigenous students are less likely to complete senior secondary than non-Indigenous students, although retention and completion rates are improving. For example, the retention of Indigenous students through secondary school has increased to 64 per cent in 2019 from 52 per cent in 2012 (DET, 2020b); the number of Indigenous students who completed a VCE, VCAL or VET certificate while at school has increased from 272 in 2011 to 688 in 2019 (VCAA, 2020).

The proportion of Indigenous students who successfully transition into positive post-school destinations is also increasing. In 2019, 92 per cent of surveyed Indigenous students who completed senior secondary transitioned to further education or employment, up from 89 per cent in 2010. However, these figures are based on survey responses and do not include the full cohort (DET, 2014, 2020e).

Putting culture at the centre of educational programs and maintaining high expectations of Indigenous students are crucial for students to gain confidence, build resilience and have positive educational outcomes. Connection to family, community, culture and Country is critical and programs that help Indigenous students feel strong and supported in their cultural identity are more likely to lead to positive outcomes such as school completion (DET, 2019d).

In addition, where Indigenous culture is embedded throughout all student programs, non-Indigenous students can also benefit from understanding and knowing about the culture of First Nations people.

Indigenous-focused VCAL programs are a way of engaging Indigenous students in education and supporting their post-school transitions (Case Studies 9 and 10). The Review's consultations with several NSSSPs and schools delivering Indigenous-focused VCAL programs indicate that these programs deliver culturally appropriate curriculum, support the development of cultural identity and some prioritise engagement with local Indigenous communities.

CASE STUDY 9

Dimboola Memorial Secondary College

Dimboola Memorial Secondary College, a small rural secondary college, offers a broad senior secondary program that includes VET, VCAL and VCE pathways. Typically, about half of the student cohort enrol in VCE and the other half undertake VCAL. Around 10 percent of school enrolments are Koorie students, with half of this cohort from families of Traditional Owners.

The College incorporates a Koorie focus in the VCAL program through PDS projects and other subjects. For example, issues of race and how they relate to Indigenous Australians have been incorporated into literacy units. VCAL students often choose to undertake projects relating to Koorie culture. In 2020, a VCAL project focused on creating a native garden and a traditional smoking ceremony with community members. In 2018, a Koorie student created a large mosaic artwork as part of their PDS unit, which is now displayed at the front of the school and was unveiled in 2019 in an event coordinated by VCAL students that included a traditional smoking ceremony.

Exploration of Koorie culture is not limited to the College's VCAL program. The whole school actively incorporates a Koorie focus throughout their learning and other school activities. Doing so leads to positive outcomes for all students—especially Indigenous students who feel that they are valued as a core part of the school and their heritage is recognised. Incorporating a Koorie focus across the school ensures that it is not tokenistic and limited to students on vocational and applied learning pathways.

Source: Dimboola Memorial Secondary College consultation

While some Indigenous programs improve student outcomes and lead to positive post-school pathways, a number of stakeholders raised concerns that some re-engagement programs can be used as a 'parking lot' to maintain students in education until they reach school leaving age, with insufficient focus on educational outcomes or transitions. Further, some students viewed the program as an opportunity to socialise.

It is important that Indigenous-focused VCAL programs balance re-engagement with educational outcomes and avoid the tyranny of low expectations. Most Indigenous-focused VCAL programs are in NSSSPs and are typically accessed by students re-engaging with education or by students who are not thriving in mainstream schooling. These cohort characteristics can drive perceptions that Indigenous-focused VCAL programs are only relevant for these students. Dimboola Memorial Secondary College embeds Koorie cultural learnings across their VCAL program as one element of a generalised approach to embedding Indigenous culture throughout the school. This approach ensures that Koorie culture is part of mainstream schooling and not connected to specific learning programs.

There are good practice programs that support the development of Indigenous role models, undermine negative stereotypes and support Indigenous students to 'be what they can see'. For example, the Stronger Smarter Institute partners with schools to directly improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and its practices highlight the importance of embedding high expectations in programs. One of the Institute's fundamental strategies to promote student success is 'high expectations' leadership to ensure 'high expectations' classrooms, with 'high expectations' teacher–student relationships.

The Koorie Academy of Excellence is a virtual academy that provides out-of-school support to Koorie secondary school students through cultural, academic and leadership activities and programs. The Academy focuses on building student's aspirations to complete Year 12 and pursue their desired tertiary education pathway. Support includes mentoring, tutoring and career guidance. The Academy currently operates in North-Western Victoria but is setting up two new academies. Other programs that provide a wraparound model of support, such as Clontarf Foundation and Stars Foundation, are also useful case studies of delivering strong outcomes for Indigenous students and supporting successful post-school transitions.

CASE STUDY 10

Indigenous VCAL programs at non-school senior secondary providers

The Academy of Sport, Health and Education

The Academy of Sport, Health and Education (ASHE) in Shepparton 'uses participation in sport to undertake education and training within a trusted, culturally appropriate environment, particularly for Indigenous students' (Academy of Sport, Health and Education, n.d., para. 1).

ASHE runs a VCAL program in partnership with the Kaiela Institute and the University of Melbourne's Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences. Their VCAL program includes Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (around 30 per cent of students are currently non-Indigenous). Students range from 15–60 years old; some students stay in the VCAL program for many years.

ASHE's VCAL program is integrated and embeds an Indigenous Australian perspective across the curriculum, with culture and wellbeing at the forefront. For example, combining WRS, literacy and numeracy into one day enables students to go out and do cultural education at other schools.

The program is individually tailored, holistic, community-driven and delivered in a trusted environment. Students have access to transport, part-time work, mentors and community leaders when needed, including outside of school hours. ASHE brokers with local businesses to help students transition from education to employment and find students jobs.

ASHE representatives reported that VCAL is 'a more suitable way of learning and living for most of our young people' as it has a stronger connection to real life, community and employment.

Dulka Yuppata Indigenous Training Centre

The Dulka Yuppata ('Place of Learning') Indigenous Training Centre is located on the SuniTAFE campus in Mildura and provides support and assistance to all Koorie students. The program currently offers VCAL at Foundation and Intermediate levels, with Senior VCAL to be delivered from 2021.

As part of their VCAL studies and community engagement, students have opportunities to participate in a range of regional events, such as the Mungo Youth Conference, NAIDOC (National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee) celebrations and local health conferences. The flexibility of VCAL implementation has also enabled the development of targeted subjects, such as 'Produce Work that Expresses own Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander identity'.

A range of supports are available for Koorie students, including on-campus Koorie Liaison Officers who are available to assist with studies and life at SuniTAFE, and a transport service. Resources at Dulka Yuppata incorporate student wellbeing, community and meeting spaces, as well as an art gallery and Indigenous resources.

More than 70 per cent of the 2019 Foundation VCAL students at Dulka Yuppata remain engaged in education in 2020.

Sources: Academy of Sport, Health and Education (n.d.); stakeholder consultation with ASHE and Sunraysia Institute of TAFE (2020).

6.2 Access to VCAL programs

The current VCAL provision landscape is not providing all students with access to appropriate VCAL programs, notwithstanding the outstanding examples of non-school provision described above. This landscape is a result of individual decisions by providers, rather than by coherent system design. As a result, VCAL provider coverage is not uniform across Victoria: some areas have many VCAL providers while others are lacking. Access to alternative school settings is also limited in some areas.

There is an opportunity—indeed, an obligation—to ensure universal access to vocational and applied learning programs that support all students to make successful post-school transitions and encourage student retention.

6.2.1 Factors affecting access

There are several factors that affect student access to VCAL programs, including nonuniform provision across the state, schools choosing not to offer VCAL and entry requirements for VCAL programs.

Non-uniform provision

Several school leaders indicated that a student's location may limit their access to a VCAL program, as some schools do not offer VCAL. For example, 46 (14 per cent of) government schools with senior secondary students did not have any VCAL enrolments in 2019. These government schools are mainly located in inner and middle metropolitan areas and in remote areas.

While NSSSPs can fill some of the gaps in school provision of VCAL, this is not the case for all areas and there is no guarantee that the offering will be high quality. Additionally, some students consulted by the Review were reluctant to change schools for senior secondary programs.

Some schools choose not to offer VCAL

The Review was advised by some government schools that the primary reasons they do not offer VCAL is a lack of student demand for the program and limited capability or capacity to offer it.

However, this can be something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. For example, it is unlikely that a critical mass of students will express interest in a program that a school does not offer or promote as an option for students. Demand should not be expected to be driven from the ground up by students. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that schools that market themselves as being 'academically focused' also tend not to deliver VCAL.

Nonetheless, there is a significant issue in the capacity of all schools to provide the conditions underpinning successful VCAL programs, especially where a potential cohort is a very small proportion of overall enrolments. The Review found that a common feature of high-quality programs (outlined in Chapter 3.1.1) included a critical mass of VCAL students, although examples of high-quality programs being run with smaller student numbers exist. Schools that do not offer VCAL tend to encourage students who would like to undertake a VCAL pathway to enrol elsewhere. The feasibility of this option, of course, depends on there being a viable VCAL provider within reasonable proximity.

Entry requirements for VCAL

Several high-quality VCAL providers have entry requirements to their VCAL program, for example, requiring students to have an interview or take a test and demonstrate their dedication to the program:

The criteria for VCAL should have a vigorous selection process and only those appropriate for the course should be in it. While inappropriate students are dumped in classes it will continue to be seen as the inferior certificate as the classes are more difficult to teach with more difficult students who are unmotivated.

VCAL teacher, online survey

While these entry requirements help to build the reputation of the program within the community and ensure suitable students are accepted, they also increase access issues for students who are not accepted. That is, if a student is not accepted to the VCAL program at their school, they will either need to undertake VCE at their current school or transfer to another provider to undertake VCAL. The 'new' VCAL provider may not deliver a high-quality program and could be located further away.

6.2.2 A place-based approach to provision

The Review considers that all students should have access to appropriate vocational and applied learning pathways, which includes access to a range of core VDSS options. A place-based approach to provision, with both schools and NSSSPs delivering vocational and applied learning programs, will support access to high-quality programs across Victoria.

It is a reasonable proposition to require all government secondary schools to deliver the new vocational specialisation.

Such a requirement in itself is not sufficient guarantee that all students will have access to a high-quality program that best meets their needs. But it is a practical baseline expectation on which a place-based approach can be built. For example, a school could offer VCAL but only offer one VDSS course that all students must take. While this provides students with access to the new vocational specialisation, it is unlikely to be the most engaging offering and does not personalise the pathway to student's interests, strengths and aspirations. It is therefore also crucial that all government secondary schools provide access to a range of core VDSS options (see further below).

In addition, although requiring all government secondary schools to deliver the vocational specialisation will facilitate access, mainstream approaches to schooling do not work well for all students (te Riele, 2014). A place-based approach recognises that NSSSPs are a necessary provision option for students who, for whatever reason, do not want to or cannot attend school:

The challenge however, for any school system proactively seeking to reattach 'lost students', is that a suitable array of alternative education and customised support settings that would be less confronting for those young people who have been traumatised or disenfranchised in mainstream schools, are not equitably available in all areas. It is abundantly clear that not all young people are able to flourish at their local one-size-fits-all (survival of the fittest) school so it should be incumbent on governments to ensure that suitable alternatives settings and programs are in place for these young people.

Watterston and O'Connell (2019, p. 21)

Secondary schools with very low senior secondary enrolment numbers should offer vocational pathways by collaborating with other providers to ensure their students have access to a high-quality program. It may be more efficient for a small number of schools to actively contribute to an area-based approach than to offer the full vocational specialisation,

including a range of VDSS options. VET clusters are one way schools are collaborating to provide a greater range of VDSS options for students.

A place-based approach also enables the different providers to determine the most effective way to meet student needs. For example, a TAFE may be well placed to deliver the vocational specialisation to those students who would prefer, for whatever reason, not to be in mainstream schooling.

A place-based approach to provision should include access to core VDSS options, similar to the expectation that all secondary schools should provide students with access to a core range of VCE subjects. These core VDSS options should be aligned with Victoria's growth sectors as well as local industry needs. This alignment means that across the state there will be some variation in terms of what is considered 'core' and options will need to adapt to changes in growth sectors.

However, as a starting point, the Review considers that students should have access to VCE-VET subjects that are aligned to the six sectors primed for major job growth.

There was broad support from schools and NSSSPs for a place-based approach to provision. Although relationships between different providers have been tested in the past, there seems to be a high degree of goodwill and interest (at least in some areas) in working together to ensure that all students can access the most suitable program for their circumstances. Stakeholders also commented that a place-based approach could align with the need to enhance external supports to prevent broken pathways out of the system; for example, schools could collaborate in clusters or hubs to support students at the end of secondary schooling.



RECOMMENDATION 11

All government secondary schools should provide a vocational specialist pathway. A placebased approach should be adopted to ensure that all students have access to a high-quality vocational pathway that includes VDSS options with the most appropriate provider.

Enhancing provision in alternative settings

An area of concern in the current provision landscape is the lack of alternative settings for students in some locations:

Unfortunately, there aren't nearly enough of these bespoke educational alternatives to cater for the numbers of students who need them so many just simply detach and disappear.

Watterston and O'Connell (2019, p. 10)

In 2019, the Expert Advisory Panel for Rural and Regional Students recommended the review and development of local plans for the provision of alternative settings in regional centres (DET, 2019i).

Students facing challenges with mainstream education are on a continuum of disengagement from education—some are at risk of disengagement and some are currently lost to the system. Education options to meet students wherever they are on that continuum

need to be available to ensure all students have the best opportunity to remain engaged in education and complete Year 12. Equitable availability of alternative settings (as opposed to schools) to support re-engagement with mainstream education is part of the solution.

There is wide variability across alternative settings in terms of their overall purpose, the target student cohort and the outcomes they seek to achieve. For example, FLOs in the government sector play a complementary role to mainstream schools by offering a targeted, intensive intervention to respond to specific behavioural, therapeutic and learning needs of a student at a particular time. FLOs provide a local, place-based option for alternative education and are designed to be short-to-medium term arrangements that aim to re-engage students with mainstream schooling or onto further education and training.

However, even within FLOs, there are a variety of models and practices being utilised. In contrast, an NSSSP delivering a VCAL program may have a different target student cohort, a more defined re-engagement purpose, and be less focused on re-engaging students with mainstream schooling than on retaining them in education. Stakeholders raised concerns about whether some FLOs were genuinely focused on re-integrating students into mainstream education.

Although alternative settings must be appropriate for the student cohort and their local circumstances, there needs to be a greater clarity around the purpose of alternative settings and where they fit within the overall provision of vocational and applied learning programs, as well as better oversight of outcomes. Enhanced guidelines around FLOs would also provide greater clarity on practice and quality expectations for these settings.

A shared understanding across school sectors of what 'good practice' looks like in these settings, and what resources and support are required to deliver successful student outcomes, would also support the delivery of high-quality programs and inform future resourcing decisions for these settings. Cross-sectoral communities of practice, where all providers could learn what it really takes to deliver a successful program, would be a good starting point.

Designating TAFEs as public providers

Although a range of NSSSPs deliver VCAL, TAFEs have a distinct role as public providers to:

- lead the training system in excellence and innovation
- provide essential life skills and support services
- help disadvantaged students and communities (DET, 2019e).

TAFEs already play a particularly important role in supporting access to vocational and applied learning pathways in rural and regional areas, where they typically provide substantial VCAL and VDSS offerings.

Stakeholders expressed differing views about the role of TAFEs as VDSS providers: some suggest that TAFEs should be a universal provider while others view TAFEs as only one option.

There has been a move away from TAFEs delivering VDSS in recent years, which currently delivers around 35 per cent of all VDSS. This represents a significant decrease from 51 per cent in 2014. In 2019, TAFEs only delivered 24 per cent of VDSS enrolments in Catholic schools—down from 33 per cent in 2014. Some of this decrease is due to TAFEs withdrawing from auspice arrangements, but many schools reported a preference for private RTOs due to pricing, flexibility of delivery and the support provided.

As public providers, there should be a requirement that TAFEs and schools ensure all students have access to core VDSS options that align with Victoria's growth and local industry needs. TAFEs have a key responsibility here as schools may lack the facilities and expertise to provide some of these core options. As such, TAFEs should be adequately funded to perform this system role. It was also suggested to the Review that these expectations should be clearly enshrined in the constitution of TAFEs.

The Department should consider creating additional centres of excellence to develop curriculum support and online delivery options in several industries or fields of education, to expand access options for schools that do not have a local TAFE. Existing centres of excellence, such as the Automotive Centre of Excellence at Kangan Institute, could develop best practice delivery materials for automotive VDSS subjects. Other TAFEs could play a leading role in expanding centres of excellence and online delivery of VDSS.



RECOMMENDATION 12

As public providers, TAFEs should have an explicit role in supporting universal access to vocational and applied learning pathways, which includes the provision of a range of core VDSS options that align with Victoria's growth areas and local industry needs.

Competition and collaboration

In some areas, there are interesting tensions between collaboration and competition among schools and TAFEs. In general, schools are supportive of TAFEs providing a VCAL program for a disengaged student cohort. However, where the TAFE is also targeting students in the local area to undertake VCAL and progress to higher-level VET, this can be seen as competing with what local schools offer.

It is counterintuitive from a whole-of-system view that TAFEs do not support providers who can offer a higher-quality experience for students.

The incentives that drive this unhelpful competition between public providers, namely government schools and TAFEs, need to be examined further. If the system is focused on improving student outcomes, retaining students until completion of Year 12 and supporting successful post-school transitions, it needs to not only lay the foundation that enables students to choose the most suitable program for them, but also address the barriers to the provision of or access to this foundation.

Strengthening the position of TAFEs as a public provider for senior secondary education will also support student pathways into higher-level VET.

Building on specialisation

A place-based approach also supports further specialisation offerings from some providers, including schools and NSSSPs. NSSSP stakeholders suggested that there was an opportunity to build on existing specialist pathways. Determining potential areas of specialisation could be undertaken in collaboration with local secondary schools. Such collaboration would facilitate more streamlined and effective program delivery. Specialisations in subject areas can be offered that are unavailable through local schools or are too complex for schools to deliver (e.g. because they require specialised equipment) and local industries to align vocational programs with labour market demand. This approach will expand student choice regarding pathways and reduce the risk that NSSSPs are seen to compete with schools.

The benefits of enabling more specialisation in a place-based provision landscape include:

- responding to a gap in provision that was not previously offered by individual providers, for example, because specialist expertise or facilities are required for delivery
- building strong relationships in specific industries and in local areas, which builds alignment between industry needs and education and facilitates appropriate SWL arrangements for students
- reducing competition for specialist staff where specialist offerings are not replicated by different providers
- attracting a larger cohort of students for pathways that may not be possible for individual providers and capitalising on economies of scale
- facilitating access to, and reducing inefficient duplication of, specialist equipment and facilities
- creating opportunities to enhance pathways between senior secondary and higher-level VET.

It is not intended that specialist providers will suit all students. However, these providers could offer high-quality integrated learning experiences for students in areas of demand and help lift the reputation of vocational and applied learning pathways overall.

Increasing central input to plan provision

Coherent system design is required if a place-based approach to provision is to succeed. Without central oversight and understanding of where the provision gaps are, some students will miss out on opportunities to undertake the most suitable pathway.

It is infeasible that all schools will be able to offer a sufficient range of VDSS courses for their students. By capitalising on economies of scale, VET clusters have emerged to respond to this challenge and to facilitate access to a wider range of VDSS courses. Many VET clusters work well, but not always. VET clusters are further addressed in Chapter 7.4.4 and will continue to play an important role in the provision of VDSS courses.

The Department should play a more active role in provision at the area level to ensure that appropriate vocational and applied learning programs are available throughout Victoria, including:

- undertaking a comprehensive mapping of existing provision in the state, including provision in alternative school settings
- identifying gaps in provision
- identifying opportunities for local specialisation, including working with industry to understand demand for skills
- brokering and supporting the promotion of programs by providers across schools, TAFEs, Learn Locals and other NSSSPs.

The Review recognises that as each local area will be influenced by different structural and historical factors, a one-size-fits-all approach to place-based provision will not work.

The Department should capitalise on the lessons from best practice models across the state and exercise judgement as to how these models could be rolled out more broadly to support the provision of quality programs.



RECOMMENDATION 13

The Department should play an active role in developing a place-based approach to providing vocational and applied learning pathways. Such an approach should include government schools, TAFEs and non-school senior secondary providers and, where appropriate, providers in the Catholic and independent school sectors.

6.2.3 Impact of the proposed certificate design on provision

An integrated single certificate framework (see Chapter 4.1.2) will support provision of vocational and applied learning pathways by enabling students to choose from current VCAL and VCE subjects. Although some schools currently do not offer VCAL, a single certificate may lead to a stronger emphasis on enrolment in some vocational and applied learning subjects (e.g. Work Related Skills or Personal Development Skills) to build student capability in areas that will support them with post-school transition.

Expectations around a 'core provision offering' should be developed to ensure all students have access to a range of vocational and applied learning subjects. For those providers not already delivering VCAL, the delivery of 'core provision offerings' will be less onerous than the delivery of a separate senior secondary qualification.

Recent efforts to broaden the VCE subject offerings have been made. For example, the VCE Collaboration Fund seeks to improve offerings for rural and regional students through school partnerships, and the VCE Expansion Project supports rural and regional students to study VCE subjects virtually.

However, efforts to improve VCAL subject availability have been limited. The learning from the reforms to improve VCE subject availability should be leveraged to provide all students access to vocational and applied learning subjects.

6.3 Accountability for transitioning students

Students may move schools or providers for a variety of family and personal reasons. Sometimes it is considered to be in the best interests of a student to transfer to another provider to complete their schooling, for example, by moving to a TAFE to undertake VCAL.

A review of government school funding in Victoria (Bracks Review) found that approximately 10,000 students from government and non-government schools drop out of school each year (Bracks, 2015). While some students in this cohort will transition to other education,

training and employment, a number of students who take this initial step out of school will not remain engaged in education. For example, some students will transfer to a TAFE to complete VCAL, only to discover that it is not for them and leave. Others will leave school to try an apprenticeship but may find themselves let go a short time later. Whose responsibility it is to reengage these students in education is unclear (Watterston & O'Connell, 2019).

School accountability for students transitioning between providers becomes particularly important in a place-based provision approach. If the system is enabling students choice to move to a different provider for senior secondary based on personal circumstances or interests, it is important that someone knows who and where these students are and endeavours to keep them engaged in education. If the goal is to support all students to have successful post-school transitions, it should not be acceptable for students to be lost to the education system.

6.3.1 Existing accountability mechanisms

When a student leaves a government school or moves out of a mainstream setting prior to completing Year 12, there are a variety of existing accountability mechanisms. For example:

- Under career education funding (formerly managed individual pathways funding), government schools retain some accountability to follow up all students within six months of them leaving school. If the student is not in education, training or employment, there is a requirement to refer them to an appropriate agency.
- If a student is expelled, the principal of the school is responsible for ensuring that the student is provided with other educational and development opportunities (Minister for Education, 2014).
- If a student is referred to a FLO, the referring school must ensure that regular communication is maintained with the FLO on the child's or young person's progress and transition plan. This communication could include visits to the FLO by staff from the referring school, or the child or young person attending the referring school on specified days (DET, 2018).
- The On Track survey monitors the destination outcomes of Year 12 completers and early leavers six months after leaving school. An intent of the survey is to contact students and assist them with further advice if they are not studying or not in full-time employment at the time of the survey. However, due to low survey response rates among early school leavers, this is not a particularly strong accountability mechanism.

6.3.2 Inappropriate transition practices

Despite existing accountability mechanisms, there is anecdotal evidence that students in some schools are not transitioning to appropriate VCAL providers because their best interests were not considered.

Some school leaders and TAFEs have expressed concerns that VCAL providers (including those in adult settings and schools without local enrolment zones that offer VCAL programs) that freely accept students from elsewhere may be used as 'dumping grounds' for students performing poorly for a range of reasons and who have behavioural issues. A TAFE stakeholder observed that schools move VCAL students, but not VCE students, and suggested that schools should not be let 'off the hook' where VCAL students are concerned.

There is a risk that the reputation of programs from these providers is unfairly and adversely affected by negative perceptions of the student cohorts themselves, rather than the quality of the educational offering. Additionally, while TAFEs and other NSSSPs are important senior secondary schooling options, students should be counselled to pursue options that suit their interests and pathway aspirations.

Community VCAL providers have similar concerns, with consulted stakeholders suggesting that:

more should be done in mainstream settings to support all students to thrive without immediately shifting responsibility to Community VCAL providers to support some of the most disadvantaged students. When mainstream schools do not put appropriate procedures and supports in place for students who are experiencing structural disadvantage, or who have additional learning needs, this places enormous pressure on Community VCAL providers who pick up the pieces.

Victorian Council of Social Service, submission

There is also concern that children are being moved into alternative settings through informal expulsions (which are prohibited) and that these settings are being used as a dumping ground for students experiencing difficulty in mainstream schools.

Because of their informal nature, no data exists on how many students are informally expelled each year or which students are affected (Glass, 2017). Anecdotal evidence from the Review's consultations suggested that this practice is occurring, with little oversight by the Department. For example, alternative providers told the Review that schools referred 'the kids [that] schools don't want' to them and students may come to them after being advised that there was no place in their mainstream secondary school the following year.



Finding 7

The mechanisms of accountability for students who leave government schools prior to completing Year 12 are ad hoc and have resulted in transitions that lead to students disengaging with education and employment which is the least desirable outcome.

6.3.3 Strengthening school accountability

The Review believes that the Department should ensure all students can access an appropriate pathway and accountability requirements for government schools should be strengthened. This accountability means that in cases where students transfer to another school or provider, the original school should retain some accountability for monitoring the success of that transfer, without diluting the immediate accountability of the new provider. Accountability might include, for example, ongoing access to pastoral or specialist support or support for the new provider:

Every school must hold on to 'the baton' until a student is transitioned into a suitable and caring educational setting.

Watterston and O'Connell (2019, p. 12)

It is unclear whether efforts by government schools to follow up students through existing accountability mechanisms are monitored by the Department. Existing Departmental processes, such as school reviews, should be used to identify schools that outsource their students to other schools or NSSSPs (VRQA, 2020a) and to improve school accountability for all students who have transitioned.

Where transitions have not been successful and young people are not engaged in further education, training or employment, it should be incumbent on the original school to make all reasonable attempts to re-engage students in education. These re-engagement attempts should also be monitored through existing Departmental processes to ensure schools continue to have an incentive to follow up disengaged students.

Stronger school accountability at the initial student transition stage will work in tandem with more intensive programs and services that support students to re-engage with education. For example, the Navigator program helps to re-engage students aged 12 to 17 years who are not connected to schools or are at risk of disengaging. The Department informed the Review that approximately 70 per cent of young people in the Navigator program successfully re-engage in education, including in mainstream schooling, FLOs, RTOs and TAFEs.

In 2019, a pilot of the Reducing Early Leavers Project was run by the Department to find early leavers and re-engage them in education. Its findings will inform future practice and policy for government schools (see Case Study 11).

CASE STUDY 11

The Reducing Early Leavers Project

In 2019, the Reducing Early Leavers Project asked all government secondary schools to follow up early school leavers and encourage them to return to education and training. All government secondary schools and P-12 schools were given lists of early leavers to follow up, and were supported by regional staff who provided advice and contacts to support re-engagement.

Schools and regional staff reported that intensive, focused efforts have resulted in active re-engagement of some young people in education and training. In addition, some students were also supported to reconsider options that include a return to school and education. However, as re-engagement is an ongoing process, some expected project benefits will not be realised in 2020.

Source: Information supplied by the Department of Education and Training

Another area of concern identified for students at risk of falling through the gaps is when they change school sectors, for example, because of an expulsion from a non-government school.

The Department should explore options to enhance cross-sectoral accountability for students and to support more collaborative and successful student transitions between sectors. For example, in New South Wales all schools, including non-government schools, are subject to an information sharing protocol to improve communication between schools about students who have been expelled. The protocol does not affect the authority of non-government schools to expel students in accordance with their own disciplinary procedures, but their sharing of the information may support the new school to address the student's emotional, learning and development needs and prevent them from experiencing further serious disciplinary action (Hammon, 2014).



RECOMMENDATION 14

The Department should be accountable for ensuring all students can access appropriate pathways and requirements for schools to follow up students who transfer out before the compulsory leaving age should be strengthened to support successful student transitions.

6.4 NSSSP regulatory requirements and funding

Under a place-based approach to provision, all providers should be incentivised and supported to deliver high-quality vocational and applied learning programs.

The regulatory requirements on and funding of schools differ from those of NSSSPs. This is despite the fact that the many students attending NSSSPs are of compulsory schooling age and may be 'more vulnerable as learners, more disadvantaged and have been disengaged from their studies for varying periods of time' (VRQA, 2020a, p. 9).

There is opportunity to strengthen the regulatory framework governing NSSSPs and examine their funding arrangements to ensure that the system as a whole supports the retention of students and seeks to improve student outcomes and welfare.

6.4.1 Strengthening the regulatory framework for NSSSPs

The regulatory requirements for delivering accredited senior secondary courses, including VCAL, on registered schools differ from those that are applicable to NSSSPs.

Current regulatory framework

To deliver VCAL, NSSSPs are required to comply with the minimum standards for registration to provide an accredited senior secondary course, as set out in the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* and Schedule 8 of the *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017*. There are six minimum standards, which relate to principles, student learning outcomes, student welfare, student records and results, teaching and learning, and governance and probity.

The VRQA's Guidelines for Non-school Senior Secondary Education Providers indicates the information, documents and evidence that the VRQA requires of an NSSSP to meet the minimum standards (VRQA, 2017).

While registered schools are also required to comply with these requirements in the delivery of accredited senior secondary courses, they have additional minimum standards that must be complied with. These standards relate to:

- school governance (e.g. not-for-profit status)
- enrolment (e.g. have minimum student enrolment numbers, have an enrolment policy and maintain an attendance register)
- curriculum and learning (e.g. monitor and report on student performance)
- student welfare (e.g. manage behaviour and monitor attendance)
- staff employment (e.g. teacher requirements and compliance with *Working with Children Act 2005*)
- school infrastructure (e.g. relating to educational facilities).

A range of additional specific requirements also apply to registered schools, including requirements relating to Child Safe Standards and bushfire preparedness.

The VRQA has observed that the minimum standards for NSSSPs have less focus on the needs of the student than those that apply to schools (VRQA, 2020a).

Strengthening minimum standards

VRQA's recent strategic review of NSSSPs confirmed that 'the VRQA could consider strengthening the minimum standards to improve quality and students' safety and welfare' (2020a, p. 48).

Its suggestions to improve regulatory requirements on the provision of senior secondary education in non-school settings included:

- amending the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* to expand the professional groups nominated under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* as Mandatory Reporters to include Chief Executive Officers of NSSSPs
- amending the *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017* to broaden the focus on students as well as course requirements, such as requiring NSSSPs to monitor and report on student performance; to provide students with access to age-appropriate buildings, facilities and grounds; and support all students to make progress or improve student outcomes
- amending the Guidelines for Non-school Senior Secondary Education Providers to
 - require NSSSPs to have clear policies and processes for student enrolment and to monitor attendance
 - require NSSSPs to provide an eligible VCE or VCAL program to support completion of the accredited qualification
 - require Victorian Institute of Teaching-registered teachers to deliver non-VET-VCAL curriculum
 - require a minimum enrolment age of 16 years by 30 April in an NSSSP to reduce the potential vulnerability of senior secondary students in adult learning environments.

The Review agrees that the regulatory framework for NSSSPs should be strengthened to promote improvements in provision of quality senior secondary education, and support student outcomes and welfare. The Review endorses the VRQA's suggested changes to the regulatory requirements for NSSSPs.



RECOMMENDATION 15

The regulatory requirements for non-school senior secondary providers delivering senior secondary courses should be strengthened to promote delivery of high-quality programs and improve student outcomes and student welfare.

6.4.2 Funding NSSSPs adequately to deliver high-quality programs

TAFEs and other NSSSPs have reported that current funding is insufficient to deliver a comprehensive and high-quality VCAL program and to provide the additional support services for their (often vulnerable) student cohort. Recent financial audits conducted by Victorian Auditor-General's Office found that of the 12 TAFEs, only four generated a net surplus in 2019, down from 11 in 2018 (Greaves, 2020).

The findings of the VRQA's strategic review indicated that students at NSSSPs are less likely to complete a senior secondary qualification for a range of reasons, some of which are directly attributable to the adult learning funding model (VRQA, 2020a). It also found that funding is not sufficient and that 'the most vulnerable students are not provided with the level of support they need to succeed in their senior secondary education' (VRQA, 2020a, p. 47).

A two-tiered system has emerged however; whereby larger NSSSPs cross subsidise senior secondary courses to provide dedicated facilities and pastoral care services.

In many settings, children enrolled in the same accredited senior secondary qualification with the highest needs are getting the least funding, the minimum facilities, less qualified teachers or trainers, unstimulating teaching and learning resources, the minimum hours and support. Not surprisingly, many are not succeeding in their studies.

VRQA (2020a, p. 11)

If the goal is to support successful post-school transitions and increase retention rates, students should have the same opportunities to complete their VCAL certificate whether they are at a school or at an NSSSP. There is an opportunity to simplify the funding arrangements for NSSSPs and to make them more equitable with school funding to support NSSSPs to deliver high-quality programs and enable them to better cater for the specific needs of their students.

The funding arrangements for NSSSPs are complex: NSSSPs receive different funding depending on their student's enrolment status. Direct enrolments in NSSSPs are funded through Skills First at \$8.25 per hour up to 1,000 hours (the nominal duration of VCAL). This subsidy has not changed since 2014.

However, when students are enrolled in a Community VCAL program (through their secondary school), the provider receives significantly more funding (95 per cent of the school's Student Resource Package plus 100 per cent of any targeted VET funding, career education funding and Program for Students with Disabilities funding).

Skills First funding only covers minimum hours and does not cover students who take longer than the prescribed hours to complete VCAL or who need to repeat units. The VRQA reported that this may be driving providers to not allow students to repeat units and instead to automatically progress them to the next VCAL level because the student cannot afford to pay to repeat the failed unit (VRQA, 2020a), and:

There is no safety net if a student fails a unit, despite the fact that many NSSSP students have missed substantial amounts of their learning.

VRQA (2020a, p. 8)

The Review understands that Skills First funding is designed to subsidise costs and is not intended to fully cover costs of delivery.

While NSSSPs can charge tuition fees, these fees are often waived due to a student's financial circumstances. Stakeholders advised the Review that funding is only received for hours attended, which becomes particularly difficult given that students often need to be re-engaged in education and absenteeism is likely especially in the short term. Funding inequalities and the need for greater funding consistency across sectors and settings were highlighted in the Bracks Review (2015).

Government Schools receive about twice the funding that we receive, yet we cater for the students that Schools are unable to accommodate. Our students' needs are complex and require high levels of additional support and 'wraparound' services.

Mountain District Learning Centre, submission

When students transition to an NSSSP to study a vocational and applied learning pathway because VCAL is not offered by their government school, or entry to the VCAL program is restricted, they should not have to face additional costs. A student should not be expected to cover the increased costs of attending an NSSSP in cases where there is no suitable government school alternative.

This is supported by a recommendation of the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education or Training (Review of Senior Secondary Pathways or the Shergold Review) that all young people should be able to access free education or training:

Governments should provide access to free education or training to 16 to 20-year-olds who have left school without obtaining a Senior Secondary Certificate of Education in order to allow them to attain a Senior Secondary Certificate or equivalent, and to attain minimum standards of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy.

Shergold et al. (2020, p. 108)

The Skills First subsidy does not provide funding for capital, maintenance, recurrent staffing costs, student extracurricular activities or wraparound supports for students. These costs are significant pressures for providers that can affect student's experience of the program.

School leaders have described instances where adult institutions have applied to become independent schools to receive significantly more Commonwealth Government funding (and more predictable funding) than they would receive through Skills First as an NSSSP. Access to federal sources of funding has provided former Learn Locals, such as Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education (PRACE) and the Hester Hornbrook Academy (Melbourne City Mission), with more capacity to support the wellbeing of their VCAL students while delivering VCAL programs. However, different sources of funding for different providers have increased the disparity in funding (and therefore program quality) between providers.

The VRQA has advised that TAFEs, being a state government entity, are unable to become independent schools and access this additional funding without significant restructure.

Wraparound supports are not always available at NSSSPs

The provision of wraparound supports for students in NSSSPs is particularly important given these student cohorts experience higher levels of disadvantage compared to those in schools.

The provision of wraparound supports appears to be largely driven by the size of the NSSSP (VRQA, 2020a). Several NSSSPs consulted by the Review outlined extensive wraparound supports for senior secondary students specifically, as well as other student support services for all students attending the NSSSP. One stakeholder mentioned that it was 'asking a lot' of organisations to provide the support without funding.

However, smaller NSSSPs are relying on 'philanthropy, short-term grants and staff goodwill' to better meet the needs of their students (VRQA, 2020a, p. 11) and wraparound support is 'seldom comprehensive' (Brotherhood of St. Laurence, submission). Some NSSSPs also reported that wraparound services can be difficult to access even for students who are completing VCAL through a Community VCAL provider but continue to be enrolled in a school.

While TAFEs can use their Community Services Funding (CSF) to provide additional wraparound services for VCAL students, the Review understands that CSF is also used to fund other student support services and is insufficient to fully meet all costs required to support vulnerable cohorts. One TAFE reported that there was an expectation that once support services are introduced, it would be hard to wind back. This is problematic for NSSSPs without ongoing funding streams.

As many students who attend NSSSPs for VCAL are under 17 years of age and some providers have high levels of student attrition mid-program, there is a need to consider how wraparound supports can be strengthened to improve student retention at NSSSPs. Options could include extending the Navigator program support into the TAFE sector or other initiatives to support these students to remain engaged in senior secondary pathways.

Access to VET can be costly for students

VET is a fundamental component of VCAL at Intermediate and Senior levels, but Learn Locals and other NSSSPs do not receive additional funding for students to access VET courses at TAFE as part of the VCAL. Students undertaking VET at TAFE are often required to pay additional fees to do so. Some students are not always able to afford these fees (VRQA, 2020a).



RECOMMENDATION 16

An equitable funding model for non-school senior secondary providers should be developed to ensure these providers are adequately resourced to deliver high-quality programs and able to cater for the needs of their student cohort.

7

VET delivered to
school students





School students can participate in the national VET system and receive credit towards the VCE or the VCAL while they are taking VET courses. Such a certification system is referred to as VDSS or what was previously known as VET in Schools (VETiS).

VDSS is a unique and important part of senior secondary education. VDSS gives students an opportunity to develop both general and occupation-specific skills, build awareness of future employment pathways and acquire work readiness skills. In 2019, 34 per cent of senior secondary students studied VET as part of their senior secondary qualification¹ (VCAA, 2020).

The Review considered the design, delivery and funding of VDSS as well as the VDSS workforce and school–industry connections. The identified key issues related to: VDSS quality, the administrative burden associated with its delivery, barriers to accessing VDSS, challenges associated with small student numbers in individual schools, the VDSS funding model, recruitment and upskilling of VDSS trainers in schools, and poor connections between schools and industry.

The Review identifies opportunities to improve VDSS through:

- expanding and better supporting VCE–VET subjects to enhance the quality of delivery
- creating a VDSS portal to consolidate and streamline the administrative tasks associated with VDSS
- improving access to VDSS by increasing travel options for students in areas with poor access to public transport, supporting VET clusters and piloting alternative delivery methods
- reviewing VDSS funding to ensure it covers the full costs of delivery and to signal that VDSS is a core part of senior secondary schooling
- increasing the supply and PD of VDSS trainers to address recruitment issues and lift trainer capabilities
- building school–industry partnerships to support student and employment outcomes and SWL opportunities.

The recommended reforms will substantially improve access, quality and relevance of VDSS and enhance the post-school outcomes of VDSS students.

7.1 VDSS provision in senior secondary schooling

VDSS is a crucial component of both the VCE and the VCAL. It is nationally recognised training delivered by the national VET system; therefore, it has the same requirements as all components of the VET system. While the Victorian Government works within the national system, it does not have the same level of control over the design and quality assurance as it does over school subjects.

¹ Note that this includes students who completed VDSS prior to senior secondary.

There are three main models for delivering VDSS:

- Providers that are RTOs deliver VET directly to their own students and sometimes students from other providers. These RTOs include school-based RTOs, TAFEs and NSSSPs that deliver VCE and VCAL, including the VET component.
- RTOs deliver VET directly to a school's students at the school's site, at the RTO's site or a combination of the two.
- Schools deliver VET directly to their own students and/or students from other schools, under the authorisation of an RTO. This delivery option is known as an 'auspice' arrangement.

Most schools provide VDSS through the second and third models—they engage non-school RTOs to deliver VET, either directly or under auspice arrangements. Only a small number of secondary schools are RTOs. Many schools have ceased to be school-based RTOs because of the compliance requirements—the total number of school-based RTOs has dropped to 47 in 2019 from 90 in 2010 (VCAA, 2020).

The different provision models reflect access and quality challenges and trade-offs, which are discussed in Chapter 7.4.1.

7.1.1 The national VET system

The national VET system provides training for a wide variety of workplace skills and knowledge-based competencies for a variety of occupations, through a range of training institutions and enterprises. This system has the support of industry and ensures the skills and competencies developed through training are recognised by, and relevant to, employers. A national system allows qualifications to be portable across states and territories.

Nationally recognised VET qualifications are either organised within a training package or are standalone accredited qualifications. Endorsed by the National Skills Standards Council, training packages include one or more qualifications and may include additional companion materials to aid delivery. Accredited qualifications are approved by one of the national or state regulators.

Because the VDSS uses the national VET system, it has a level of industry recognition and buy-in that would be difficult to achieve in a solely senior secondary offering. But this also ties the VDSS to the strengths and weaknesses of the national VET system. For example, the Commonwealth's recent review of the VET system noted that:

Industry groups, RTOs, employer organisations and governments all voiced concerns that training packages are very cumbersome and complex and too hard to change. As a result, qualifications quickly fall out of date, and in some cases have been out of date for a long time.

Joyce (2019, p. 53)

If a nationally recognised qualification includes a very narrow set of skills or has quite limited support materials, then Victoria has quite limited levers to influence its delivery. As such, this Review focuses on how the delivery of VDSS might be improved; it does not make recommendations about the design of the national VET system. A current review into Victoria's post-secondary education and training system (the **Skills for Victoria's Growing Economy** Review) may recommend ways to improve both the design and delivery of training packages in the broader VET system.

7.1.2 Recognition of VET qualifications in senior secondary

Students undertaking VET can work towards a nationally recognised qualification and receive credit towards their VCE or VCAL. Credit is available for full or partial completion of a VET qualification.

In 2019, 34 per cent of senior secondary students studied VET as part of their senior secondary qualification² (VCAA, 2020). VDSS is relatively more common among VCAL students than among VCE students, as it is a prerequisite for Intermediate and Senior VCAL programs. In 2019 around 27 per cent of VCE students and 92 per cent of Intermediate and Senior VCAL students participated in some VET (see Figure 6). More VCE students than VCAL students study VET despite the proportion being higher in VCAL (see Figure 7).

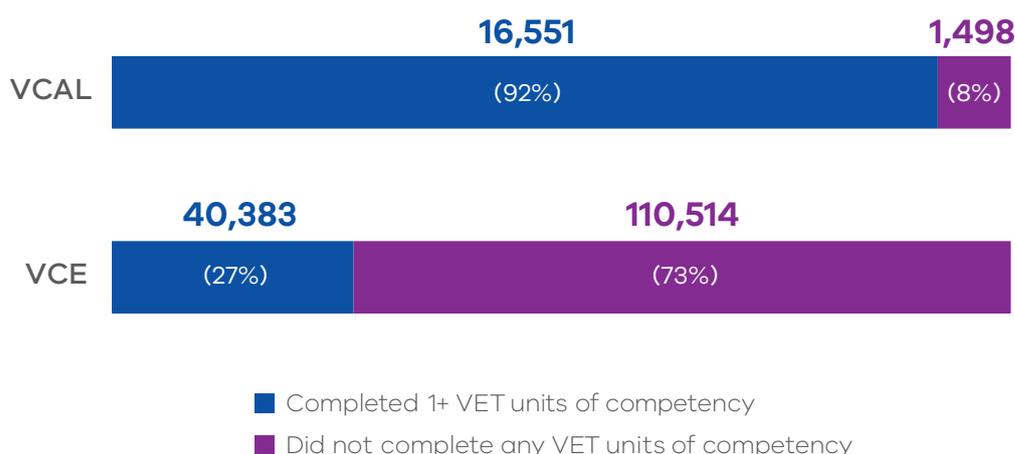
In 2019, the majority (93 per cent) of VCE completers who participated in VET completed at least 90 nominal hours of units of competency and received credit for one or more VCE units. As VET is a requirement in Intermediate and Senior VCAL, all senior secondary VCAL completers received credit for one or more units of VET.

VCE and VCAL have different methods of determining the credit that a student receives. Both certificates allow for credit based on the nominal hours of completed units of competency, with every 90 hours granting credit for one unit. VET completed before enrolling in senior secondary can be credited towards VCE or VCAL.

The level of VET qualification affects how it is recognised:

- Certificate I qualifications can be credited in Foundation and Intermediate VCAL
- Certificate II qualifications can be credited in all VCAL levels and as VCE units 1–2
- Certificate III qualifications can be credited in all VCAL levels and as VCE units 1–4
- Certificate IV and higher VET qualifications can be credited in VCAL and as VCE units 3–4
- VCE-VET subjects can be credited in VCAL and VCE with units 1–2 and 3–4 available.

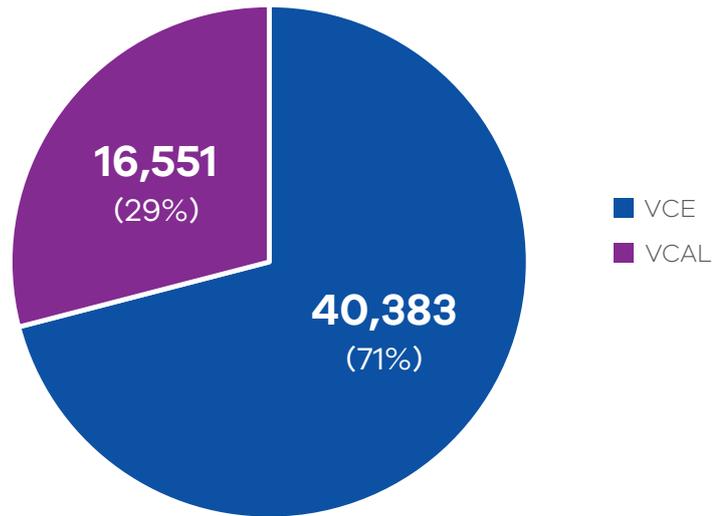
Figure - 6 VET participation, 2019



Excludes interstate VCAL students
Source: VCAA (2020)

2 Note that this includes students who completed VDSS prior to senior secondary

Figure - 7
Share of VET enrolments by certificate, 2019



Completed 1+ VET units of competency

Excludes interstate VCAL students
 Source: VCAA (2020)

7.1.3 VET contribution to ATAR

Only subjects providing a units 3 and 4 sequence can contribute to the ATAR. VET contributes to the ATAR in two ways:

- Scored VCE-VET is treated the same as any other VCE subject with a units 3 and 4 sequence, and provides a study score based on school-assessed coursework and an externally set examination. Students can only count one VCE-VET study in their first four subjects for the calculation of the ATAR.
- Non-scored VCE-VET and other VDSS courses that provide a units 3 and 4 sequence do not receive a study score. Instead they can receive an increment (block credit) calculated as 10 per cent of the fourth study score of the primary four scores. Students can receive up to two increments for a fifth or sixth study.

7.2 Importance of VDSS in student pathways

In the past decade, the number of enrolments in VET has failed to match the strong growth in university enrolments. Consequently, there is current decline in technical skills across the Victorian workforce. Australia ranks sixth among OECD countries based on the proportion of 25- to 64-year-olds who are university- or diploma-educated, but ranks 27th in terms of the proportion of 25- to 64-year-olds who possess intermediate skills (Mackenzie, 2019).

This finding highlights a relative undersupply of VET-trained workers in the country. It is particularly significant when one considers that most Victorian jobs predicted for the next few years can be filled with a VET qualification (Deloitte Access Economics, 2019). The mismatch of skills demand and labour supply is reflected in skills shortage profiles of several VET-related occupations (DET, 2020f, 2020a).

Despite the importance of VET for many student pathways, there remains a strong preference for university among some in the community (see Chapter 1.2). Many stakeholders raised concerns that there appears to be a commonly held perception—including by some students who might be better suited to VET pathways—that university education is required for those with high aspirations.

Many stakeholders emphasised the importance of VDSS as part of a general education. VDSS has a unique role in senior secondary: it develops both general and occupation-specific skills and provides workplace experience and readiness. VDSS is part of the national VET system and there is industry recognition that it might be difficult to access as a solely senior secondary offering. Industry buy-in of VDSS is critical to finding student opportunities to learn in real workplaces (Clarke, 2012).

The primary objectives of VCAL, VET delivered to school students and SBATs should be to expand the dimensions of a senior secondary learning program, complementing and—when done well—integrating with other academic subjects. The education value of vocational, practical and applied learning should be articulated and celebrated.

Victorian TAFE Association, submission

Students who participated in VET were more likely than their classmates to go on to post-school VET or employment, and less likely to go to university (Misko et al., 2020). Indeed, the most common reason students choose to participate in VDSS is because they are interested in a job in their area of training. Clarke & Polesel (2013) found that 47 per cent of VDSS students who were surveyed indicated getting a job in the area of their training as their main reason for studying VET. Other common reasons for choosing VDSS were that it leads to a VET qualification and that it is an enjoyable subject:

I'm doing VET because I actually enjoy hands-on learning and ... I probably want to be a carpenter after school.

School student, school visit

Students who participate in VET tend to have previously had lower engagement with secondary school and/or lower levels of achievement in literacy or numeracy (DET, 2020d; VCAA, 2020). VET pathways may serve these students well. Polidano & Ryan (2016) found that in Australia, VET plays a key role in facilitating positive labour market outcomes for those who have lower levels of academic achievement.

The Review heard that many students found VDSS the most engaging part of their schooling, expressing sentiments such as 'VET is the best part of school' (VDSS student, school visit). Participation in VET is associated with increased school retention and completion rates (Black et al., 2011; Clarke & Polesel, 2013). For example, Polidano & Tabasso (2014) estimated that participating in VDSS increased the chances of secondary school completion by 14 percentage points.

VDSS is not just for students who wish to pursue a VET pathway post school. It is entirely appropriate that some students participate in VDSS and then go on to university. A good experience of VDSS can help challenge the unfounded assumption that VDSS is only for students who are low academic achievers.

VDSS is often recommended for students who have disengaged from school or are at risk of disengaging. However, while VDSS can be useful for re-engagement of disengaged and at-risk students, this should not be viewed as the primary purpose of VDSS.

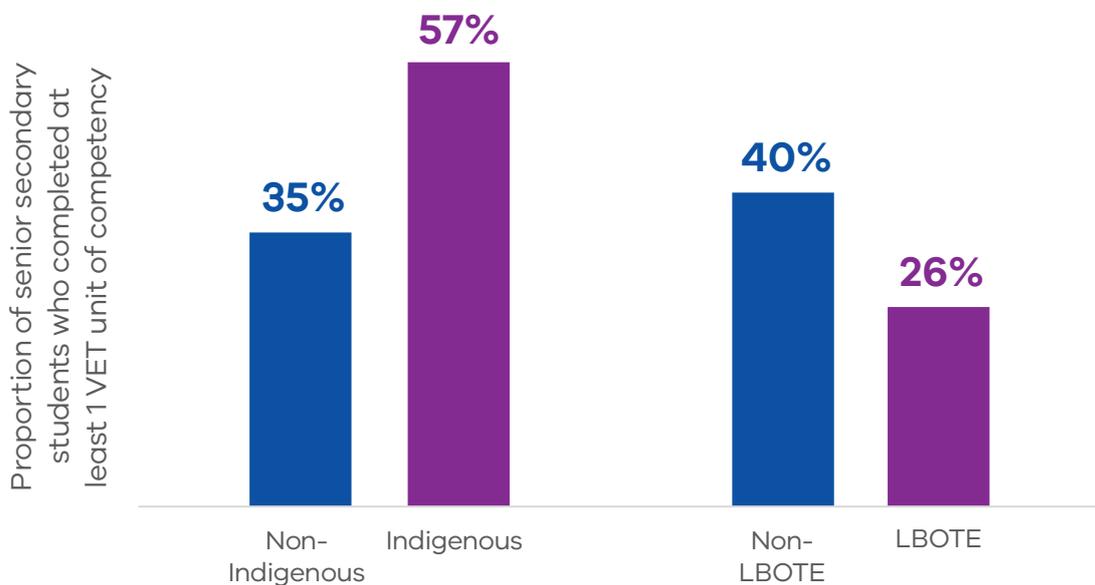
Moreover, there can be perverse consequences of using VDSS as the primary re-engagement pathway. Some may judge the value of VDSS (and VET more broadly) by student participants rather than by the quality of the program itself. Such an evaluation can create negative associations with VDSS and reinforce perceptions that high-achieving students should not pursue VDSS and that students cannot be supported with engaging applied pedagogy in an academic pathway. The evidence is, however, that students should be supported in all pathways, and the applied pedagogies that are key to student engagement and re-engagement should be available across both 'academic' and 'vocational' content. The purpose of re-engagement should be secondary to that of VDSS's fundamental purpose, which is to provide pathways to further education or employment.

In general, students from non-English speaking backgrounds are less likely to do VDSS, while students with an Indigenous background are more likely to do VDSS (Figure 8). The Review heard that many parents from non-English speaking backgrounds associate high aspirations as requiring university education:

There's an issue where some parents start from the assumption that VET in school is only for students who want to go to TAFE post-school and don't see value in it for other students. A lot of parents, especially those from a language background other than English, don't place a high value on this pathway.

Secondary school deputy principal, school visit

Figure - 8 **VET participation for select cohorts, 2019**



LBOTE: Language background other than English
 Excludes interstate students
 Source: VCAA (2020)

In contrast, Indigenous stakeholders reported that their students may get streamed and counselled into VCAL and VDSS on the ground that the VCE is not suitable for them:

We used to struggle to get Koorie students to stay in school. Now we have lots of students in senior secondary, but most are in VCAL—they are encouraged into it and not given the opportunity to do VCE ... They need help transitioning into positive destinations.

Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group representative, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEAI) Representative Council

The under-representation of students from non-English speaking backgrounds in VDSS enrolments suggests that there may be a lack of understanding and appreciation of the complexities of higher-level VET and its connection to good employment outcomes. Chapter 2 discusses the false dichotomy between vocational and academic learning.



Finding 8

VDSS plays an important role in providing pathways into post-school education, training and employment for both VCE and VCAL students.

VDSS provides a way to develop the occupation-specific skills for jobs in industries where students want to work. At the same time, students are also developing general skills that can be used in a range of workplaces and industries across their career. This combination of general and occupation-specific skills is particularly important as many students will work in occupations not closely related to their VET training. VDSS also plays a key role in helping students to experience and prepare for the world of work. Dommers et al. (2017) found that work-related experience complements other learning and is interesting and valuable for students.

VDSS can also help students to experience a learning culture that differs from other schooling. Many students also find VDSS motivating and engaging, which complements the other features of VDSS and can be leveraged in other subjects that contextualise the learning in topics that the students are interested in.

The Review heard differing stakeholder views about the purpose of VDSS. While some industry-related stakeholders continued to regard its purpose as developing skills for a pathway into an occupation and employment, there was broad support for VDSS's importance in developing general employability skills. In addition, many school-related stakeholders viewed VDSS as part of a general senior secondary education based on student interest and its usefulness for engaging students. School staff also valued the general, employability and occupation-specific skills that VDSS provides, as well as its pathways into VET and employment. Students valued the opportunity to learn occupational skills, with many recognising the transferable skills that VDSS provides.



Finding 9

VDSS serves multiple purposes in developing industry-specific knowledge and skills that are applicable across a wide range of employment, training and educational settings.

7.3 VDSS design

While VDSS is a part of the national VET system, this does not preclude the Victoria Government from taking actions to improve its delivery across the state.

7.3.1 Making VDSS a part of senior secondary education

Senior secondary education should prepare students for post-school education and employment as well as lifelong learning and active citizenship. As such, it is important that students develop general skills applicable in a variety of post-school pathways. Most stakeholders felt that nationally recognised qualifications are too narrowly focused on occupation-specific skills to form the totality of a good senior secondary education. While there was widespread agreement that VDSS is useful for learning a range of skills, most stakeholders viewed senior secondary as having a wider purpose than a VET qualification:

the programs offered through VETiS are narrowly preparing students for work in specific occupations that may be contracting or radically affected by automation in the next 10 years, rather than providing them with broader exposure to an industry and the kinds of preparation that industry requires.

Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, submission

VET has a role as part of senior secondary but should not be considered a desirable replacement for a senior secondary qualification.

It has long been understood that completing Year 12 generally offers substantial benefits over leaving school without a senior secondary certificate (Lamb & Huo, 2017). Nationally recognised qualifications are designed for delivery to adults and may assume a level of foundation skills that are not held by all senior secondary students. In addition, some qualifications are focused on a narrow set of skills specific to an occupation, which does not necessarily prepare students well for post-school education and lifelong learning. Additionally, Certificate II level VET is not as effective at providing pathways directly into secure employment (North et al., 2010) and should be viewed as providing a pathway to further training.

Completing a senior secondary qualification may be more valuable than some post-school qualifications. The Department's analysis of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey data (2019g) found that earnings of students who completed senior secondary but do not attain a post-school qualification were generally higher than those who completed a vocational certificate but did not complete senior secondary.

Students should be advised that completing Year 12 provides the best opportunities for post-school education and employment. Students who have an interest in vocational pathways should include VET in their senior secondary certificate.



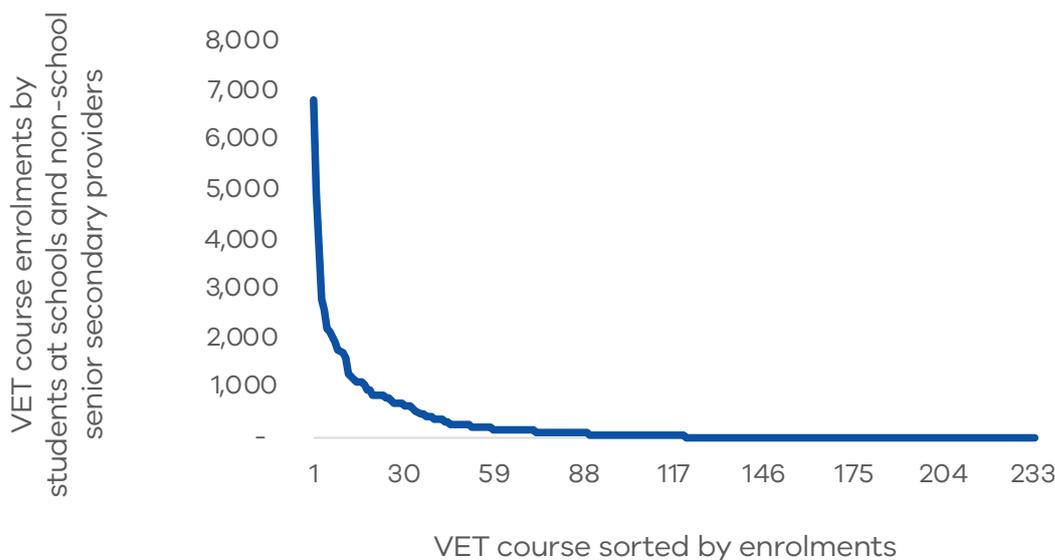
Finding 10
 Most students are better served by attaining a senior secondary qualification that includes VDSS than by a standalone VET certificate.

7.3.2 Expanding support for VCE-VET options can improve quality

More than 90 per cent of secondary schools offer access to some VET. The number of qualifications offered at schools varies greatly. Some schools offer only one VET course while the largest schools offer as many as 47. Significant variation in the number of offered courses also exists among schools of similar size and in nearby locations.

While more than 200 VET courses were offered in schools in 2019, half of the VDSS students were enrolled in 12 courses and 80 per cent of enrolments were in the most popular 35 courses (see Figure 9).

Figure - 9 **VDSS course enrolments, 2019**



Excludes interstate students
 Source: VCAA (2020)

The wide variety of possible VET offerings can make it difficult to deliver VET at a consistent level of quality and cost efficiency. Such a broad selection tends to dilute student numbers across many courses, which may be fiscally unviable or encourage cost-cutting at the expense of quality.

Additionally, such an extensive offering means that schools may have little experience with a course and find it difficult to distinguish high-quality from low-quality providers. The Bracks Review (2015) recommended that targeted VDSS funding should be limited to a VCAA-approved list of accredited, industry-matched courses at Australian Qualifications Framework Level II and III. Similarly, some stakeholders opined that VDSS enrolments should be concentrated into a narrower set of VCE-VET courses with better delivery support.

However, the Review acknowledges that there is a role for specialised courses (e.g. aviation) in a few locations, and these courses may not be available through VCE-VET courses.

VET offerings are influenced by ease of provision. A substantial proportion of VDSS is concentrated in industry areas that do not require specialised equipment (such as sports and recreation, business) or in areas where specialised equipment is more widely available (such as hospitality). Curriculum materials that make it easier to deliver VCE-VET subjects could improve quality and may encourage more schools to offer more VCE-VET subjects. The VCE-VET Health subject has new 'supplementary advice' that includes background information about the industry and learning materials to support delivery. This advice has been well received and similar information could be provided for all VCE-VET subjects.

VCE-VET programs use the national VET system of qualifications, which prescribes the competencies to be demonstrated to achieve the qualifications but contains little detail on effective teaching and learning to deliver them. This relative silence places considerable onus on individual RTOs and has arguably contributed to variable quality in the programs delivered. Within the content of the training packages, additional materials could be developed to support and improve VDSS delivery.

Victoria could develop high-quality curriculum resources, learning materials and assessment tools to support the delivery of the most common VET courses. This development might include extending and expanding the supplementary advice for VCE-VET Health to other VCE-VET subjects. The Skills for Victoria's Growing Economy Review is better placed to make recommendations about the national VET system.

There is currently a lack of data on the quality of VDSS provision and transitions post school nor the monitoring of student experiences. In part, this arises from the varied reasons for doing VDSS and the lack of a single metric that defines quality. Recommendation 38 calls for the collection of more and appropriately granular data on VDSS student experiences and outcomes.

The Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) has indicated its intention to closely monitor VDSS provision because of persistent concerns about inconsistent quality (ASQA, 2019). Recommendation 22 includes the development of a list of local preferred VDSS providers. When developing this list, the Department could consider the quality assurance measures in the Skills First provider contract requirements.

7.3.3 Proficiency-based assessment can raise levels of achievement

The Review heard that there are tensions between the competency-based approach of VET and the graded approach of VCE subjects. While some students may be attracted to the competency-based approach, proficiency-based assessment—or the awarding of grades—can encourage the development of greater levels of expertise. The structure of the national VET system means that any Victorian reform to proficiency assessment for the purposes of reporting on the school system will not extend to the VET qualification itself.

The VCAA has a well-established and accepted process for the graded assessment of VET studies which is recognised within the VCE. The Productivity Commission (2017, p. 94) has argued that introducing proficiency assessment to VET would:

- create incentives for attainment of excellence for students (because it positively affects job prospects and wages)
- provide information to employers to enable efficient recruitment and job matching
- give the VET system the necessary status to compete with other routes (such as university) to a successful career
- assist future learning pathways for students wanting to upgrade from a vocational qualification to a university qualification (such as upskilling from an ‘enrolled’ to a ‘registered’ nurse).

The National Federation Reform Council (replacing the Council of Australian Governments or COAG) is currently developing a roadmap for VET reform (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2020b). This roadmap may recommend a move towards graded assessment in VET, which has been called for by stakeholders such as the Minerals Council of Australia (2020). Changes to the national VET system could have implications for VCE-VET but are unlikely to affect the recommendations in this report.

Experience with VCE-VET suggests that proficiency assessment can be introduced relatively smoothly for a wide variety of VDSS subjects, with scope to expand the set of VCE-VET subjects that are scored. While a written examination may be unsuitable for some non-scored VET subjects, these could be assessed differently, such as a practical demonstration or performance similar to the current assessment of the VCE-VET dance and music industry subjects. Offering an option for scored assessment could encourage deeper learning, make these subjects more attractive for high-achieving students and provide more flexibility in post-school pathways. The assessment model used in the World Skills competition may be instructive for how practical examinations can be used to assess achievement.

7.3.4 Increasing support for VCE-VET subjects

Opportunities exist to enhance support of VDSS delivery through the provision of more resources and support for selected VDSS subjects. Supporting schools to consolidate their provision of a selection of VDSS subjects (such as VCE-VET subjects) will allow senior secondary providers to capitalise on economies of scale rather than all ‘secondary schools being expected to be able to cover [all] occupational streams’ (Apprenticeship Employment Network, submission).

VCAA’s advice to schools could recommend that VCE-VET subjects are considered before other VET options are considered. Such advice would also enable other VDSS reforms (e.g. increasing the number of VDSS trainers) to be targeted to a smaller set of occupational fields.

Existing VCE-VET subjects should be reviewed and potentially expanded to ensure good coverage of options that are suitable for school-aged students (e.g. visual arts or transport and logistics). The review should consider employer demand for associated qualifications. This Review notes that developing appropriate examinations or alternative external assessment for some VCE-VET subjects may require industry support.

Micro-credentials

There is growing interest in the inclusion of micro-credentials in senior secondary. This practice already occurs in Victoria to some extent in the recognition of units of competencies in both senior secondary qualifications rather than requiring the completion of a full certificate. However, there is scope to build on this by identifying the components of qualifications that have value and are, or could be, recognised as skill sets or microcredentials.

Employer and industry stakeholders have suggested that small, focused micro-credentials are flexible, efficient and cost-effective (Shergold et al., 2020). Milligan and Kennedy (2017) described microcredentials as having growing uses in business, including providing evidence of learning and capabilities, demonstrating currency of skills and professional learning, recognising prior learning that can be recognised within a larger qualification, and enabling specific stackable credit that builds towards a full qualification. The Business Council of Australia (2018) has argued that microcredentials are especially valuable for already qualified workers to demonstrate currency and professional learning.

The market for micro-credentials has been growing in both the higher education and VET sectors, and the response to the COVID-19 pandemic saw a substantial increase in both offerings and uptake of a range of micro-credentials (Shergold et al., 2020).

A review of VCE-VET subjects could consider whether some partial completions of qualifications might constitute or be credentialed as skill sets or micro-credentials. For example, a student who partially completes a Certificate III in Sport and Recreation may qualify for the Pool Lifeguard Skill Set, which would enable them to work as a pool lifeguard. Other short courses (e.g. barista training and first aid certificates) could also be recognised skill sets that a student could attain as part of a VCE-VET subject. Competency in these skill sets should be included in an enhanced Statement of Results (see Chapter 3.4.1).



RECOMMENDATION 17

- **Existing VCE-VET offerings should be further developed to include:**
- **high-quality learning materials and assessment resources to support delivery of all VCE-VET subjects**
- **scored assessment for all VCE-VET subjects that include a unit 3 and 4 sequence**
- **a greater range of subjects**
- **credential the partial completion of identified subjects in some qualifications.**

7.4 VDSS delivery

VDSS is delivered to students either at school (through a school-based RTO or an auspicing arrangement) or off-site at an RTO. A single delivery model for all Victorian schools is not feasible and so schools will need place-based approaches tailored to their circumstances. Even at one school, multiple different delivery models might be appropriate for different VET qualifications, depending upon the options available and the facilities at the school.

7.4.1 Delivery models reflect trade-offs

There are a range of different ways that schools can offer VET to their students.

Delivery through schools

If a school has enough expertise, facilities and capacity, then becoming an RTO can be an attractive option. An RTO status allows the school's students access to high-quality VDSS onsite, with the most timetabling flexibility. A small number of larger school RTOs (such as Bendigo Senior Secondary College) have an extensive VET offering and can deliver 10 or more courses. But many school RTOs (e.g. Northern Bay P-12 College) offer just one or two courses.

Becoming an RTO is not easy. While it may be an attractive option, the difficulty and administrative burden associated with being an RTO mean it is not feasible for most schools. It would be undesirable for schools lacking the sufficient expertise and resources to deliver high-quality VET to seek to become RTOs. Historically, some industry representatives have expressed scepticism about the legitimacy of schools as RTOs, so it is crucial that this option is only used when a school is clearly capable of delivering industry-standard training and meets all RTO requirements of the VET sector.

Schools can engage RTOs to deliver VDSS. Such a delivery model generally requires either the students to travel to the RTO or the trainer to travel to the students. Most commonly, students travel to the trainer as the RTO will have the facilities required for the training. Therefore, this model comes at the cost of sometimes significant travel time and can make timetabling difficult, meaning students may miss other school classes. It can be preferable to have the trainer come to the students, but this requires the school to have appropriate facilities for the training, sufficient numbers of students to make the training viable and can be more expensive as the trainer needs to be compensated for the time and cost of travel. Trainers also need Permission to Teach (PTT) recognition from the Victorian Institute of Teaching to deliver VDSS on a secondary school campus (see Chapter 7.6 for further details).

Although VDSS delivery must meet the same regulatory standards as adult VET, some stakeholders believe that the quality of VDSS training is inferior to adult VET. The national regulator, ASQA, has repeatedly found evidence of inconsistent quality in training and identified VDSS as a key area requiring attention in its most recent Annual Report. Some industry stakeholders highlight that schools are better placed to provide an introduction and basic experience in an industry (such as a Certificate II) while TAFEs and other RTOs are better placed to deliver higher-level VET qualifications.

Delivery through auspice arrangements

Under the authorisation of an RTO, schools typically auspice delivery onsite but avoid the administration requirements of being an RTO. The Review heard that there are many benefits of auspiced delivery, including its provision in isolated schools, curriculum support and delivery of VDSS in an environment familiar to students. Auspiced delivery addresses the needs of students who are exploring pathways to secondary education in an age-specific environment that is respectful of their developmental needs and friendship patterns. The demand for auspiced delivery has led to auspice-only RTOs entering the market (see Case Study 12).

The CECV reported that there are perceived advantages for onsite VDSS delivery, where appropriate. These include consideration of how such onsite arrangements suit the age cohort, the benefits arising from internal timetabling and the reduced need for student travel. Approximately two-thirds of Catholic VDSS enrolments are delivered on school sites (either the home school or other schools through cluster arrangements).

Schools stated that onsite provision was sometimes the only viable option for some students who lack the confidence or maturity to travel off-site for VDSS. There are strong incentives for schools to opt for auspiced delivery; however, this should not come at the expense of quality.

RTOs and industry bodies raised concerns about the quality of VDSS delivered through auspicing models. Many TAFEs also reported concerns that they find it difficult to maintain quality assurance over auspiced delivery in schools. The Review heard concerns that low-cost auspiced delivery could come at the expense of student learning. Joyce (2019, p. 93) noted that:

schools may directly deliver VET to their students under auspicing contracts with external RTOs. The degree of regulatory oversight of these arrangements is unclear. While this Review was being conducted, ASQA made the decision to cancel the registration of (or refused to re-register) two RTOs in Western Australia that deliver significant volumes of training to secondary school students in the state. It is apparent to the Review that inconsistent approaches towards quality assurance may have the potential to damage public confidence in VET delivered to secondary students at some point ...

Some TAFEs have withdrawn from auspicing arrangements due to concerns about the trainer's industry currency. Bendigo Kangan Institute (BKI) and Victoria University Polytechnic have withdrawn auspicing arrangements following a quality assurance review of all their contracts. Similar concerns were raised by other RTOs still delivering VDSS through an auspicing model.

Currently, the Department has less stringent standards for RTOs delivering VDSS than for RTOs who receive Skills First funding. Mackenzie and Coulson (2015) recommended that auspicing arrangements should be limited to approved providers. Chapter 7.5.2 discusses issues with procuring quality VET in more detail.

Auspice arrangements can be an attractive model of delivery for schools. However, there is a risk that some RTOs may not be capable of ensuring the quality of the program delivered.



Finding 11

Auspiced delivery of VDSS is an attractive delivery model for schools but requires appropriate quality assurance and raises perception issues about the quality of VDSS.

CASE STUDY 12

VDSS-only delivery models

The introduction of VDSS has led to the development of small, specialised RTOs that cater only for secondary students. In 2019, the single largest provider delivered 20 per cent of VDSS in Victoria, entirely through auspicing 16 VET courses. This provider more than doubled their enrolments from 2015 to 2019. Most of the courses they offer do not require specialist facilities (such as sports and recreation, business, community service); they operate Australia-wide and do not have any adult VET delivery. The marginal cost of delivery for this business model is low and there are risks for quality assurance measures, as RTO employees are not present to deliver training. The provider is aware of the risks and is actively managing them, but ASQA has signalled an intention to more closely monitor this form of delivery and has suspended the registration of several providers in Western Australia.

Source: VCAA (2020)

TAFE as a public provider

TAFEs have a distinct role as public providers that support access to vocational and applied learning pathways. Stakeholders expressed differing views about the role of TAFEs as VDSS providers: some feel that TAFEs should be a universal provider, others view TAFEs as simply one option. Several stakeholders have also asked that TAFEs be funded to reinvest in partnerships with schools to support and enhance regional delivery. Chapter 6.2.2 further discusses the role of TAFEs as a public provider.

7.4.2 Administrative burden

The Review heard that delivering a high-quality vocational and applied learning program that includes VET and work placements is more complex and expensive than delivering a standard VCE program:

VCAL and VET have a large administrative burden, but they should be no different to VCE. There should be more [administrative] support. [Structured workplace learning] can be onerous and there is no single register of placements so often when you hear about something it's too late.

Secondary school principal, online survey

For a school to deliver VDSS or to engage a third-party provider, the school needs to coordinate contracts with RTOs and TAFEs (often multiple contracts per school), monitor student attendance and assessment results across multiple providers and sites, arrange shared provision with other schools, manage workforce shortages and recruitment, and comply with occupational health and safety requirements. These tasks—often not required for non-VET subjects—take school staff away from planning, designing and delivering high-quality programs.

In schools with large VET or VCAL programs, staff spend a significant amount of time on administrative tasks, such as monitoring student movements to TAFE, coordinating RTO and TAFE contracts, managing infrastructure maintenance and complying with occupational health and safety requirements (Grant Thornton Australia, 2017).

Supporting students to find meaningful work placements is a particularly difficult task that can require substantial time identifying and liaising with potential employers. Rural schools find this particularly challenging due to the limited pool of potential employers who are often inundated with applications.

Schools retain a duty of care while students are on work placements or training with a third-party provider. However, some schools told the Review that current resourcing does not always enable them to adequately support students while they are off-site, for example, by visiting workplaces.

There is a small number of Departmental regional staff who support schools with vocational and applied learning, mostly in relation to student pathways and transitions. Additionally, Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) work with schools, education providers, industry and community to build and maintain partnerships. They support schools to source work placements, SBATs and other employment activities to support career education. LLENs are primarily funded by the Department but provide services to all secondary schools—government and non-government.

Trainers, teachers, principals and employers often have inconsistent—often incorrect—understandings of VDSS, including the eligibility requirements for VCAL and VDSS. The Review heard accounts of VDSS coordinators who presumed that only VCE students could undertake VCE-VET and only VCAL students could study other VDSS courses. There were also examples of employers and group training organisations with conflicting understandings of the interaction between VDSS, SBATs and Skills First eligibility conditions.

VDSS coordination is usually only a small part of any role in senior secondary providers and RTOs, and these jobs often have frequent turnover. Many staff lack the capacity to keep abreast of changing requirements and may still believe outdated information. Clear and concise information is necessary to ensure all stakeholders have a common understanding of VDSS benefits, requirements and outcomes.

Recommendation 5 proposes that the Department funds in-school pathways coordinators to facilitate vocational and applied learning programs, including VET and work placements. A dedicated pathways coordinator will be able to undertake administrative duties and work with clusters, LLENs and employers to enhance student exposure to work-related and work-based learning. Chapter 3.4.3 provides additional detail on more delivery support for vocational and applied learning pathways.



Finding 12

Schools require more support to shoulder the many and varied administrative requirements of delivering a comprehensive VDSS program.

Some VET clusters have developed portals that centralise documentation and information on contracting, reporting and administration. For example, the Mullum VET Cluster's portal includes student attendance and hosts a variety of resources that include contact details, policies and enrolment documentation. Both the Brimbank VET and Western Edge VET clusters have a portal that includes medical information as well as student's individual learning plans.

The Department should develop a portal for use by schools and VET clusters that hosts the information required to procure and manage VET contracts. This information might include documentation relating to budget, enrolment, attendance records, policies and responsibilities, medical and contact details, student reports, individual learning plans and units of competency completed. The portal would consolidate information on administrative duties, and facilitate the streamlining of some administrative requirements by having student details in one location. The portal should be able to synchronise or submit enrolment and completion information to the VASS.

The Know your RTO tool should be augmented and potentially incorporated into the new portal. It should include clear accessible information on providers, including courses offered, location, price, quality, student outcomes, and the support services and facilities that are available. The tool could also include ratings of experience with providers, reviews and/or customer advice about providers. Once augmented, the website should be promoted as the 'go-to' resource for VET coordinators and clusters when considering third-party VET providers.



RECOMMENDATION 18

To facilitate the management of VET contracts and student enrolments, the Department should develop a single portal for schools and VET clusters that can be synchronised across existing administrative systems so that administrative requirements for schools can be streamlined.

7.4.3 Access challenges

While students can access some VDSS through most senior secondary providers, the selection of available courses is very limited for many students. In 2019, 19 per cent of senior secondary providers had enrolments in three or fewer different VET courses. Additionally, there are specific access challenges for regional and rural students because of a lack of providers and transport barriers. The necessity of online delivery during the COVID-19 crisis may offer important insights into how different modes of delivery can address some of these barriers.

The Department is currently working to expand options to deliver VDSS in rural and regional areas. The initial focus is on delivering VCE-VET subjects via virtual learning. However, the Department's work will also explore other options for expansion, such as face-to-face delivery to better match supply and demand and leveraging of existing rural and regional infrastructure for delivery (e.g. TTCs).

The Review heard that access issues can be compounded for students with additional needs. Some students have significant or complex needs that can act as a further barrier to accessing VET. These students may require additional supports and flexible arrangements to ensure that they are not unduly prevented from accessing education and training opportunities that are available to others.

VDSS requires specialist facilities

VET courses are delivered in a range of facilities that provide students with access to specialised and technical equipment, including TTCs, Tech Schools, TAFEs and private RTOs. To ensure that VDSS remains relevant and credible, it is important that students have access to industry-standard equipment and that these training facilities retain currency.

There is currently no dedicated funding stream to build or maintain VDSS infrastructure in schools. To fund the building of VDSS infrastructure, a school would either need to cross-subsidise building of infrastructure from other funding sources or receive funds through some form of non-recurrent funding, as occurred with TTCs.

The Australian Government's Trade Training Centres in Schools program aimed to address skills shortages in trades and emerging industries. The program included 74 Victorian projects, with just over half of these led by government schools and the others by Catholic or independent schools. It was a capital only program that funded new or refurbished facilities, trades equipment for the centres and a small amount for administration costs. The funding explicitly did not cover recurrent funding requirements. Although TTC equipment was funded (or sourced) at the outset, schools must manage subsequent costs relating to that equipment. Replacement and upgrade costs may be significant, as TTC equipment is generally highly specialised and more expensive than core school assets to maintain.

A lot of specialised equipment in TTCs needs replacing or upgrading to ensure their facilities remain current with industry requirements. A South Australian audit of TTCs found that most of their equipment are no longer fit for purpose or provide the correct facilities for local training requirements (Government of South Australia, 2019).

The Review considers that all students should have access to appropriate vocational and applied learning pathways. Appropriate access, however, requires a place-based approach to provision that recognises that not all schools can have specialised VET facilities.

Planning of system-level school infrastructure by the Department should consider specialised VET facilities in order to take advantage of economies of scale and specialisation. Such planning would involve a needs analysis at the regional level, as industry demand varies considerably across the state. Needs analysis should also be informed by both current and expected local and statewide demand. The Victorian Skills Commissioner's Mallee Regional Skills Demand Profile is an example of useful regional mapping of demand that can inform decisions about expected local needs.

Additionally, an inventory of existing regional resources and their condition is required. The inventory should consider resources in both schools and NSSSPs. A strategic planning group tasked with considering resources in schools and post-school training should determine which facilities would be upgraded or refurbished, and guide investment decisions accordingly. Such planning and prioritisation will require investment trade-offs between facilities, which also necessitates a strategic approach to stakeholder engagement. Strategic planning will enable the Department to better monitor the supply of, and demand for, specialised facilities in schools (including TTCs).



RECOMMENDATION 19

The Department should facilitate specialised equipment replacement in Trade Training Centres (TTCs) and other facilities for VDSS, supported by improved strategic planning to increase utilisation across TTCs, TAFEs and other registered training organisations.

Travel can be a significant barrier

The Review heard that some schools—primarily those in rural and regional Victoria—find it difficult to access VDSS options. Where VDSS providers are not local, students may have to travel significant distances to access their VDSS course:

We currently bus students an hour to another region to access VET offerings—so one hour on the bus to the city and then one hour back—this is not ideal but in a small rural town we understand this is what is needed to offer more pathways to VET students ... from next year our school will not be able to fund this and parents will need to pay—which will limit student access due to low socio-economic area.

VET coordinator, online survey

The Department provides financial help for transport through the Conveyance Allowance. This allowance provides \$2.10 per day for rural and regional students (in Years 11 and 12) who need to travel more than 4.8 km to study off-campus as part of their study.

However, this allowance does not, and is not intended to, cover the full transport costs of students. The Review heard examples from students of bus tickets in regional areas costing in excess of \$20 for a round trip at the student concession rate. Moreover, only a very small proportion of rural and regional school students doing VDSS access the Conveyance Allowance.

The cost of transport to an off-site VET can be a significant barrier, especially for disadvantaged students and students whose secondary schools are in areas with poor access to public transport. The Department should consider increasing travel subsidies to ensure all rural students can access VDSS.

The Review heard examples of:

- students being charged weekly transport fees to travel to regional TAFEs
- students undertaking block delivery during school holidays at regional centres, with students requiring accommodation over the period
- students dropping out of VDSS courses due to the travel requirements.

Travel to an off-site VDSS provider can be time-consuming and tiring for students. This burden is especially acute in areas with poor access to public transport, such as Melton and parts of regional Victoria. Further, some regional public transport routes may run only once or twice a day, which can affect VDSS access, especially when the VET delivery is for only part of the day:

Students in small towns are regularly disadvantaged as public transport does not meet their needs, due to timing of the infrequent services. Students cannot get to and from larger towns at times that fit with VET classes.

TTC Manager, online survey

These identified barriers—geographical and financial—put VDSS out of reach of some students, particularly rural students and those from low socio-economic households. The Review heard that where buses have been provided, there is a substantial effect on VDSS uptake.

7.4.4 Alternative delivery models

To improve access to VDSS, stakeholders suggested alternative delivery methods such as blended learning models and increasing access to TTCs.

Blended learning models, which combine face-to-face and online delivery, are promising but difficult to deliver. A regional TAFE noted that online delivery of an agriculture course produced mixed results. While many of their students live on farms and appreciate the ability to train from their homes, the TAFE noted that completion rates were poor. A hybrid model with both online and in-person delivery is likely to lead to better outcomes:

Blended learning should be developed and offered in these areas to help remove some of the barriers that currently exist in accessing high-quality options. In the broader VET context, government should incentivise VET providers to develop and deliver courses that meet industry need in rural and regional areas to provide career exposure and pathway opportunities, including those courses offered through VETiS and SBATs.

Victorian Council of Social Service, submission

Another innovative model to address issues associated with low demand is holding mixed community classes. The Review observed a small regional school that ran a mixed school student and adult VET class with a trainer who travelled from a regional centre. Such an arrangement allowed the school to offer VDSS that would not have been viable otherwise. Some stakeholders suggested combining VDSS with adult learners to 'help make classes viable to TAFEs and RTOs' (TTC Manager, online survey).

A hybrid approach of some auspicing and some onsite delivery may be a model to be explored further. BKI delivers Australian qualifications in China under a partnership agreement: Chinese VET trainers deliver approximately two-thirds of the training and assessment, while BKI trainers travelling to China assure quality of the training and deliver and assess the rest of the qualification (see Case Study 13). This hybrid model of delivery might be applied more broadly in rural and regional Victoria.

CASE STUDY 13

Online delivery by the Kangan Institute

Kangan Institute offers an international delivery model that combines auspicing of theoretical components and block assessments of practical components by Kangan Institute staff. The in-person assessment of practical components enables Kangan Institute staff to assure the quality of equipment and facilities that students use, and ensure the competencies of the practical components are adequately met by students.

Source: Information supplied by the Kangan Institute

Regional stakeholders told the Review that blended learning models combining online and intensive face-to-face delivery, potentially to mixed adult cohorts, can be an attractive and viable delivery option for some schools. This option be combined with mobile classrooms, such as Wodonga TAFE's Hospitality Bus, to increase access to VDSS. The Review heard from stakeholders that British Columbia and other Canadian provinces invest more extensively in mobile classrooms than Victoria. These models could be explored as options to improve VDSS access in Victoria.

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic could point to alternative viable methods to deliver VDSS. Guthrie and Waters (2020, pp. 2–3) found that:

new thinking has emerged about how to blend synchronous and nonsynchronous online delivery, face-to-face classroom teaching, practical workshops and structured work-based learning (SWL) as well as paper-based and other distance delivery modes for [VDSS] students ... [T]here are opportunities to augment practical classes with virtual reality technologies and mobile classrooms, depending on the course. Practical training needs to be held in appropriate facilities in schools (which might include a mobile practical facility that comes to a region) or in an RTO within reasonable travel distance of the school, either one day a week or in a week of block release, over a weekend or in holiday blocks.

The Review's findings from stakeholder consultations are consistent with these observations. The Review notes that research by Guthrie and Waters only examined practice relating to VCE-VET for a select cohort of students, its scope was limited to government schools in rural and regional Victoria and it excluded VCE-VET undertaken as part of VCAL or an SBAT. This research scope is indicative of the general focus on VCE over VCAL (see Chapter 3.3.2 for further discussion on system prioritisation).

Lessons from the effectiveness of responses to the COVID-19 pandemic could be further explored and evaluated as part of existing work to explore virtual delivery of VDSS, which has the potential to reduce the travel required and increase access to a broader range of VDSS.

VET clusters can capitalise on economies of scale

Stakeholders raised the benefits of VET clusters for addressing access problems and enhancing VDSS provision across the state:

consolidating student participation levels with 'regional and industry clusters' will enhance the educational opportunities and provide for a financially sustainable model

Apprenticeship Employment Network, submission

Many schools participate in a VET cluster that consolidates student numbers and provides students access to a wider range of VET courses. It is largely left to the schools and clusters to determine which VDSS arrangements work for them. While some schools can offer a wide range of qualifications, many schools have quite a limited VDSS offering. Additionally, in some areas, such as rural and regional Victoria, there can be very limited options for VDSS provision. This limited menu is compounded in the case of more specialised courses and fields like aviation or animal studies.

Stakeholders suggested that strengthening support for clusters could also increase VDSS provision across the state:

Bolstering clusters ... is one way of providing a greater variety of courses and options on offer for regional and rural schools, as several schools can work collaboratively to create a class that a TAFE or RTO could deliver.

Current VCAL teacher, online survey

Well-functioning clusters provide a range of useful services for schools. Table 4 outlines those features commonly identified by stakeholders as characterising an effective VET cluster.

Table 4 - Common elements of an effective VET cluster

Element	Description
Administration support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dedicated resourcing for the bulk of administrative tasks associated with VDSS ● Collective reporting software or a portal that allows the cluster to manage various administrative tasks
Celebration of success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A mechanism or event to acknowledge and celebrate student success, such as an awards night
Quality assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A quality assurance process to review providers and school-based trainers ● A survey of student experiences to inform quality assurance and provider decisions
Student engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Engagement with students to understand their needs and promote VDSS and VET pathways ● A student survey to understand student perceptions and experiences
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All clusters were funded by school membership fees ● Some clusters were also supported by fees or charges to providers such as associate membership
Clear roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the VET cluster and the related responsibilities of schools and providers
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Schools have buy-in to the importance of VDSS and VET pathways ● Some clusters work with LLENs and others work at the school level



RECOMMENDATION 20

The Department should address student barriers with accessing VDSS through:

- increasing travel options and subsidies for students in areas with poor access to public transport
- working with TAFEs, schools and VET clusters in regional areas to pilot alternative delivery models for delivering VDSS, including blended learning models, intensive classes and mobile classrooms
- promoting the sharing and uptake of good practices in VDSS delivery across all VET clusters, including the facilitation of forums for clusters to learn from each other and receive guidance.

7.5 Funding challenges

Many principals and other school staff reported that VDSS funding (to government schools) does not fully cover the tuition costs of VDSS. This funding gap is more acute when small numbers of students wish to do VDSS. Schools also reported that charges for materials (paid by students and families) present an access barrier, especially for disadvantaged cohorts.

7.5.1 Insufficient funding is a barrier to offering VDSS

A sample analysis of costs involved in delivering VDSS (in one of the 17 Department areas) found that current VDSS funding covers tuition costs. However, there are frequent additional costs that may not be fully funded, including equipment maintenance and replacement, transport and administrative functions.

Additionally, there are significant cost differences in the price that is charged by RTOs across Victoria for the same VDSS courses. These discrepancies suggest schools in other Departmental areas may be experiencing funding shortfalls.

TAFEs indicated that VDSS is more expensive and challenging to run than adult VET courses due to constraints set by schools, including timetabling constraints (e.g. classes must be on a Wednesday). The Department's analysis suggests that auspice arrangements also tend to be cheaper than other delivery options, which may influence more schools to choose this method of delivery (DET, 2020i).

The VDSS funding model is complex

The Department's funding of VDSS in government schools has three components:

- a proportion of the core student learning funding to schools (see DET, 2020g)
- targeted VET funding (based on the eight VET qualification 'bands' and a rural weighting)
- a TAFE supplement (for qualifications on the Skills First funded course list when there is a gap between VET funding and the Skills First rate, also with a rural loading).
- SBATs (and Head Start) are funded separately through Skills First.

Throughout the consultations, it was apparent that there was confusion and a lack of understanding regarding the VDSS funding model among school leaders, NSSSPs, VDSS staff and RTOs. The Review also heard that, in some instances, principals avoid or minimise offering VDSS due to its perceived additional costs relative to non-VET subjects.

Consultations also indicated that some government school principals only consider the targeted funding when comparing VDSS costs and its funding, and are not considering the general allocation of school funding to cover VDSS costs. A failure to consider full funding may influence decision-making and allocation of resources.

The funding model might be clearer for schools if the Student Resource Package (SRP) component and the targeted VET funding were consolidated in a single line item rather than separate items. The funding model needs to balance the signal that VDSS is a core part of senior secondary schooling and funded through the SRP, while also appropriately recognising VDSS's additional cost burden and its uneven provision across schools.

Catholic schools receive band funding from the CECV to help offset the costs of VDSS delivery. While the CECV attempts to match the Department's band funding, they have been unable to match recent funding increases. CECV also funds two certificate I courses (Certificate I in Transition Education and Certificate I in Employment Pathways) and some further education courses (CECV, 2019).

Independent schools receive additional funding from the Australian Government to subsidise VDSS enrolments. Schools receive around \$180–\$200 per student enrolment (capped at 20 students per certificate per school)³—significantly less than the CECV and Victorian Government band funding. Independent Schools Victoria reports that VDSS costs are often passed onto parents, which restricts access for low socio-economic families. Some independent schools, especially rural and regional schools, find it difficult to offer VDSS subjects because of funding constraints. Independent schools report that the current economic climate is going to have a significant financial impact and may further restrict VDSS offerings.

There has been an increase in the number of specialist independent schools focused on disadvantaged cohorts (such as young people re-engaging with education). Consideration could be given to provide these schools with additional support to address financial barriers for students accessing VDSS. Unequal funding between providers is discussed further in Chapter 6.4.

There is significant price variability across VDSS courses

Departmental analysis shows that there is considerable price variation across Victoria for the same VDSS courses. For example, the price of Sport and Recreation/Outdoor Education varies by \$3,300 between the highest and lowest cost providers. This price variation was highlighted as a challenge for ‘rural schools [where there is] usually no choice of provider’ (TTC Manager, online survey).

Large variation in prices for course delivery from different providers may encourage schools to choose providers based on price at the expense of quality. Schools may lack expertise in VET and so may not be able to distinguish high-quality from low-quality providers. This lack of expertise is exacerbated when schools do not participate in the training and therefore find it difficult to assess the quality of tuition provided.

The current funding model may encourage VDSS offerings that do not necessarily align with students’ interests or with local employment needs. Valad Solutions (2018) found that some VCAL providers enrol students in VDSS courses that attract higher funding rather than those that reflect student’s interests. Grant Thornton Australia (2017, p. 23) found a lack of alignment between employment opportunities, local skill shortages and VDSS courses in rural areas, in part because funding does not cover RTO fees in these areas:

One LLEN in a regional area highlighted high numbers of students completing hairdressing qualifications in an area with limited work experience or employment opportunities, but strong demand among local employers for social media and digital marketing skills.

However, additional funding is unlikely to address funding shortfalls as the Department’s VDSS funding rate influences prices. TAFEs and other RTOs reported that they frequently set VDSS prices in line with the Department’s funding rates rather than based on the cost of delivery. For example, the 2019 increase to targeted VET funding led some RTOs to increase their prices in line with the increase. Catholic and independent schools that did not receive the same VDSS funding increases were charged higher prices that were often passed on to parents.

Schools lack information to make VDSS choices

Schools should be choosing VDSS providers and delivery models based on student interest and circumstances. However, there is currently limited information about VET providers for

3 Information supplied by Independent Schools Victoria.

schools and students to make informed choices. The consequence is that schools make VDSS purchasing choices based on limited information, often relying on price as the single determining factor.

The Department's new Know your RTO tool can help schools find a provider to deliver courses through a variety of delivery modes. However, the tool does not include information that would allow a school to make decisions based on factors such as quality of delivery or student outcomes. Some schools and clusters have a good understanding of the available providers, but this understanding is far from universal. There is an opportunity to help schools make informed decisions about the provider options that are available and the best provider for their students.

Additional costs can be a barrier for students

Many stakeholders raised the issue of costs of VDSS tuition and materials—passed onto families—as a barrier to VDSS participation. Some VDSS courses entail significant fees for materials (e.g. beauty and hospitality), which limits participation by some students:

The cost of VET courses is prohibitive to many students in our low socio-economic schools. Our school allows families to set up payment plans to help them meet the costs of materials fee (some over \$1000).

Current VCAL teacher, online survey

The Department is currently reviewing funding and policies related to these charges at government schools. The Review supports any decision that would remove or reduce payments made by students and families, as these are a barrier to accessing VDSS. If these fees are not removed entirely, the Review suggests that a subsidy for students of low-income households would be appropriate.

Opportunities to improve VDSS funding

The VDSS funding model can be simplified and more clearly communicated. It should enable students to access appropriate training based on their interests and local employment needs. Schools should have access to reliable and easily comprehensible information on providers. Consideration could also be given to providing additional support for independent schools with a low socio-economic ranking to address their students' financial barriers with accessing VDSS. Additionally, Recommendation 18 proposes the development of a new VDSS portal, which will enable schools to make informed VDSS purchasing choices.



RECOMMENDATION 21

VDSS funding should be reviewed to:

- ensure it is based on the full costs of delivering VDSS and acknowledges that costs differ across industries and geographic areas
- reduce the complexity of the funding model
- signal that VDSS is a part of core senior secondary schooling while accounting for the additional costs of delivering VDSS
- ensure that materials costs of VDSS are not a barrier to student access.

7.5.2 Some schools need additional support to procure VDSS

Some schools have rather limited experience with and expertise in VET. Further, when school leadership has little understanding of or engagement with VET, decisions tend to be delegated to a VET coordinator. The coordinator role may not be a full-time role and the position holder may have limited capacity to research and make decisions about VDSS provision.

Schools may find it difficult to distinguish high-quality from low-quality VDSS providers, especially if they lack experience with VET and they are not delivering the training themselves. A 2017 review of VDSS found that schools spend significant time and effort trying to understand the local VET market and to find quality providers (Grant Thornton Australia, 2017). Schools may also be responsive to some incentives that are irrelevant to a student's interests. For instance, a school may put a premium on a provider that is easy to enrol with and that is responsive to enquiries but may have little way to infer the quality of the training delivered.

The Review heard from TAFEs that some schools can be unresponsive and difficult to engage. On the other hand, the Review also heard from some schools and clusters that they found TAFEs unresponsive and preferred private RTOs as some of these provide a high-quality and reliable VDSS offering.

Other sectors and states have models that can be instructive. For example, the Auspiced Training Industry Partnership (ATIP) enables the CECV to broker arrangements with selected RTOs on behalf of Catholic schools (see Case Study 14).

The New South Wales (NSW) Government has an approved RTO panel that lists the only RTOs that government schools can engage to deliver VET courses (NSW Government, 2019). In 2016, it carried out a public tender process to approve providers for the 2017–2020 period. By centrally reviewing and approving providers, NSW reduces the burden on schools to review provider quality. The Government of Western Australia has also announced that they will develop a preferred provider panel to support schools to deliver VDSS (Western Australia, 2017).

The Bracks Review (2015) recommended that targeted VDSS funding should be tied to the use of an 'approved supplier panel' for providers that meet a higher level of quality assurance, similar to the requirements for Skills First funding. Similarly, Mackenzie and Coulson (2015) recommended that auspice arrangements should be limited to only approved providers. Given the risks associated with auspiced delivery, the Review considers that these proposals may have merit and are worth exploring further.

Some schools find VDSS procurement quite onerous, especially when it is for a small number of students. Recommendation 18 proposes the development of a new VDSS portal that will provide information and streamline the procurement and management of VET contracts.

Many stakeholders suggested that the Department could play a greater role in supporting schools to provide their students with access to VDSS. The Department could consider providing schools guidance and direct support with procurement, especially the procurement of auspiced delivery. Increased Departmental support through VET clusters can also be a way of increasing VDSS provision.

CASE STUDY 14

The CECV Auspiced Training Industry Partnership

The CECV ATIP has forged strong relationships with selected RTOs that are underpinned by formal Service Agreements with RTOs on behalf of Catholic secondary schools. The CECV is a go-between for schools and the third party, or direct delivery contracts are entered into between the schools that adopt the ATIP arrangement and their RTO partner(s). The CECV brokers school partnerships with selected RTOs and capitalises on economies of scale.

The ATIP Service Agreements stipulate specific meetings to ensure there are ongoing communications regarding the agreed deliverables and milestones. These RTO arrangements are reviewed and renewed annually, during which an evaluation of VDSS offerings and consideration of opportunities to include new programs or remove unsustainable offerings are made.

ATIP arrangements have particularly assisted regional and rural Catholic secondary schools to deliver VET programs onsite. These schools face an additional disadvantage in their access to appropriate and locally available training for students. Rural schools often do not have access to a TAFE institute, and if they do, have little choice but accept set pricing arrangements due to a lack of local market competition from other RTOs.

The ATIP arrangements have helped to increase access to VET programs in Catholic schools, with an average number of 21 VET certificates offered in each school across Victoria. Such expansion of program options increase curriculum choices and enhances student preparedness for a successful transition from school. In 2019, 68 schools undertook VET programs through ATIP arrangements, with approximately 4,000 student enrolments. The CECV reports that the uptake of VDSS delivery through the ATIP arrangements highlights the importance of VDSS to senior secondary provision.

Source: CECV (2019, p. 84)



RECOMMENDATION 22

The Department should play a greater role in the contracting of VET providers and should consider:

- providing schools with guidance to help them make provision decisions that will maximise quality and access to VDSS
- exploring options to assist schools deliver VDSS under auspice arrangements with appropriate quality assurance processes in place
- leveraging economies of scale and brokering agreements with registered training organisations on behalf of schools to potentially negotiate reduced prices
- assisting schools to establish more efficient cluster networks to support sustained VDSS delivery
- developing and maintaining a shortlist of place-based preferred VDSS providers who offer high-quality VET courses that are suitable for school students.

7.6 VDSS workforce

The VDSS workforce includes registered teachers with VET qualifications, VET trainers working in schools, and VET trainers employed by a non-school RTO (including TAFEs). To be qualified to teach VDSS, a trainer must have each of:

- a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment
- a relevant industry qualification for the content being taught or higher (e.g. Certificate III in Hospitality)
- relevant industry currency.

Additionally, if VDSS training is provided at a school site (rather than at an adult-focused VET provider), the trainer must also have either:

- a Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) teacher registration or
- a 'PTT' approval from the VIT.

Last year, there were approximately 430 VET trainers employed in Victorian schools who held PTT.

7.6.1 Improving the quality of VDSS trainers

Schools find it difficult to upskill VDSS trainers. VDSS trainers require a range of skills and are also likely to have more attractive employment options in the adult VET sector than in school settings. At the same time, there is a lack of sufficient school support for VDSS trainers to improve practice and maintain industry currency. There is a lack of incentives for well-qualified VDSS trainers to stay in the school system.

VDSS trainers need to be both educators and experts with current industry practice

VDSS trainers are 'dual professionals' in that they need to have expertise in education and in the relevant industry.

While the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment covers basic education skills, it does not develop the skills required to be an expert educator. The teaching of VDSS also requires a range of additional teaching skills that are not typically included in the Certificate IV, such as skills specific to instructing and engaging with school-aged students, disengaged and at-risk students, and students with additional learning needs. Yet, these would often be asked of VDSS trainers:

The difficulty is that TAFE is generally targeted at a different age group and cohort of students with different priorities. Trainers are often not equipped to deal with secondary school-aged students and the barriers for a well-informed, knowledgeable semiretired tradie to become an influential teacher and motivator of young people, are too high.

Current VCAL teacher, online survey

VET trainers are required to maintain industry currency under the national Standards for Registered Training Organisations. However, this requirement rests with the RTO and not the trainer, even though it is the trainer who must maintain currency. This state of affairs can raise compliance challenges, especially when trainers are employed on short-term contracts and/or across multiple RTOs.

The Review heard that some VDSS trainers in schools find it difficult to maintain industry currency, especially in industries for which practices change quickly or employers do not recognise or appreciate the time required to update understanding and relevant skills.

Support mechanisms to improve practice and currency are inadequate

Currently, there is no agreed framework for assessing VET trainer capabilities, and independent assessment of trainer capabilities is rare. As a result, it can be difficult for schools to know what standards to expect of VDSS trainers and for trainers to know how or where to focus their PD.

Several stakeholders raised concerns about the limited opportunities for capability building of VDSS trainers. There are very few dedicated professional learning opportunities for VDSS trainers and no recognised centre of excellence to drive quality. Additionally, teaching resources and continuing PD materials for VDSS trainers are quite limited. An agreed framework could help ensure that continuing PD is focused on clearly outlined capabilities required for their roles.

There may also be an opportunity for VDSS trainer-focused peer networks to include trainers at TAFEs and at Learn Locals to improve connections between schools and the adult VET system. The Review heard that it is uncommon for VDSS trainers to be part of peer networks such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). These peer networks have been shown to be effective at circulating good practice among teacher networks (Jensen et al., 2016) and should be encouraged for VDSS trainers. Some peer networks, such as the Carpentry Teachers Network, are focused on VET trainers but include a proportion of VDSS trainers. Peer networks that include VDSS trainers have coalesced around TAFEs, specialised RTOs (such as OzDance) and industry bodies (such as the Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce).

The success of PLCs can be extended or applied to VDSS trainers to promote good practice. VDSS PLCs may become more efficient as VDSS enrolments become focused in a smaller number of VCE-VET subjects (see Chapter 7.3.4) and give VDSS trainers more common ground to discuss and share practices. VET trainers in TAFEs and Learn Locals might also be invited to participate in VDSS PLCs.

In 2019, the Victorian Government announced a 'targeted initiative to attract more teachers', which includes funding for several programs to attract or upskill VET and VCAL teachers. One of these programs is a professional learning program for all VDSS teachers and trainers in government secondary schools. The initiative also provides funding for the sharing of VET trainers between schools and TAFEs to promote collaboration and partnerships between schools and TAFEs. While these initiatives are laudable, they are one-off programs that will not resolve the systemwide issues of recruitment and upskilling of VET trainers in schools.

Some professional learning that is available for VET trainers can be extrapolated to VDSS trainers, but very little professional learning is focused on delivering VET to school-aged students. VDSS trainers have access to the VET Development Centre (VDC), which offers a range of PD activities. Although many of these activities are subsidised by the Department, they are not specific to VDSS trainers. The VDC has previously offered school and youth cohort-focused PD that has been met with limited interest. The Department could consider working with schools to examine demand for this type of PD and guarantee a minimum number of places to ensure its availability.

The Review heard that there is opportunity for some school student-focused training to be developed and made available. Specific gaps that VDSS-focused training should address include age-specific pedagogy; instruction of disengaged and at-risk students and students with additional learning needs; and design, development and delivery of online and blended VET (Guthrie & Waters, 2020). The Department should also develop a professional learning program to improve access to, and quality of, vocational and applied learning (Recommendation 6).

School leaders and RTOs raised concerns about the capacity of in-school VDSS trainers to maintain industry currency. The CECV provides up to 10 days of funding for VDSS teachers to participate in industry placements and maintain industry currency (CECV, 2019). While this practice is helpful, it does not address the difficulty of finding replacement trainers when existing staff are on placements.

The Review heard that previous initiatives by the Department to offer industry placements for VDSS teachers were well received. Recurrent funding of these placements, rather than funding every few years as one-off programs, might make them more effective.



RECOMMENDATION 23

The Department should promote professional development and peer learning for VDSS trainers through:

- developing professional learning for VDSS trainers focused on age-specific pedagogy
- expanding and promoting Professional Learning Communities with a specific focus on VDSS
- supporting VDSS trainers to maintain industry currency.

7.6.2 Attracting and recruiting VDSS trainers

Many schools reported difficulties with attracting and retaining suitable VET-qualified teachers and other VET trainers. The prevalence and persistence of these difficulties suggest there is a chronic undersupply of VET trainers and VET-qualified teachers. Recruitment difficulties are exacerbated in many regional and specialty areas, where the workforce pool is more limited. Additionally, the Review heard that Free TAFE has exacerbated these challenges as many VDSS trainers have been enticed into the post-secondary VET sector where pay and conditions may be more attractive.

Victoria does not have a VET workforce development strategy for the supply of high-quality, industry-relevant teachers and assessors. The recruitment of trainers is an issue for the wider VET sector; many VET trainers have higher-paying employment options in the industry. Further, additional school requirements on VET trainers compound recruitment challenges.

Many VET trainers explained to the Review that they had only pursued an educator role because they were seeking a change in career from industry. Industry is a useful supply of potential trainers, many of whom may have an outdated view of schools and not perceive schools as VET providers. There may be an opportunity to better tap into this potential supply of trainers.

Additionally, the Review heard that career advancement opportunities for VDSS trainers are rare and there are few mentoring or leadership development opportunities available. The Department may be able to provide clearer and more accessible pathways for VDSS trainers to advance into teaching and leadership roles.

The Review also heard concerns about VET trainer employment conditions. VET trainers can only be employed in schools as paraprofessionals with lower salaries and less secure conditions than teachers and TAFE VET trainers. In addition, the rollout of Free TAFE is incentivising many VET trainers in the school system to move into the post-secondary sector where they receive better pay and more stable employment conditions.

Full-time VET or trainer positions in schools are uncommon, which also makes recruitment difficult. Several stakeholders suggested that the Department could fund a mobile classroom equipped for a VET industry area and staffed by full-time VET trainers to service regional areas. Wodonga TAFE's Hospitality Bus may be an example worth exploring.

The COAG Education Council endorsed the following recommendations to align teacher registration and VET trainer and assessor qualification requirements (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2018):

- greater alignment between teacher registration and VET qualifications for teachers who hold or seek dual teaching and VET qualifications⁴
- development of pathway programs for teaching qualifications that recognise the VET qualifications, prior learning and the experience of the VET trainer/assessor and how to make these available to VET trainers/assessors employed in schools under alternative authorisation-to-teach arrangements.⁵

Such alignment will facilitate the attainment of both teaching and VET training qualifications, make it more attractive for a VET trainer to upskill and be a teacher, and reduce difficulties with recruiting VET trainers. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) is currently working on implementing these recommendations and is consulting with key stakeholders until November 2020 (P. Corcoran, personal communication, 15 July 2020). It is expected to report to the Education Council in March 2021.

4 Recommendation 15 of the National Review of Teacher Registration (AITSL, 2018, p. 50).

5 Recommendation 16 of the National Review of Teacher Registration (AITSL, 2018, p. 51).

During consultations, stakeholders consistently expressed frustration with the PTT process and indicated that schools continue to experience lengthy approval timeframes. Delays in approval are a barrier to schools recruiting VET trainers and may influence program delivery decisions. Delayed approvals have also created situations where students are being sent off-site to undertake VDSS delivered by trainers who do not need a VIT registration.

VIT has recently developed a new online PTT application that streamlines the process, which has been tested and positively received by principals. The online PTT application was launched at the end of July 2020 with the new VIT business system.

An additional 'Education Instructor registration category could be created through the VIT to reduce the need for administratively burdensome and frequent (often annual) PTT applications. A new registration category could ensure that there is professional recognition of VET trainers. Within their scope of practice (VET instruction), VET trainers could be required to meet the same professional standards as those required of all other teachers, including suitability and fitness to teach standards (noting suitability and fitness to teach standards are currently required to be met by holders of PTT).

The new registration category could be paired with the paraprofessional class that exists in the Victorian Government Schools Agreement 2017. A paraprofessional VET instructor position could have leave for continuing PD to address the difficulty that some VDSS trainers have had with obtaining leave from schools in order to meet this requirement. This new registration category and paraprofessional position could support longer-term positions and stronger career pathways for people looking to transition into VET training, and make it simpler for schools to hire high-quality staff.

The Review is aware that the Department is currently working on several reforms to address workforce challenges, including funding 25 industry professionals to undertake an adjusted two-year Initial Teacher Education course and grants to support schools to improve the utilisation of VET-qualified teachers and other VDSS trainers. While this is welcomed, more is required to address the shortage of VDSS trainers across the state. The Department should explore a variety of strategies to increase the supply of VDSS trainers.

The Review notes that the Department is somewhat constrained in relation to increasing the supply of VET trainers. There is a role for industry to work with the Department and to invest in the supply of VET trainers so that those entering the workforce can learn the skills that employers need.



RECOMMENDATION 24

The Department should increase the supply of VDSS trainers and teachers by:

- increasing the profile of VDSS trainer roles among industry professionals
- exploring the creation of an education instructor category for VIT registration and pairing this with paraprofessional positions for VET trainers.

7.7 School–industry connections

The Review heard that better engagement between schools and industry could improve the quality and relevance of VDSS, provide more opportunities for workplace learning and pathways to employment, and improve the reputation of high-quality VDSS (e.g. Clarke, 2012).

It heard that larger schools have more resources to form relationships with local employers and industries, and that these relationships are not replicable in all schools. Case Study 15 is an example of a large senior secondary school that has built high-quality industry connections.

CASE STUDY 15

Local industry connections at Catholic Regional College Sydenham

Catholic Regional College Sydenham (CRCS) is a large senior secondary college in metropolitan Melbourne. CRCS has a TTC that delivers 27 VDSS qualifications, either directly or through onsite auspiced delivery.

CRCS requires all its Year 11 students to do either VET, a language or a religion subject, with a substantial student cohort doing VET. This requirement encourages a well-rounded education and provides a critical mass of students for all VDSS courses. The school is a member of the local VET cluster, which increases the options available to its students and opens the school's facilities to students from other schools.

CRCS has more than a dozen businesses that operate onsite and that students are involved with running. These onsite businesses are functional entities that allow students to experience real workplaces and do SWL and/or Work Related Skills units in a real workplace without having to travel off-site. Profits from these businesses are re-invested in new equipment or expansion of the school's VET offering.

CRCS has close connections with many local industries. It builds and maintains these relationships through SBATs and work placements for VET, SWL and WRS. Work placements are taken seriously: VCAL students, their coordinators and WRS teacher have responsibility to find a work placement that is appropriate for the student.

The school leverages its parents and their networks, and maintains ties with previous alumni and their families. It takes a close interest in its students' post-school destinations, and helps alumni find apprenticeships with local businesses. Some of its alumni have even been employed by CRCS as apprentices in its businesses. The school has now been a significant VET provider in the area for some time and can leverage these connections to help find work placements for students. These relationships take time to build and can be disrupted if there is a lack of follow through.

Source: School visit

VET clusters could foster local industry and employer connections and improve school–employer partnerships. Such partnerships could advance the relevance of VDSS and other vocational programs by aligning programs and topics with local industry needs. Proposals in Recommendation 22 include assisting schools to establish more efficient VET clusters that, as bodies dedicated to VET access, can focus on connections with employers.

Information about labour markets and pathways should play a key part in schools' and local clusters' relationships with RTOs and local industry. Chapter 10.5.3 notes that more such information should be provided, and that this information needs to be tailored to local contexts.

Chapter 9 explores school–industry engagement in more detail.

7.7.1 Students may not understand current employer needs

Students' VDSS choices are not always well aligned with industry demand or employment outcomes, perhaps because students pursue their own strengths and interests. However, misalignment may also reflect a lack of student understanding of career and labour market options.

Many stakeholders raised concerns that students appear to have an outdated view of the needs of the labour market. Two-thirds of employers identify that they need 'technical and job specific skills' now or within 12 months (DET, 2019h). Most of these skills could be developed through VET training. There is an opportunity to build on recent career reforms and provide accessible labour market information to schools and students. Useful guidance to help students select the VCE-VET subjects that are right for them is also available in the *Get VET* handbook (VCAA, 2018a).

Many young Australians are concerned that they lack the skills needed in the labour market. For example, the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2017) found that three in four young Australians do not believe they possess the relevant vocational and practical work experience to gain full-time work, and in 2019, three in 10 young Australians were unemployed or underemployed (ABS, 2020a).

Having relevant workplace skills is more crucial than ever, given current labour market conditions are likely to disproportionately affect young people.

7.7.2 Students may not be exposed to sufficient work-based learning

Many stakeholders, including employers, raised concerns about a lack of work-based learning in VDSS courses. Some VET qualifications include requirements for SWL but if school students are only partially completing a qualification, it is unclear how many undertake SWL.

SWL—the on-the-job or work placement component of a VDSS program—provides students with the opportunity to integrate practical on-the-job experience and learning in industry. SWL is an important component of high-quality VDSS (Clarke, 2013; Kis & Windisch, 2018). VDSS that includes SWL is associated with improved school retention as well as improved post-school employment outcomes (Polidano & Tabasso, 2014). Some stakeholders suggested there may be value in increasing the amount of SWL in VDSS.

In 2018, the VCAA introduced a Structured Workplace Learning Recognition (SWLR) unit that provides VCE or VCAL credit for workplace learning undertaken by students doing a VCE-VET subject or a SBAT. However, this unit is only applicable for workplace learning in an industry aligned to the VCE-VET subject or SBAT—it is not available to other VET students. VCAL also includes Work Related Skills units, which cover preparation for employment, but the relationship between these units and workplace learning is not specified.

Moschion et al. (2019) found that VDSS that includes work-based learning (through SWL, apprenticeships or traineeships) has significant, long-term benefits for employment outcomes. For students who transitioned to study in the first year after school, these benefits persisted for seven years; for those who did not study in the year post school, these benefits did not persist.

Some schools can offer effective SWL to their students, but these opportunities are not consistently available. Difficulties with accessing work placements may be most acute for students in rural and regional Victoria:

VETiS courses often do not provide young people with sufficient 'real world' work experiences or structured workplace learning. Increasing the number and quality of work placements in accredited VETiS qualifications would build relationships between young people and employers, and increase industry confidence and investment.

Brotherhood of St. Laurence, submission

Some schools use brokers, such as LLENs, to help manage and maintain relationships with employers and increase the availability of SWL. LLEN's role includes facilitating appropriate SWL for senior secondary school students and other forms of school–employer engagement. While some LLENs appear to play a strong role in facilitating SWL and employer connection, others do not appear to be as active in this space.

Schools are also supported to find SWL opportunities through the SWL portal. However, this portal is not available to TAFEs and Learn Local providers who offer senior secondary qualifications. The Review also heard that some schools do not let their students participate in SWL because of concerns about lack of attendance and school capacity to fulfil their duty of care.

The Review heard from some industry stakeholders who articulated their concerns about the work readiness of VDSS students. Specifically, some students lack employability skills that would have been developed through workplace learning. However, the current volume of work-based components in VDSS does not suggest work readiness is a focus (Clarke, 2012; Shah et al., 2015). The Review also heard of instances of employers using students to do basic tasks (e.g. cleaning) and not helping students develop appropriate skills.

VET offerings in schools do not provide enough work placement or on-the-job training when compared to standard post-school VET delivery and employers often do not see them as being sufficiently work integrated or as providing authentic workplace or career exploration.

Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, submission

Schools and employers might benefit from more guidance about what to expect from SWL arrangements.



Finding 13

As structured workplace learning adds considerable value to VDSS courses, its availability should be expanded.

The Review considered the option of making SWL a compulsory part of VDSS—similar to the scheme in NSW. Compulsory SWL is delivered in NSW through ‘Work Placement Service Providers’ who coordinate work placements for all VDSS students. The NSW approach has been highly successful with ensuring that a wide cohort of VDSS students can access SWL.

However, as there are considerable barriers to finding SWL opportunities, substantial resourcing would be required to ensure all students can access these opportunities with local employers. The required resourcing would need to cover costs of accommodation and transport to facilitate placements outside of many schools.

However, schools and NSSSPs could be better supported to provide students with SWL placements. The Victorian Government could more actively promote work-based experiences by:

- requiring government tenders to include work-based opportunities for senior secondary students, including SWL, SBATs and other career-related experiences
- providing employers with more guidance on how to engage with schools
- requiring government business to provide work-based learning opportunities for school students.

For SWL to be recognised as part of the VCE, SWL is required to occur in an industry related to VDSS training. Such a requirement ensures SWL complements the skills being taught in VDSS. However, the Review heard of numerous accounts of VCAL students who gained significant, transferable skills and benefits in their experiences with employers not in the industry of the student’s VET studies. Additionally, only a minority of VDSS students continue to work in an occupation associated with their VDSS training.

As such, there may be value in relaxing the requirement that SWLR is directly linked to VDSS courses. The ability of students to undertake SWL not directly related to their VDSS may be particularly useful in rural and regional areas, where willing and available employers are few and far between.

There are further opportunities to promote SWL in vocational and applied learning pathways. SWL could be more strongly embedded in the Work Related Skills units, in a similar way that SWLR is in the VCE. SWL should also be acknowledged on students’ enhanced Statement of Results. Chapter 3.4.1 provides additional detail on Work Related Skills units and enhanced Statement of Results.



RECOMMENDATION 25

The Department should increase support for schools to ensure that all VDSS students have access to structured workplace learning opportunities by:

- requiring government tenders to include work-based opportunities
- providing employers with more guidance on how to engage with schools and what to expect from workplace learning arrangements
- requiring government business to deliver work-based learning opportunities.

8

School based apprenticeships and traineeships





An SBAT combines a senior secondary program (either the VCAL or the VCE) with a part-time apprenticeship or traineeship. Students combine their schooling with at least one timetabled day a week of employment and/or structured training. Students are required to undertake an average of 13 hours of work and training a week over a four-month period each year. All SBAT students enter a training contract and progress towards completing an apprenticeship or traineeship (noting that currently, most students complete their school based traineeships while still in school).

In 2019, 3,193 Victorian students—around two per cent of the state’s senior secondary students—commenced an SBAT. Eighty per cent commenced SBATs in non-trades (2,564 students), with only 20 per cent (628 students) starting an SBAT in a trade (NCVER, 2020).¹

Victoria’s SBAT commencement rates have been steadily declining from the peak of nearly 4,300 in 2014. Since then, non-trade SBAT commencements in Victoria have decreased by 19 per cent and trade SBAT commencements by 44 per cent, with the latter commencements having declined 6 per cent since 2010. These falls echo the downward trend in full-time apprenticeships and traineeship commencements, which have fallen by 31 per cent since 2014 (NCVER, 2020).

In 2019, Victoria had the second highest number of SBAT commencements in the country, behind Queensland with 7,340 (NCVER, 2020).

The Review has found that SBATs can benefit many Victorian students, schools and employers. A school based apprenticeship, especially in the trades, is a well-regarded pathway; however, school based traineeships can be problematic when school based trainees do not receive enough workplace experience or are not exposed to genuine workplace experiences when participating in contrived employment arrangements.

There is scope to improve the current SBAT offering in Victoria by providing additional support to schools to administer SBATs, bolstering senior secondary providers’ central role in the SBAT approval process and evaluating and streamlining eligible SBAT qualifications.

8.1 The purpose of SBATs

The purpose of SBATs is to provide students with workplace experience and training to develop industry-specific knowledge and skills while attaining a senior secondary certificate, facilitating them on the path towards valuable post-school employment.

SBATs have an extremely strong focus on employment and provide students with a specialised occupation-related pathway. This focus and specialisation is much more than that provided in individual VDSS units. High-quality SBATs offer students genuine workplace experience and comprehensive training to build work readiness and prepare them for meaningful post-school employment in an industry area. To fulfil this purpose, SBATs must provide students with authentic workplace arrangements.

1 NCVER’s ‘trade’ and ‘non trade’ designations are largely analogous to apprenticeships and traineeships, with some slight differences.

8.1.1 Positive labour market outcomes

SBATs allow students to earn an income, learn valuable workplace skills, receive credit towards their VCE or VCAL, and kickstart their careers. They facilitate successful transitions to sustainable and meaningful post-school pathways by enabling students to commence employment and start an apprenticeship or traineeship while simultaneously completing their senior secondary schooling.

During consultations, many school leaders and parents highlighted the multiple educational and occupational benefits that SBATs offer individual students, including the opportunity to combine their senior secondary schooling with vocational training:

SBATs offer support for students in their transition from secondary to tertiary training by allowing the flexibility for them to go to work, trade school and still maintain the connections to their peers, teachers, community and support services at their school.

Pathways leading teacher, online survey

SBATs, especially school based apprenticeships, offer many motivated and hardworking students a 'terrific opportunity' to achieve a senior secondary certificate and secure employment, to 'earn while learning ... and get a head start in a career' simultaneously (NSSSP CEO, online survey):

In completing SBATs, they grow into confident young people with a strong sense of identity and sense of achievement having completed their qualification at a level that is actually recognized, and success and personal growth through their employment.

VCAL coordinator and teacher, online survey

Students gain many opportunities, including the chance to develop long-term industry networks, earn a wage, hone their technical skills, learn from (and alongside) industry experts and build connections with prospective mentors.

SBATs (usually school based traineeships) also offer an **educational** benefit (accompanied by a wage) for students, particularly those with special needs:

It is really good that students with mild disabilities or learning difficulties get to ... complete an SBAT. This is often their first experience in the workplace and the outcomes can be immense.

SBAT provider, online survey

This educational benefit could come from other forms of work placement instead, such as SWL; however, school based traineeships are often a more viable option because of employer subsidies. From an industry perspective, there is a risk that using SBATs for educational benefits may exacerbate concerns that students who complete school based traineeships are not vocationally competent, thereby potentially tarnishing the credibility of all SBATs.

SBATs tend to have higher completion rates than non-school apprenticeships and traineeships. Most school based apprentices complete their apprenticeships after they complete senior secondary, with completion rates usually around 96 per cent (VRQA, 2019).² School based apprenticeships tend to take longer to complete than full-time apprenticeships, most likely because students are part-time while at school.

² Data is drawn from all apprenticeships and traineeships that completed between 1 January 2017 and 31 December 2019 (inclusive). VRQA (2019) found that 373 out of 470 (79 per cent) school based apprenticeships completed while students were employed as full-time or part-time workers. During this period, one employer was investigated by the VRQA and subsequently closed. When apprenticeships with this employer was excluded from the sample, the completion rate was 96 per cent.

SBATs promote successful school-to-work transitions and have positive effects on student completion rates and post-school employment outcomes. Numerous studies have found that senior secondary students who undertake SBATs or VET combined with work-based learning in senior secondary programs are more likely to complete school and find secure full-time employment (Black et al., 2011; Moschion et al., 2019; NCVET, 2020; Polidano & Ryan, 2016).

8.1.2 Good delivery practices

The SBAT pathway, a unique and demanding option, requires a guided and selective process with substantial school oversight. The pathway is most effective when a school is equipped to judge the suitability of the student to undertake an SBAT, the suitability of the proposed training contract and the quality of the workplace training.

SBATs are most effective when:

- schools, employers and RTOs work together to develop individual student programs
- there is a genuine employment need and the SBAT aligns with industry demand; the employer provides the school based apprentice or trainee with proper training and there may be opportunities for ongoing employment
- there is a genuine interest from the student who is mature enough to balance workplace demands with school and training, able to create a trusting relationship with their employer and eager to complete their senior secondary certificate—the SBAT should align with the student’s career interests and the senior secondary provider should ensure that the student is work-ready prior to the commencement of SBAT
- the school supports SBATs from the outset, has the capacity to assess the training contract, manages the related fees and administrative burden, builds a relationship with the employer and oversees the student’s individual needs or concerns (Deloitte, 2017)
- students do not necessarily need to complete their apprenticeship or traineeship at school and can continue their employment and training post school.

The above characteristics, which highlight the primary purpose of SBATs, have the support of many stakeholders:

A successful outcome would be that the trainer and the student have job satisfaction and a valued career, make informed career choices, commensurate with their personal strengths and interests, from sound and balanced career counselling, and make the most of their school years by developing useful workplace skills and contribute to the industry of their choice.

Victorian Farmers Federation, submission



Finding 14

SBATs provide students with a valuable specialist pathway that enables them to develop workplace competencies and industry-specific knowledge and skills while attaining their senior secondary certificate.

8.1.3 SBAT students

There is broad concern among industry stakeholders about the appropriateness of students doing SBATs in certain occupations due to age, maturity or attitudes to work and learning. Some employers believe that students may not be mature enough to work in certain areas, particularly community service, aged care and allied health. Others question whether SBATs should be offered only to particularly motivated students with specific career goals. They maintain that certain transferable skills may be a precondition to success in an SBAT rather than skills that are acquired during this form of training, and that SBATs may be more successful if students are already motivated.

Previous consultation by Deloitte identified examples of school based traineeships being used to motivate disengaged students. However, these students were unlikely to view the SBAT as a career pathway and 'were seen as less likely to be successful' (Deloitte, 2017, p. 22). The Review met with many school based apprentices and trainees who emphasised that each school week was considerably full and very time-consuming. The expectation that these young people balance a full load of work, school and training (on top of their non-school lives) was draining and difficult to sustain, and often tested their dedication. SBATs are certainly not the easy way out nor the same as enrolling in a VDSS subject as a taster.

Some schools use interviews to screen prospective students and argued that an SBAT may be less appropriate than another pathway that gives students skills and prepares them to pursue a Certificate III in Year 11. Screening could be supported by having a pre-apprenticeship or some form of SWL as a prerequisite and more carefully matching students to suitable employers. These measures would require extra paperwork, counselling and student support, further exacerbating the administration challenges outlined below.

In South Australia, senior secondary students must complete a VET Readiness Orientation program (VETRO program) before embarking on a VET pathway. The VETRO program 'includes upfront assessment, induction and orientation to VET carried out by an RTO' (Department for Education, Government of South Australia, 2019, p. 9). The VETRO program checks suitability, ensures students are aware of what is involved in the pathway and establishes the specific supports that students need.

Victoria's Head Start program includes a filtering and guiding process and offers provides students with a higher level of support. Prior to commencing a Head Start apprenticeship or traineeship, each student:

- completes an expression of interest to ensure they are making an informed and appropriate choice
- meets with the Head Start Coordinator to determine whether they are ready and to help them choose a suitable training pathway
- engages with a prospective employer, accompanied by the Head Start Coordinator, to investigate whether they are a good fit
- undertakes a structured work placement with the prospective employer to determine whether they would like to undertake the Head Start program with the employer.

This process ensures that the decision to undertake a Head Start apprenticeship or traineeship is based on informed student and employer decisions and supported by schools.

SBATs, especially school based apprenticeships, are specialist programs for students who have defined career goals, are committed to pursuing training and recognise the value of completing a senior secondary certificate. However, given the level of maturity, time and commitment demanded of students, this specialised pathway is unlikely to attract a large number of students.

8.2 Opportunities for reform

Despite their many potential benefits, significant quality concerns undermine SBATs' value and efficacy and mar their reputation. Most concerns about quality relate to school based traineeships, rather than school based apprenticeships.

There are opportunities to improve SBATs' design and delivery to realise their potential and ensure that they provide meaningful career pathways for students.

8.2.1 Limited on-the-job exposure and experience for trainees

Stakeholders expressed significant concerns about the quality of school based traineeships, particularly in relation to school based trainees' limited time on the job and limited exposure to appropriate opportunities in the workplace. This concern is less of an issue for school based apprentices, most of whom do not complete their apprenticeships and instead continue to a full-time apprenticeship post school.

SBAT's quality challenges highlight the difficulties of trying to fit school, training and workplace components into an SBAT and delivering each component effectively.

The shallow workplace experience afforded to most school based trainees (especially when compared to full-time trainees) calls into question their vocational competence (and therefore their employability) and compromises the credibility of SBATs in the labour market. This is a critical issue particularly when current labour market impacts of COVID-19 make it even more important that these trainees have industry competencies and are employable.

Many stakeholders, including prospective employers, questioned whether school based traineeships provide the same employability and industry-specific skills as those of full-time trainees. Without substantial workplace hours, school based trainees may be perceived to be unready for employment; they may struggle to find a relevant job once they complete senior secondary and not achieve a successful post-school transition.

If these students receive a qualification for which they are not industry competent, they may find it difficult to secure employment in their chosen industry. Having completed a school based traineeship, these students will still be eligible to undertake a Skills First–subsidised course at the same level (e.g. Certificate III). However, they will be unable to redo the same course and any future employer may be ineligible for a subsidy for a different traineeship at the same level.

Full-time apprentices and trainees undertake an average 38 hours of work per week, whereas SBAT students average only 13 hours per week across both training and work combined. Of these hours, SBAT students generally spend around 7 hours (i.e. one day) on the job, with some students spending a significant amount of that time setting up or packing up equipment.

The Review heard many instances of school based trainees completing a Certificate III traineeship within one school year. Completion data shows that a school based trainee, on average, spends 42 days in employment compared with a full-time Certificate III trainee who, on average, spends 283 days at work. The most popular school based traineeship, the Certificate III in Sport and Recreation, is completed within 35 days on average in employment. The VRQA found that all school based trainees who completed their traineeship between 1 January 2017 and 31 December 2019 (inclusive) did so with fewer days in employment than their full-time counterparts. Stakeholders noted that Commonwealth-funded financial incentives may be driving the speedy completion of SBATs (VRQA, 2019).

SBAT students are expected to manage a heavy load of training, school and work; consequently, the workplace element tends to suffer. Stakeholders, including school leaders and prospective employers, expressed concerns that a typical school based traineeship's short workplace duration is insufficient to develop and consolidate student skills. Under these circumstances, a student may complete their school based traineeship and obtain the same formal qualification as a full-time trainee, but be severely disadvantaged in their employment prospects because of minimal workplace experience.



Finding 15

Relative to full-time trainees, school based trainees do not spend enough time in the workplace and are prevented from developing vocational competencies.

The Review recommends introducing a required minimum amount of workplace hours before school based trainees are eligible for completion of their traineeship. Minimum workplace duration should 'reflect contemporary employment practices that meet both the employer and student work training needs' (Deloitte, 2017, p. 33). Such a requirement will help guarantee that all school based trainees get the opportunity to develop their skills and extend them on the job. Doing so will boost the validity of these traineeships and build employer and stakeholder trust that school based trainees have sufficient on-the-job experience.

A similar requirement exists in Queensland where, to be eligible for completion, employers are required to provide students with a minimum of 50 days of paid employment for each year of the equivalent full-time nominal term of the traineeship. For example, a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care traineeship has a nominal duration of 24 months. A school based trainee in Queensland would need to complete a minimum of 100 days in paid employment to be eligible for completion.

Stakeholders indicated their support for the introduction of minimum prescribed workplace hours or duration to increase school based trainees' on-the-job experience. Members of the Victorian Skills Commissioner's Industry Advisory Groups (IAGs) agreed that implementing minimum number of days would prevent exploitation of school based trainees and improve quality of experiences and outcomes. They recommended that any requirement for a minimum number of days in the workplace should be based on the complexity of the qualification. Some members suggested that the minimum requirements for each qualification be tailored so that a suitable number of SBAT paid employment days would be specified in approved training schemes.

This proposed recommendation has implications and trade-offs for school based traineeships and other aspects of trainee education. First, it may require schools and NSSSPs to be more flexible with school timetabling to enable students to complete the minimum number of workplace hours. Alternatively, school based trainees may be required to complete their school based traineeship over several years (like the model in Head Start) or finish their traineeship after they complete school (like many apprenticeships).

Introducing minimum prescribed hours may also reduce SBAT commencement rates. As school based traineeships become more time demanding, some students may be deterred from commencing one, schools may find it harder to timetable and employers may not be able to offer so many days in the workplace. However, the school based traineeships that remain are more likely to be genuine and meaningful.

The Review notes that two independent assessments have been developed (in Early Childhood Education and Care, and Commercial Cookery) and several more are in development. The independent assessments may affect the recommended minimum hours.

Therefore, the Review suggests that, where independent assessment is adopted, fewer hours than the mandated amount should be considered acceptable (assuming the student attains the level expected by the independent assessor).



RECOMMENDATION 26

The Department, in consultation with the VRQA, VCAA and industry, should develop a policy requiring a minimum number of workplace hours for SBAT traineeships. The VRQA should use this policy to prescribe the minimum workplace hours for approved training schemes.

8.2.2 Contrived SBAT employment arrangements

Various stakeholders raised concerns about employers who exclusively hire (often vulnerable) SBAT students and/or sign up students from the same school in bulk. At face value, these arrangements can entail employers who are also the RTOs, and labour-hire agreements in which students are sent to other workplaces at little or no cost to the host employer.

Under such arrangements, students are less likely to obtain quality workplace experiences: they are less likely to be exposed to proper training, are unable to develop a meaningful long-term relationship with their employer and are unlikely to remain employed following the completion of the traineeship. These arrangements also risk undermining the perceived quality of SBATs more broadly, as students are not exposed to an established workforce.

These sorts of arrangements require additional scrutiny if they involve vulnerable students. While vulnerable students may gain educational benefits and develop confidence in a non-school environment, they may not complete their SBAT with the required vocational competencies and therefore will be less able to smoothly transition into employment and/or training at another organisation once they complete their senior secondary schooling.

There is often limited monitoring to ensure genuine employment and workplace learning occurs, and there is little destination data on students who identify as having special needs (e.g. a disability) undertaking an SBAT. However, the need for such scrutiny is becoming increasingly significant for stakeholders:

Students with a disability (at special schools) frequently use the SBAT system and these students are particularly vulnerable to 1) exploitation (as they are working and training outside the school, with potentially less supervision); and 2) poor employment outcomes from undertaking qualifications that are not suited to their needs (and may be reliant on others to determine the appropriateness of an SBAT). Whilst their participation may result in positive outcomes (such as employment or further study)—an extra layer of scrutiny may be warranted.

Deloitte (2017, p. 36)

Deloitte (2017) found instances of SBATs being offered to maximise public subsidies in employment arrangements that indicate SBATs have not been designed to meet individual student needs. Stakeholders reported that some employer entities shorten the duration of student employment under an SBAT to limit wage costs and to access cheap labour. The consequence is completion timeframes that are so short as to frustrate student development of industry-standard skills or opportunities for ongoing employment:

RTOs pay little regard to securing workplace experience for young people undertaking SBATs. Too many opt for number of enrolments over quality of workplace-based training. Many employers also show too little commitment to the workplace learning needs of their young apprentices and trainees. RTOs seeking to enrol SBAT students should be required to satisfy stricter criteria, including proving their capacity to maintain productive relationships with employers that share a commitment to longer term outcomes for the students. Implementation of satisfactory workplace training should be monitored.

Brotherhood of St. Laurence, submission

Changes to Skills First funding can drive significant changes in SBATs. Deloitte (2017) reported instances of providers offering different qualifications that had similar units of competency but attracted higher funding, or RTOs registering students towards the end of the year before funding rates changed.

Schools with high workloads and limited expertise in SBATs and industry cannot always distinguish between valuable and less appropriate training plans. As a precaution, schools currently submit training plans to the VCAA for assessment.



Finding 16

Contrived employment arrangements do not provide students with quality workplace training and undermine both the quality and purpose of SBATs.

Deloitte (2017) found that current policy settings limit the VRQA's capacity to limit the availability of qualifications that students can undertake as an SBAT (despite evidence of entities behaving opportunistically). The VRQA has broad powers to quarantine the

qualifications available under SBATs; however, it lacks the policy mandate to use these powers.

The VRQA's regulatory approach includes responding to individual issues as and when they arise. Modifying policy and regulatory settings would enable VRQA to coordinate a more proactive approach to compliance and enforcement. As a complementary measure, the education of all stakeholders on the purposes and intended outcomes of SBATs could be improved.

To avoid contrived employment arrangements, the Department—in consultation with the Victorian Skills Commissioner—could provide more guidance to the VRQA on how it can determine whether workplaces are providing students with the relevant skills, exposure and expertise. The Department should develop minimum standards for SBATs and ensure the VRQA is able to proactively monitor SBAT employers and RTOs.



RECOMMENDATION 27

The Department should develop policy outlining the minimum requirements and workplace arrangement for SBATs so that the VRQA can monitor compliance and ensure that SBATs are offering students genuine employment and training opportunities.

8.2.3 Complex and burdensome administration

Stakeholders reported that SBAT logistics can be complex for schools and NSSSPs to administer:

There are a number of barriers to schools embracing the SBAT program, primarily that it takes time and hence money for its successful implementation.

Former VCAL teacher and VCAL and SBAT coordinator, online survey

The SBAT pathway involves multiple Victorian and Commonwealth parties, making it a particularly difficult area of vocational learning to navigate, especially for schools and NSSSPs. Schools and NSSSPs must work with students, parents and carers, RTOs and employers to successfully administer SBATs. Schools face a range of administrative and compliance tasks associated with the provision of SBATs, including:

- sourcing employment opportunities
- checking whether training contracts have been signed by all parties and lodged with the Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN)
- checking the contribution of the SBAT to the VCE or VCAL on the VASS to ensure students are eligible to complete their senior secondary qualification
- endorsing the training plan for registration of the SBAT prior to student enrolment to train with an RTO
- releasing students from classes to incorporate training or employment components in their learning
- communicating regularly with the student in line with pastoral and duty of care requirements

- complying with the Child Safe Standards for the duration of the SBAT
- informing the employer and RTO of any student issues that need to be addressed to minimise health and safety risk during employment or training
- ensuring students are aware of workplace rights and responsibilities and supporting them to raise concerns, make complaints or let someone know they feel unsafe (Deloitte, 2017).

In addition, several agencies regulate and administer SBATs:

- The VRQA is the statutory authority responsible for regulating apprenticeships and traineeships. It determines which training qualifications are available as approved training schemes. It also approves prospective employers, resolves disputes and quality issues within the SBAT system and establishes and maintains a register of apprentices and trainees.
- The VCAA determines which apprenticeship and traineeship qualifications are suitable for school students, enables students to enrol in SBAT qualifications as a component of their VCE/VCAL and records completion of units of competency for credit towards the VCE/VCAL.
- The ASQA is the national VET regulator. ASQA only regulates RTOs in Victoria if they offer courses to overseas students or students in other Australian jurisdictions (excluding Western Australia).
- The AASN facilitates the signing of training contracts and assess, approve and process the payment of Australian Government incentives to eligible employers, apprentices and trainees. Providers must lodge the signed training contracts with the AASN.

There is limited understanding of how SBATs work and their requirements, even among VCAL and VET coordinators. Both the VCAA and VRQA require SBATs to be registered on their systems, further adding to their complexity. Schools are required to sign each approved training plan before the SBAT can commence.³ SBAT coordination is usually only a minor component of any staff role, both in senior secondary providers and RTOs, and these positions often experience high turnover rates. Many staff lack the capacity to keep on top of the shifting requirements and may still rely on outdated information.

Some school leaders have suggested promoting a cluster or consortium approach to manage this complexity. Other stakeholders, including DET pathways managers, reported that this lack of understanding extends to all parties, not only among senior secondary providers. Trainers and employers also often have varied and inaccurate understandings of VDSS and its eligibility requirements. The Review heard examples of employers (including group training organisations) with incorrect understandings of the interaction between SBATs and Skills First eligibility conditions.

School leaders also noted the considerable variability in the level of compliance with the requirements of students' individual training plans. Variable school compliance is exacerbated by a lack of requirements for SBATs to be recorded in VASS within a certain timeframe, and no requirement for principal sign-off before SBATs commence.

Timetable inflexibility in schools is another recognised barrier. SBAT timetable negotiations between the trainer, employer and school are often difficult and time-consuming, especially because schools do not always have the flexibility to release a student at times that suit the employer and/or RTO. This inflexibility deters employers from taking on SBAT students, especially multiple students who are required on different days. To sidestep this issue, many schools limit SBAT offerings to VCAL students because their timetables are more flexible than VCE students.

³ If a school does not sign the training plan, the student undertakes a 'Part-Time Attending School' arrangement (instead of an SBAT) where training and employment are conducted outside of the school timetable.

Scale and geography pose additional challenges for SBAT offerings in regional and rural schools. These challenges perhaps explain why ‘not all SBAT students ... in rural and regional areas have access to relevant and high-quality applied learning’ (Victorian Council of Social Service, submission). Small numbers of local employers can pose challenges for participation, especially of students in more isolated regional and rural areas. More isolated schools also tend to have fewer resources with which to provide SBATs, face difficulties finding suitable RTOs and employers, and must deal with exacerbated transport and logistical challenges.

To successfully administer and oversee each student’s SBAT pathway, schools face compliance requirements and have to navigate complex systems and various timetabling, travel, scale and geography challenges. These senior secondary providers, most of whom are already stretched for time and resources, need additional support to be able to effectively ensure that all their SBAT students receive high-quality experiences. Notably, the Head Start program (outlined below) addresses these challenges by providing schools with dedicated administrative support.



Finding 17

Schools require additional resource support to manage the heavy administrative burden associated with SBATs, which includes timetabling, coordinating with employers and registered training organisations, and navigating complex regulatory requirements.

Schools not always involved prior to SBATs commencing

Schools should be positioned centrally in the SBAT process. But in practice, they are sometimes only consulted after a student has entered into an agreement with an employer and RTO:

Often, the SBAT arrangement (with the Training Contract already signed) emerges as a surprise to the school. This presents significant challenges to the school in cases where arrangements do not necessarily comply with requirements or the arrangement is not necessarily well understood by all parties (for example, when the SBAT does not appear integrated into the student’s timetable or the proposed Training Plan does not align with deadlines to enable the anticipated credit contribution to flow in a timely way for the award of the student’s senior secondary certificate). Or, the school may have concerns regarding the readiness of an individual student to undertake an SBAT arrangement: juggling school (in some cases requiring catching up on missed classes), work and training commitments, plus balancing personal and life commitments, could prove overwhelming, as well as fundamental factors to consider such as the inherent Literacy and Numeracy skills expected to successfully navigate the SBAT arrangement, and how the SBAT is aligned with the student’s pathways aspirations.

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, submission

Schools or NSSSPs cannot always ensure that the SBAT is appropriate for the student and undertake proper due diligence unless they are involved from the beginning. School staff members reported that traineeships can be very hit and miss depending on the quality of employers. Senior secondary providers need to be vigilant in checking each program and discussing at length what the arrangement will look like.

School leaders have noted, for example, that there is no requirement on principals (or school delegate) to sign off on the training contract before a student commences an SBAT. Deloitte (2017) recommended that principals (or their authorised representative) should be involved well in advance of any sign-off and be required to approve each SBAT before the training contract is signed by the relevant parties (i.e. the student and employer) and then registered with the regulator, to ensure that it provides a genuine school based learning opportunity.

In some instances, 'part-time attending school' traineeships are appropriate as they can be undertaken by VCE students who cannot be released from school for a regular SBAT. However, in other instances, stakeholders reported that some students, unaware of what they are agreeing to and unaware of its implications for future apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities, unwittingly enter into a traineeship through their part-time job. While schools endeavour to counsel students to avoid these contracts, school staff reported instances where students, particularly those with non-English speaking backgrounds, were unaware they had signed up to traineeships.

Senior secondary providers, including schools, should be involved when an SBAT is first being considered and certainly well in advance of any signing of a training contract. Early involvement allows schools to ensure that the SBAT is appropriate for the student and to undertake proper due diligence.

Many stakeholders, including school leaders and educational peak body representatives, expressed support for the introduction of a requirement for school endorsement before a student can commence an SBAT. Schools are best placed to judge whether a student is ready, the training is appropriate and the employer is genuine:

It is crucial that the school is involved at the start of any SBAT process to ensure the appropriateness of the training, the alignment of the proposed arrangements with SBAT requirements, the readiness of the student to undertake the arrangement, and the potential contribution of the SBAT towards the student's senior secondary certificate. It would be beneficial if one outcome of the Review were to consider how schools could be best included as a fundamental and integral component when SBAT discussions were being initiated at the start of the SBAT process.

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, submission

While the school should be included as a key participant in discussions well before a student starts an SBAT, it should also remain an integral part of a student's SBAT journey until the student either completes the SBAT or finishes school.

School involvement is critical considering the risks of employer opportunism, the vulnerability of certain student cohorts and the potential implications for student access to further VET study. When schools are actively involved in a student's SBAT from the beginning, they can support them through it, protect the student's interests and ensure that the SBAT continues to be an appropriate arrangement and a genuine and valuable learning opportunity.



RECOMMENDATION 28

Schools and non-school senior secondary providers should be required to approve SBATs before a student and employer can sign and enter into a training contract.

Funding and training fee challenges

Senior secondary providers reported a number of challenges with SBAT funding and fee arrangements.

The Review heard that SBAT funding arrangements are generally not well understood by senior secondary providers, employers and other stakeholders. The Skills First funding eligibility rules for SBATs are quite clear; however, rules relating to who pays the tuition fee (and its amount) are not well known and often misunderstood. These rules are technical, complex and frequently changed. Schools and NSSSPs often find it difficult to keep abreast of them. For example, Skills First funding is available for students who wish to undertake further VET study at the same certificate level as a previous SBAT. The rules surrounding employer incentives are complicated and may affect whether a student can do a further traineeship.

Some schools reported that they lack enough funding and resources to support SBATs given the associated reduction in SRP. SBATs are subsidised through Skills First, and when a student undertakes an SBAT there is a 20 per cent full-time equivalent (FTE) reduction for each day the student is out of the school to undertake the SBAT (typically one day), and there is also a 10 per cent FTE loading to cover the administrative costs associated with SBATs. These funding rules usually translate to 90 per cent FTE SRP for an SBAT, meaning that the school loses 10 per cent of that student's allocated SRP even though the school's cost per student is reduced only through economies of scale.

Some school leaders reported that, without enough students, there are no real savings and previous consultation has found some schools 'actively encouraging [VDSS] as a pathway for students, rather than SBATs' (Deloitte, 2017, p. 25). Conversely, some principals reported that SBATs were the only option for delivering VDSS when student numbers were too low to run VDSS classes. The SRP reduction for students completing SBATs is inconsistent with SRP funding for students undertaking Head Start apprenticeships and traineeships. Schools still receive full SRP funding for Head Start students, despite these students spending more time learning on the job and less time at school. SBAT funding implications should be explored as part of the SRP review.

Stakeholders also expressed concerns that training fees were being passed on to students and that employers were required to reimburse students for apprentice tuition. Some stakeholders were concerned about the equity of these arrangements and questioned whether students should contribute to their own training.

Generally, employers are required to pay training fees for school based apprenticeships whereas school based traineeships have varied requirements (Deloitte, 2017). Employers can be reluctant to pay training fees as students are only employed part-time, and in these cases, fees are passed on to the families. Some stakeholders were of the view that students should contribute to their training costs as it would increase their commitment:

TAFE fees need to be minimal for all school based apprentices, regardless of whether they hold a health care card. Students must be responsible for their own fees, so they have 'some skin in the game' i.e. they too have some ownership of the SBAT. Under current rules ... employers are responsible for paying the TAFE fees. Employers need to be rewarded for taking on a student to train and mentor. The incentives they receive only go a small way to offsetting the costs associated with taking on an SBAT and they definitely should not also be responsible for paying the student's fees.

Former VCAL teacher and VCAL/SBAT coordinator, online survey

Training fees are of particular concern because, unlike full-time apprentices and trainees, SBAT students are often ineligible for concession fees. RTO fees are usually passed on to families, which can limit access for students of low-income families. It may be necessary to review SBAT funding to ensure fees are not a barrier to student participation and to:

firm up the rules regarding who pays for the [training] fees for SBATs —employers, families [or] schools.

VCAL coordinator and teacher, online survey

Many schools, NSSSPs, students and families across the state encounter cost challenges associated with SBAT. The complexity and insufficient funding associated with administering an SBAT program (including the SRP reduction) frustrates many schools. Coupled with inconsistent RTO fees and equity issues, these factors act to deter students from undertaking SBATs.



Finding 18

Current rules and arrangements relating to SBAT funding and fees may limit access to SBATs for students experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

Providers should be properly supported to run SBATs

Increasing administrative support for schools will enable them to consistently deliver high-quality SBATs across Victoria. Many schools are overburdened and would welcome more funding, better organisation, increased external support and better avenues of collaboration. Pathways coordinators (Recommendation 5) may also help to shoulder the administrative burden associated with SBATs. Additional resourcing could be complemented with clear, concise and up-to-date information regarding SBATs and an enhanced role for third-party organisations such as LLENs and clusters.



RECOMMENDATION 29

Schools need time and resources to actively monitor their students' SBAT experiences. The Review recommends providing more administrative support in the following form:

- increase resourcing so that schools have access to specialised staff to support SBAT students and are equipped to navigate complex VET and SBAT systems
- increase guidance on SBAT suitability so that schools know what arrangement is or is not appropriate and whether students are prepared
- enhance the role of Local Learning and Employment Networks to assist regional and rural schools find employers of SBAT students and help employers and students choose an appropriate registered training organisation, thereby reducing workloads for schools, increasing community engagement and connecting students to legitimate employment prospects
- produce a comprehensive, clear and concise one-stop guide that is regularly updated and maintained, available to all and in particular made prerequisite reading for any coordination role.

8.2.4 Low community profile

SBATs currently suffer from poor reputation among some students, parents, industry, schools and VET institutes:

Our SBATs are doing Certificate III qualifications and working in industry but are still looked down upon by their VCE counterparts doing a Certificate II VET.

VCAL coordinator, online survey

When students undertake an SBAT within their VCE, the VCE subjects are often prioritised and students often miss classes while at training or employment; they often have to catch up in their own time. The Review notes that the COVID-19 remote learning experience may present a valuable opportunity to introduce more flexible learning options, allowing students to remotely access missed lessons:

schools place a higher priority on the VCE subjects, irrespective of the significant benefits of [the traineeship] for learning, employability, skills development and so on.

VCAL coordinator and VCE teacher, online survey

Many industry stakeholders perceived SBATs to be an inferior experience to fully-fledged apprenticeships or traineeships (e.g. because they provide less workplace hours and their associated negative effects on workplace competency, as outlined in Chapter 8.2.1). Employers can also be reluctant to take on SBAT students because they have negative past experiences or generally view SBAT arrangements as inflexible, time-consuming and expensive (Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, submission):

In our experience significant areas of manufacturing and construction are wary of, and unwilling to engage, SBATs.

TTC manager, online survey

In consultations for the Review, employers expressed ambivalence towards SBATs, recognising their benefits (for instance, that they provide students with a secure pathway and enable them to commit to an industry area) but also their limitations (such as provision of insufficient workplace experience and the fact that most students are unable to drive). These limitations have led some employers to recommend that students wait until after Year 12 to begin an apprenticeship or traineeship.

The Review also found limited awareness about SBATs across students, employers and school staff:

Programs such as Head Start and SBATs ... provide opportunities for young people to earn while they learn in school. However, the understanding of these opportunities and the tangible benefits of vocational and applied learning are often misunderstood, not promoted or simply unknown.

Victorian Council of Social Service, submission

There appears to be limited awareness among employers in certain industry areas about SBATs, the Head Start program and their associated benefits:

Only 21 per cent of respondent employers said they are aware of the new Head Start model, while 78 per cent said they are not aware of it or are not sure. Members told us: 'We would like more information on this program. Have no awareness of its existence'.

Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, submission

Research corroborates this general lack of awareness. It has found limited interest and awareness among students, with 56 per cent of students not considering an apprenticeship or traineeship for a post-school pathway and 43 per cent unsure if their school offered school based apprenticeships (Shiely & Stuble, 2018). This level of student awareness is echoed by employer groups, who reported that students appeared unaware of the employment opportunities in their industry.

Some stakeholders, especially those working in schools with quality vocational and applied learning programs, recognise that SBATs can be extremely valuable. However, in Victoria overall, SBATs are not widely known, understood or appreciated.



Finding 19

There is limited awareness of SBATs among employers and students about their benefits, and low prioritisation by schools, which have contributed to their status and perception challenges.

SBAT commencements reflect gender norms

Consistent with broader labour market trends and post-secondary VET enrolments, fewer female students commence school based apprenticeships than male students. Likewise, female senior secondary students who undertake SBATs largely undertake traineeships in industry areas that tend to be lower paid (such as personal care and early childhood).

Stakeholders suggested these trends are because SBATs are largely focused on 'old school' trades concentrated in traditionally male-dominated industries. Between 2010 and 2017 in Victoria, female participation in all school based apprenticeships decreased from 18 per cent to 12 per cent, while female participation rates in traineeships increased.

Many stakeholders recognised the need for gender diversity in school based apprenticeships in traditional trades (which, other than commercial cookery, tend to be dominated by male students). However, strategies and initiatives to recruit female students into school based apprenticeships in male-dominated areas (such as engineering, automotive and building and construction) should be built into whole-of-industry strategies. Promotion of gender diversity by industry peak bodies (e.g. the Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce, the Master Builders Association of Victoria and the Housing Industry Association) should be encouraged rather than relying on standalone school initiatives. Once female students see genuine interest and encouragement from industry in their preferred industry area, they will be more inclined to enrol in a relevant school based apprenticeship.

Table 5 - SBAT commencements by gender, 2010–2019

Trade SBATs

	2010 (%)	2011 (%)	2012 (%)	2013 (%)	2014 (%)	2015 (%)	2016 (%)	2017 (%)	2018 (%)	2019 (%)
Male	81	83	75	73	75	66	68	72	75	79
Female	19	17	25	27	25	34	32	28	25	21

Non-trade SBATs

	2010 (%)	2011 (%)	2012 (%)	2013 (%)	2014 (%)	2015 (%)	2016 (%)	2017 (%)	2018 (%)	2019 (%)
Male	53	49	57	55	53	52	50	50	53	52
Female	47	51	43	45	47	48	50	50	47	48

Source: NCVET (2020)

SBATs do not always align with local labour market outcomes

Stakeholders indicated that SBATs do not always align with local industry needs or priority growth areas. In some cases, this is because of employment availability (or lack thereof) and/or training availability in the relevant locality. Some regional school stakeholders called for more industry transparency about opportunities for growth post-entry level jobs.

At a state level, most industries have had positive employment growth over the past 10 years and the relatively small number of SBATs is unlikely to result in oversupply or solve labour supply issues. However, at a local level, aligning SBAT commencements with the needs of local industry need can be crucial:

The delivery of vocational and applied learning in urban, rural and regional areas should relate in some way to regional and state economies ... A planning process that relates (but not defines) VET/VCAL programs with local economies will ensure that the skills needs of the various industry sectors are addressed adequately and that young people are more able to transition into local employment. This will strengthen the possibility of deepening the skills base for important local industry sectors and increasing the likelihood of high youth employment rates.

TTC Manager, online survey

Some stakeholders were concerned that students are not necessarily choosing industry areas with positive local labour market outcomes. For instance, stakeholders from Mallee reported that agriculture and horticulture are driving the local economy, but students are not pursuing vocational pathways in these areas despite the plethora of work opportunities available.

Stakeholders also raised the effectiveness of some school based traineeships in leading to employment outcomes. Many school based trainees undertake certificates in sports and recreation, hospitality and retail even though, depending on student location, jobs in these industries may be limited. However, the lack of data on employment outcomes at each individual certificate level makes it difficult to assess their effectiveness at this stage.

Early childhood education is not only popular among SBAT students but also experiencing increased industry demand across the state. The Certificate III in Early Childhood Education is an SBAT qualification that aligns well with labour market outcomes. One VCAL leader acknowledged early childhood education as a particularly good opportunity because the local area is currently experiencing skills shortages, there are opportunities for genuine employment, and students have been successful when undertaking these SBATs. Another school leader also expressed an appreciation for the qualification, as many of their students have gone on to work part-time in the industry and gain a Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Care.

In consultations, representatives of some industry areas indicated that they could benefit from a stronger worker stream and acknowledged that SBATs are a useful means for this purpose:

The horticultural industry can be viewed by career practitioners as only suitable for students who are not academically inclined, irrespective of the scope, breadth, depth and needs of the industry. The industry does indeed have a place for everyone, but we also need to raise entering/graduating employees skill level to maintain support for SBATs ... and to meet the needs of the industry. The number in the current pool of students/apprentices/trainees is insufficient for the industry to maintain its current rate of growth.

Nursery and Garden Industry Victoria, submission

There is a lack of data on SBAT outcomes, including the success of its pathways into further training or employment, that makes it difficult to evaluate its value. More fine-grained data on student outcomes, including post-school transitions, will allow the Department to assess whether SBAT qualifications need to be better aligned to local industry needs (see Chapter 11).



Finding 20

The alignment between SBATs and local labour demand could be improved to ensure that students who complete them have strong employment outcomes.

8.3 Relationship between Head Start apprenticeships and traineeships and other SBATs

Head Start is a flexible model of apprenticeships and traineeships for school students located in 10 participating clusters across Victoria. Head Start aims to help growing Victorian industries fill vacant positions and offers motivated students the opportunity to kickstart their career while completing their VCE or VCAL. The program, initiated in 2019, has been funded for four years and is delivering approximately 1,700 apprenticeships and traineeships in over 100 secondary schools (DET, 2019c).

Students are generally expected to undertake an average of one day of paid employment per week in Year 10, two days in Year 11 and three days in Year 12. If required, some students can undertake the final year of senior secondary over two years (leading to the equivalent of a Year 13). Each cluster area has a team of Head Start staff who work across their local schools to support school leaders, Head Start students and their employers.

The Head Start model has enabled schools to think differently about apprenticeships and traineeships and to test new ideas. It exposes and addresses many of the quality challenges associated with general SBATs, including the difficulty of trying to fit in school, training and workplace components, and ensures that each apprenticeship or traineeship is delivered well (e.g. through more rigorous control to achieve meaningful job outcomes).

Stakeholders have praised the Head Start program, appreciating the dedicated support it has given to participating students:

The Head Start staff have been instrumental in finding the school's 10 Head Start students genuine employers, continuing to monitor them, providing holistic feedback to students and parents and continuing to find opportunities for students to develop and grow during COVID19 restrictions.

VCAL Leading Teacher, participating Head Start school

The Review heard that the model, which includes 50 staff working across 100 schools, provides more support for students by matching them individually with employers to ensure fit, liaising with schools to improve their delivery and working to source genuine employment opportunities.

The partial rollout of Head Start does not include all SBATs, even at participating schools. The current approach to running SBATs and the Head Start program in parallel may create confusion among schools, families and employers. The Review heard that in some schools

this rollout has led to an 'us' versus 'them' mentality that does not serve all students well, especially as in some instances, some schools have some students doing Head Start and others doing other SBATs. In this scenario, it is apparent that the Head Start students receive substantially more support than their peers, prompting many to question the fairness of this arrangement.

The Head Start program addresses many of the SBAT issues that are identified in the Review; however, its requirement for substantial resourcing makes its widespread implementation costly and suggests it may always be a niche offering. An evaluation of the program, due to be completed in 2022 when funding expires, will identify the core components of the model, suggest the optimal resourcing that could be rolled out to lift SBAT quality for all students, and inform a revised SBAT program post 2022.

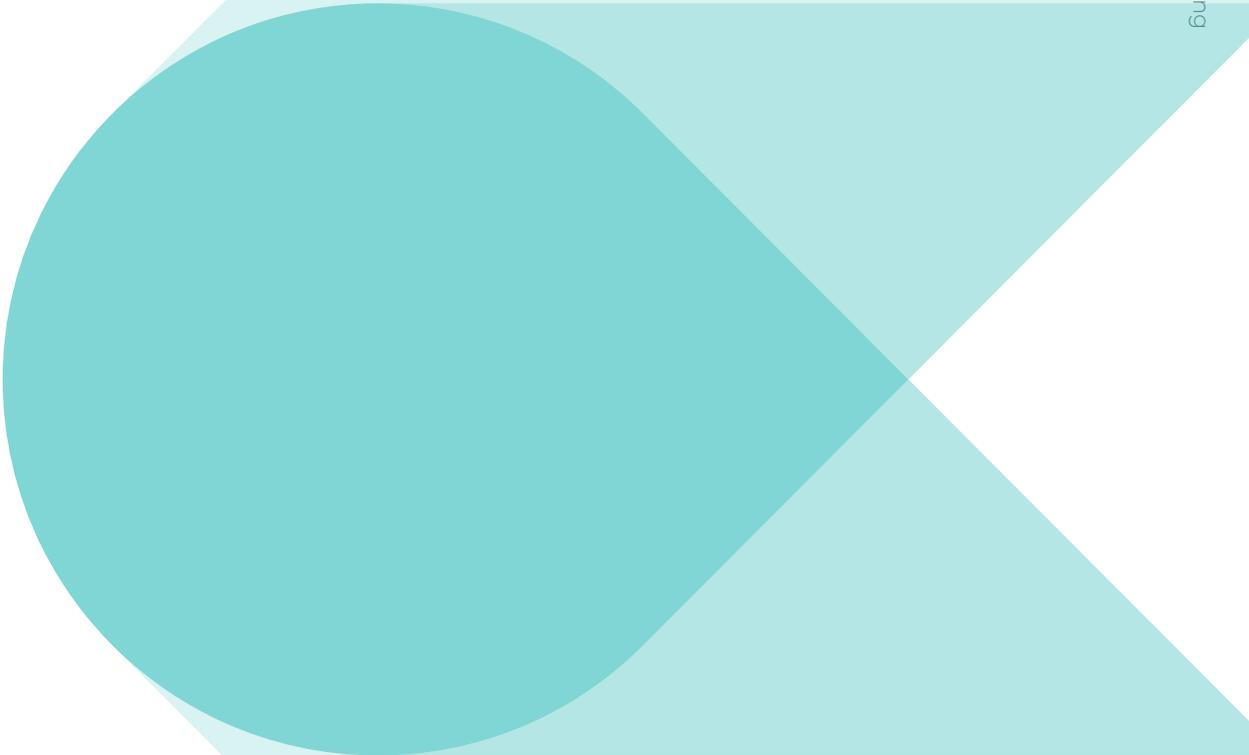
The findings of the evaluation can be instructive for how Head Start apprenticeships and traineeships can be accessed by all students, identify system improvements to address SBATs' quality issues, boost enrolments and recommend appropriate and sustainable levels of resourcing for all SBATs. Prospective solutions could include one additional resource per school, cluster or headcount of students, and/or assistance from LLENs to help identify employers and oversee students who need additional support. These solutions would require a substantial amount of seed funding, some LLEN restructuring and staff upskilling.

The Department will need to decide whether to provide the same level of resourcing to continue the Head Start program as is or consider how best to refine the program and determine which initiatives can be maintained with less resourcing. Following the evaluation of Head Start, the Department will need clear criteria for extending or modifying support for all government schools.



Finding 21

The Head Start model addresses many of the issues that plague SBAT, and full rollout of the Head Start model should focus on ensuring all schools are adequately resourced to support all SBAT students.



9

School-industry engagement





School–industry engagement underpins many aspects of high-quality vocational and applied learning in secondary school and is key in VDSS, VET tasters, SWL, SBATs and career education. It provides a range of benefits for all parties, including students, schools and employers.

However, throughout consultations with both school and industry stakeholders, barriers to school–industry engagement were frequently highlighted, suggesting that this engagement is inconsistent and non-uniform across Victoria. In a place-based approach, the Department will need to play a more active coordination role to promote school–industry partnerships at a systemwide level across Victoria.

9.1 School–industry engagement is mutually beneficial

Effective school–industry engagement mutually benefits students and industry stakeholders. The benefits have been acknowledged in several recent Victorian and Commonwealth reviews and inquiries.

The engagement of employers in education has been shown to improve student achievement, engagement, transitions and employment outcomes. These benefits are greater for disadvantaged students who often do not have strong connections or networks with employers (Norris, 2011; Torii, 2018).

School–industry engagement is critical for:

- building student awareness of jobs and careers and enabling students to engage with the world of work: Research has found that young people who have a good understanding of the requirements of their career paths have better long-term outcomes; they need to know what to study to match their career ambitions to future labour force needs
- preparing students for the changing skills and needs of the labour market, including the necessary knowledge and skills for future career paths
- developing general capabilities essential for the workplace, including problem-solving, collaboration and digital literacy skills
- providing context and relevance for the curriculum and subject choices in senior secondary: Students who understand the significance of what they learn in school for their future careers are more engaged and have a better understanding of what skills are required for a desired pathway
- helping students understand current workplace demands and recruitment processes in preparation for school-to-work transitions
- providing students with opportunities to meet and learn from industry professionals and gain an understanding of the full range of career opportunities available in different industries.

(Australian Council for Educational Research, 2011; Lucas & Smith, 2018; Mann et al., 2018; Shergold et al., 2020; Torii, 2018).

School–industry engagement also offers numerous benefits for industry, such as matching workforce skills needs; growing the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) workforce; and providing employees with engagement opportunities and corporate social responsibility (Torii, 2018).

Employers have previously expressed concern that career education in schools does not always provide accurate and up-to-date advice on their industry, and career practitioners are often unaware of all the career options in an industry (Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee, 2018).

Strong school–employer engagement supports employers to increase public awareness about their industry, enables up-to-date and accurate industry information to be shared among schools and students, and directly shapes perceptions of their industry among students (their potential future workforce) and in the community more broadly. This engagement also increases understanding among schools, employers and industry groups of how to train young people for employment (Outer Eastern LLEN, submission).

Logistics is the largest employer in terms of full-time jobs across the west. The Brimbank VET Cluster offered a Certificate III in Logistics in 2019 and had 0 enrolments. Future Connect is working with the Logistics Peak Body to delve into this further but we suspect young people don't really understand the industry and the opportunities; that is, they probably have misconceptions about the industry.

Future Connect, submission

Engagement may also facilitate future recruitment opportunities for employers. For example, in a recent employer survey conducted by the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the benefit of participating in structured workplace programs that was most valued by employers was the ability to recruit future employees (according to 66 per cent of respondents).

Industry stakeholders reported that where school–industry engagement has been successful, they have benefited industry, students and schools:

In my previous dealings with VCAL my organisation (Private Industry Electrical RTO) developed a partnership with 6 secondary schools, 5 state schools and 1 Catholic secondary college. We interfaced with a number of VCAL teachers. We ran an Electrical VCAL program and articulated a number of VCAL students into electrical apprenticeships. This partnership delivered a quality outcome for the students and the participating schools.

Training manager, online survey

In countries like Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and Switzerland, employer engagement is deeply embedded in school vocational pathways, with secondary school students undertaking industry-based apprenticeships in their final years of schooling. Joyce (2019) noted that in Denmark and Germany, links between schools and local businesses are formally enshrined in legislation. The perceived mutual benefits of these arrangements could be replicated in Victorian reforms to integrate the senior secondary system.

Findings from past and current reviews and inquiries

The importance of school–industry engagement has long been recognised. Many previous Victorian and Commonwealth reviews and inquiries have looked to source and strengthen opportunities to improve the quality of school–industry engagement and increase student exposure to work-related learning. Their recommendations have focused on how school–industry partnerships may be strengthened and embedded across the education system:

- The Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training (*Looking to the future*) recommended that ‘education authorities need to facilitate and encourage partnerships between schools and employers at the local level in order to help students make choices and gain experience in the diverse career pathways that different industries can offer’ (Shergold et al., 2020, p. 21). It also recommended that working relationships between education authorities and industry bodies need to be formalised so that industry engagement becomes a statewide feature of secondary schooling.
- The Expert Review of Australia’s Vocational Education and Training System (*Strengthening skills*) noted that ‘the quality and relevance of VET delivered to secondary students can be further improved by strengthening the role of industry in advising and endorsing the work of schools’ (Joyce, 2019, p. 101).
- The 2018 Parliamentary Inquiry into Career Advice Activities in Victorian Schools found that information about the nature of jobs and industry can be inaccurate, work experience requirements are burdensome and linking classroom learning to career opportunities could make learning more relevant (Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee, 2018).
- The 2018 Parliamentary Inquiry into School to Work Transition (*Unique individuals, broad skills*) recommended that the Commonwealth Government identify ways for employers and schools to proactively establish relationships, measure work-related learning and establish more ways to for industry to engage in student education (Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, 2018).

School–industry partnerships are also ingrained in education strategies. For example, the 2018 National Career Education Strategy recognises a need to promote partnerships, ensure they reflect the diversity of employer needs and pathways available to students, and support the connection between work-related learning to classroom learning.



Finding 22

School–industry engagement improves student and employment outcomes, although their effective practice remains uneven across the system.

9.2 Barriers to school–industry engagement

While school–industry engagement was identified as important throughout consultations for the Review, barriers to building strong relationships were also frequently highlighted by both school and industry stakeholders. These barriers have led to patchy success with school–industry partnerships across the state.

It is very challenging for secondary schools to form partnerships with external organisations.

VCAL teacher, online survey

Schools face barriers in terms of both their capability to engage and limited capacity in the face of competing priorities. Torii (2018) noted that teachers are key in school–industry engagement, but many lack the time and energy to engage with industry and to integrate partnership activities with teaching the curriculum. A range of structural barriers, such as additional costs, child safety requirements and procurement policies, also make relationship-building more complex.

For example, many [school teachers] have spoken to us about the limited opportunities for students to get any real insight into the realities of workplaces and different vocations/careers and the difficulty in securing enough work placements for students to get meaningful time to engage with employers.

Future Connect, submission

In addition, there is a lack of central recognition and reward for engaging with industry, with little systematic measurement or assessment of the quantity and quality of employer engagement (Gonski et al., 2018; Torii, 2018).

Engaging with schools is challenging for industry. Industry stakeholders have difficulty initiating engagement, identifying which schools to engage with and knowing how to make the engagement mutually beneficial (Torii, 2018).

Unfortunately, schools often do not understand the needs and requirements of industry, and similarly industry is not always aware of how they can fit into the education system.

Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, submission

These barriers have significant consequences for the adoption and sustainability of school–industry relationships. For example, according to Ai Group’s 2018 survey of employers, only 12 per cent reported that the relationship was established and long term (Ai Group, submission).

9.3 Improving school–industry engagement

The interface between school and industry runs right through secondary school. However, while successful school–industry engagement exists in Victoria, it is not systematically practised in all secondary schools.

Unfortunately, much school–industry engagement is successful because of the initiative and efforts of an individual teacher, career practitioner or employer, or because of a dedicated person who is funded to run the program. When that person leaves or funding is removed, the relationship is likely to falter and cease.

9.3.1 Existing support for school–industry engagement in Victoria

A range of key players have a role in connecting schools to industry and supporting school–industry engagement in Victoria. Torii (2018) identified that intermediaries who facilitate these partnerships can play an important role in creating education relationships. These intermediaries include industry associations, employer bodies, universities, RTOs, not-for-profit organisations and government departments. Intermediaries can be particularly valuable in communities that lack networks, connections or infrastructure, including those in rural and remote areas (Shergold et al., 2020).

In Victoria, employers are supported to engage with Victorian schools through a range of intermediaries, including:

- Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs): the core role of the 31 LLENs across Victoria is to broker initiatives and create and develop sustainable relationships and partnerships with and across local schools, education providers, industry and community. Employers may work with LLENs to address skills shortages, identify and provide employment and training opportunities for young people and communicate with education providers about future skills needs.
- Tech Schools: Tech Schools partner with industry to give students exposure to different STEM careers. They work with industry representatives to ensure that programs and technology are relevant and equip students with skills in the local sectors expected to experience strong growth. However, there are currently only 10 Tech Schools and they typically only work with students in Years 7 to 10. Not all secondary schools or students have access to a Tech School, and links with industry representatives could be strengthened to ensure that there is direct continuity with senior secondary programs, particularly from VDSS programs.
- Industry Advisory Groups (IAGs): the 10 IAGs comprise industry, union and employer representatives who cover a range of industries, including construction, business services and transport and logistics industries. They are an important source of industry intelligence (e.g. future skills demand in industries) but are primarily focused on VET.
- VET clusters: many providers across all sectors participate in a VET cluster to increase student access to a wider range of VET courses. Some VET clusters also play a role in connecting local providers with industry partners and building long-term sustainable partnerships between schools, training providers and industry.

The Department offers all Victorian secondary schools a free school–employer engagement service that is facilitated by the LLENs. The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and Independent Schools Victoria have joined the Department (through a Memorandum of Understanding) in promoting this free localised school–employer partnership service across its schools. Not all schools have engaged with this service.

Since 2016, the Department has funded LLENs to facilitate SWL for all school students undertaking VET in their VCE or VCAL. From 2019, this facilitation has been extended to a range of school–employer engagement activities for different purposes, including work experience, community work placements, SBATs, industry presenters, workplace visits, industry tours and work readiness programs.

In addition, the Department’s Structured Workplace Learning Statewide Portal enables all Victorian secondary schools to access LLEN-sourced opportunities (Local Learning and Employment Network, 2020a).

Several resources have also been developed to assist with school industry partnerships, including a guidebook produced by the Ai Group to assist schools and employers to form partnerships (see Case Study 16)

CASE STUDY 16

Strengthening School - Industry STEM Skills Partnerships

In 2015, the Ai Group was commissioned by the Office of the Chief Scientist to write a guidebook that advances school–industry partnerships in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics domains. The project coordinated several pilot programs, led to the development of some models of school–industry partnerships and demonstrated the diversity of potential approaches, especially for schools.

Three school–industry engagement models were showcased in the final report:

- single school, single company
- multiple schools, multiple companies and university
- multiple organisations—schools, government and peak industry bodies.

Source: Ai Group (2017); Ai Group, submission

9.3.2 Opportunities to increase school–industry engagement

The Review’s consultations found appetite—among both schools and industry—for more engagement and partnerships, but both sides also indicated they need more support for this to happen.

According to Ai Group’s 2018 survey of employers, 10 per cent of employers indicated an intention to increase links with schools and a further 13 per cent intended to establish new links (Ai Group, submission). School stakeholders also called for increases in opportunities for students to gain exposure to the workplace:

Structured and funded connections with Industry. Initiatives like the Tech schools where technology and industry pathways are accessible and visible.

VCAL teacher, online survey

A place-based approach to school–industry engagement

The Department, individual schools and industry stakeholders must all play their part to increase the prevalence and strength of school–industry engagement.

Shergold et al. (2020) emphasised that industry need to step up and increase their involvement in senior secondary schools, and governments and school authorities need to authorise and actively encourage industry partnerships. The Review's recommendation to fund pathways coordinators in government schools (see Chapter 3.4.3) will increase in-school capacity to build stronger relationships with industry and to engage with intermediaries such as LLENs and IAGs. This position holder will also act as an initial point for industry stakeholders to liaise with schools.

The Review acknowledges that enhancing school–industry engagement requires a local, place-based approach. Each local area will have different intermediaries, employers, growth industries and existing school–industry partnerships in play. Therefore, the form of support to increase workplace and work-based opportunities for secondary students will differ for each local area. That said, a range of different approaches can be taken to establish successful school–industry partnerships.

The Department, with the support of intermediaries like LLENs, needs to be more active in its coordination, support and promotion of school–industry engagement at the local and state level. The points of this engagement need to be increased, and links, where made, need to be strengthened. This recommendation complements other recommendations by the Review, particularly those relating to SWL, VET tasters, career education and SBATs.

In addition, the Department has an opportunity to consider how existing models (e.g. Tech Schools) could be better built to support schools form ongoing relationships with industry.



RECOMMENDATION 30

The Department should adopt a place-based approach to building school–industry partnerships. It should also have a stronger coordination role in these partnerships to provide students with more industry and employer exposure. Exposure can be promoted through, for example, local employer forums and career fairs, common forms of information sharing and provision of guidance to employers and schools to build productive relationships.

The Victorian Government as employer

As a significant-sized employer and a procurer of major projects, the Victorian Government should lead by example and create strong relationships with schools. The diversity and size of government projects are such that they have significant potential to provide secondary school students with work-related experience, in both metropolitan and regional areas.

Early student exposure to major government projects in secondary school will increase the visibility of possible employment pathways. Government–school engagement may also support the creation of a local workforce pipeline that will support future government projects in the area. These engagements are particularly important given the increased demand for skilled labour as a result of the Victorian Government’s unprecedented investment in public infrastructure, the potential reduction in migrant labour from COVID-19 travel restrictions and possible future shortages in some of the occupations related to major projects.

The Major Projects Skills Guarantee (MPSG) creates employment opportunities in major government building and infrastructure projects for Victorian apprentices, trainees and cadets. For all government construction projects valued at or over \$20 million, the MPSG requires at least 10 per cent of the total estimated labour hours in the project to have been worked by Victorian apprentices, trainees and cadets. This policy aims to ensure that ‘we continue to grow the next generation of skilled workers in Victoria’ (Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, 2020). Training opportunities exist in all areas of these projects, from design and engineering through to the actual construction work. However, the Review understands that there is limited, if any, engagement in these projects at the school level. Attempts to engage secondary school students under the MPSG should be more coordinated and focused so that students are aware of these opportunities earlier in their schooling, interest in relevant apprenticeship and traineeship pathways can be generated, and a workforce pipeline established. Case Study 17 outlines an example of building school engagement in major projects.

CASE STUDY 17

Meeting the skill needs of major government projects

Two demonstration projects—the North East Link (a large civil construction project) and Footscray Hospital (primarily involving the construction workforce)—are testing a new approach to meet the skill needs of major government projects.

These projects have dedicated resources to meet labour demands. A dedicated project officer develops a workforce development plan and promotes and coordinates training for major projects, and a Skills and Jobs Centre is linked to each project.

The project officer will support more connections with schools to bridge the skills gaps and provide opportunities for school students. These relationship-building activities will build student awareness of the opportunities available in major projects and be an avenue to attract workers to the sector. Long-term infrastructure projects can provide students a line of sight from school to TAFE to employment.

Source: Information supplied by the Department of Education and Training

There is also opportunity—particularly in local schools within a project area—to expand student exposure to government projects through the Industry Immersion Experience Program (see Case Study 18). This could include expansion beyond ‘blue-collar’ roles into paraprofessional or professional roles, including roles at head offices of major government projects and organisations. In addition, the Victorian Government could consider directly offering work experience placements in its government departments and agencies. A centrally coordinated work experience model, similar to that used in the Victoria Police Work Experience Program, could be pursued to provide secondary school students with greater exposure to the diverse opportunities in the Victorian Public Service (Victoria Police, 2020).

CASE STUDY 18

The Industry Immersion Experience Program

The Industry Immersion Experience Program enables Years 7–10 students in rural, regional and low socio-economic government schools to spend a day onsite at an industry workplace in priority industry areas. Students build knowledge about the world of work and future workforce skill requirements, and gain real-world insights from working professionals into their preferred occupations and career journeys. It also enables teachers and career practitioners to gain a more detailed understanding of different industries so they can support students with their pathway decisions.

The program’s partner organisations include major government projects and organisations, such as the Metro Tunnel, the Level Crossing Removal Project, the National Gallery of Victoria, as well as private organisations.

Source: Australian Centre for Career Education (2020)

Development of school–government partnerships could build on existing efforts to meet the skills needs of major government projects. Knowledge and understanding built on successful school–industry engagement for major government projects could also inform guidance for large employers—in the private as well as the public sector and government—on how to engage and partner with schools.



RECOMMENDATION 31

As a large employer and procurer of major projects, the Victorian Government should play a more direct role in creating partnerships with schools to provide students with work-related opportunities, increase the visibility of work opportunities in government projects and inform guidance for large employers on how to engage and partner with schools.

10

Preparing for
senior secondary
pathways and
career education





Engaging students in their middle senior secondary years (Years 9 and 10) promotes their retention in senior secondary and the likelihood of successful post-school transitions. The middle senior secondary years are a critical period for career planning and decision-making; it is a period during which students become equipped with the skills to make course and career choices for senior secondary (Shergold et al., 2020).

Many stakeholders pointed to the importance of vocational and applied learning programs prior to senior secondary in preparing students for senior secondary and to building and maintaining their engagement. They highlighted the particular importance of Year 9, where student engagement can be at its lowest.

The Review believes that strengthening the applied learning on offer in the middle secondary years—including learning through the Victorian Curriculum F–10 and participation in vocational tasters—and enhancing career education will encourage student engagement, prepare students for vocational and applied learning pathways in senior secondary, and help them to make more informed choices for and during their senior secondary years.

10.1 The middle secondary years

A number of the Department's indicators show marked declines in student engagement, achievement and wellbeing in the middle secondary years:

- student satisfaction and engagement are the highest in primary years before dropping in Years 7 to 9 (DET, 2020d)
- in 2018 government school students were absent for an average of 17 days, with the highest number of absent days among Years 8, 9 and 10 students (DET, 2020b)
- in 2019 the proportion of students achieving the top two bands for National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) Reading was 23 per cent of Year 9 students, compared to 58 per cent of Year 3 and 40 per cent of Year 5 students (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2019)
- the proportion of students experiencing high levels of psychological distress was greater among Year 8 students (24 per cent) than among Year 5 students (14 per cent) (DET, 2019b, p.13)
- only 43 per cent of students in Years 7–9 responded positively about student voice and agency compared with 71 per cent of students in Years 4–6 (DET, 2020d).

These results collectively suggest that middle secondary students have particular needs that are not being met in secondary schooling.

Research also suggests that students need help with understanding the relevance of what they are learning at school for their post-school lives. A perceived lack of relevance contributes to student disengagement during these years.

When you look at where school disengagement really starts and peaks ... it's kind of in those middle years of schooling around Year 8 and 9 ... the question of not knowing how relevant your schooling is, not seeing a pathway out of it, not knowing why you're bothering to do it or not, certainly does seem to be one factor for young people.

Dommers et al. (2017, p. 24)

10.2 Vocational and applied learning in the middle secondary years

Schools take different approaches to vocational and applied learning of students in the middle secondary years. This difference extends to whether they provide VET courses and Foundation VCAL during the middle second years, and whether they offer the Victorian Curriculum F–10 and vocational tasters.

The middle secondary years are an important period to prepare students for their senior secondary pathway. However, in practice, there is a blurring of the lines between F–10 and senior secondary education: many students enrol in VET courses, VCAL and VCE units prior to Year 11.

Indeed, Year 10 is increasingly seen as the start of the senior secondary pathway. Yet, some stakeholders are concerned that ‘young people often do not have a real understanding of what different jobs or careers entail which has a significant impact on their senior secondary pathway choices’ (Victorian Council of Social Service, submission).

Increased exposure to vocational and applied learning in the middle secondary years will develop and support student understanding of different careers as well as build aspirations and promote engagement in school.

10.2.1 Years 9 and 10 enrolments in VET and VCAL

Prior to Year 11, the encouragement of Years 9 and 10 students to enrol in senior secondary programs and VET courses is intended to support student engagement, achievement and wellbeing. There are a variety of reasons why students might seek to start senior secondary subjects early (e.g. for academic extension, because the courses may be more motivating or engaging). Students are also able to begin tailoring their education program to align with their interests, strengths and aspirations.

Valad Solutions (2018) found that a reason schools introduce a Foundation VCAL program to Year 10 students was to cater for students who lack adequate literacy and numeracy skills. Although the VCAA has confirmed that Foundation VCAL can be used as an alternative curriculum for Year 10 students, this is not its intended purpose.

It is concerning that students below Year 10 are enrolling in Foundation VCAL to get exposure to applied learning. While this may be the most suitable pathway for some students, in general it is preferable that students in Years 9–10 continue to learn the full breadth of the F–10 curriculum and should not have to enrol in a Foundation level qualification prematurely to get more exposure to applied learning. The VCAA could provide clear advice and sample programs that highlight the many opportunities for applied learning within the Victorian Curriculum F–10.

In 2019, 11,530 students undertook VET in Year 10 and 1,713 in Year 9. The majority of VET enrolments in Year 9 were in Language, Hospitality, Agriculture or Employment Pathways. In Year 10, VET enrolments look more like senior secondary enrolments, but with a larger proportion of enrolments in Language and Employment Pathways.

Of the 2,750 students enrolled in VCAL in Year 10, the vast majority are enrolled in Foundation VCAL (94 per cent), with 6 per cent in Intermediate VCAL. Senior VCAL enrolments in Year 10, as well as Year 9 enrolments in VCAL, were small. The Review is also aware that some providers use the Foundation VCAL program informally as a school-based pre-VCAL program to engage students and expose them to applied learning pathways.

These early enrolments in VET and VCAL (as well as Year 10 students studying VCE subjects) is contributing to the view that Year 10 is the start of the senior secondary pathway.

10.2.2 Victorian Curriculum F–10

Stakeholders raised the need to provide more applied learning opportunities prior to senior secondary. Students also told the Review that they would have liked to have more applied learning in their middle secondary years and that they might have remained more connected to their school if more applied learning opportunities were available.

There is consensus that applied learning is a pedagogical approach in which students learn through doing in circumstances that simulate the real world, entailing both vocational and academic knowledge and skills.

Although some schools are successfully integrating applied learning into the Victorian Curriculum F–10, for example, in the areas of cooking and digital technologies as well as through problem-based learning, schools could be better supported to do so for all learning areas:

We also see an opportunity to modify the syllabus prior to year 11–12 to include vocational exploration in all subjects, including music, food and nutrition, design and graphics.

Brotherhood of St. Laurence, submission



Finding 23

Schools would benefit from appropriate central support to build applied learning in the delivery of the Victorian Curriculum F–10 in order to engage students and support their decision-making regarding senior secondary pathways.

10.2.3 Vocational tasters

Vocational tasters are short immersive VET experiences that enable students, typically in Years 9 and 10, to learn more about the subject area and discover what skills will be learned, and that inform decisions on their pathways in senior secondary. These immersions can range from a few hours to a finite number of days.

Vocational tasters are seen to offer dual benefits—they allow students to explore vocational options while also eliminating those that are not suitable (The Gordan, submission). However, provision of vocational tasters is ad hoc across Victoria.

Different models of delivering VET taster programs have been adopted. These models include the use of an external provider exemplified by the Geelong Tertiary Futures Program (see Case Study 19), industry-led tasters such as the CCF Taster Program, and school-based models such as Ranges TEC, which provides tasters as part of Foundation VCAL in Year 10.

There was widespread stakeholder support for vocational tasters for students in Years 9 and 10 to help inform senior secondary pathways decisions:

We support the concept of 'taster' programs for applied learning in Year 9. Students could be offered a 'suite' of VET tasters (e.g. 4 programs, one per term, over the course of the year) which would introduce the experience of applied learning and provide a basis for choosing a desirable VET program in Year 10.

South Gippsland Bass Coast LLEN, submission

CASE STUDY 19

Geelong Tertiary Futures Program

The Geelong Tertiary Futures Program gives students the opportunity to explore a range of potential tertiary pathways at The Gordon TAFE. Students can select five in-depth career preview courses from up to 30 options. The program works to build important employability skills, with students completing two accredited units in communication and workplace health and safety. The program assists students to clarify their aspirations for future employment while building their workplace skills.

The program is currently open to Year 9 students from four schools: Newcomb Secondary College, Bellarine Secondary College, Western Heights College and Northern Bay P-12 College. The program has been operating since 2015 and has had over 2,000 participating students.

Results of student surveys show that most participating students were better informed about future education and employment opportunities, and were more motivated and engaged in education after participating in the program. The Review also heard from a participating school that they felt students can select their VET studies for their senior years of schooling with more certainty as the experience complements pathways discussions and career guidance.

Source: Gordon Institute of TAFE (2020)

Some schools are enrolling students in VET courses as early as Year 9. The majority of VET courses are not designed or generally suitable for younger students because of considerations, for example, relating to maturity levels and age requirements for work placements in some industries. As VET courses are not intended for Year 9 students, these schools should be supported to use vocational tasters or other vocational learning programs to expose students to a variety of vocational pathways and build student familiarity with workplace expectations:

Consideration could be given to offering broader programs to students before they access VET in Schools. Many of the qualifications relate to particular trades or occupations when students are really at an age when they should be exploring a variety of options. Ideally, a student interested in a trade should gain an understanding of metal trades, construction trades, automotive trades, etc. before choosing a VET delivered program in school. This could be done in Year 10.

Ai Group, submission

Tech Schools are Victoria's centres of excellence in STEM. They are described as 'a link between schools and industry to provide innovative learning programs' that 'challenge students to solve real-world problems and prepare them for the future world of work' (DET, 2019f). Hosted by universities and TAFEs, Tech Schools also expose students to higher education and career pathways (DET, 2019f).

The Department should explore the potential to expose more students to STEM career pathways. As vocational tasters are generally short immersive experiences that are not ongoing, they could be delivered by Tech Schools to expose more students to the experience of a Tech School and to maximise the utilisation of these schools' facilities in their downtime (e.g. outside of the school term). There may also be an opportunity to utilise TTCs to deliver vocational tasters to local schools where their facilities are under-utilised.

Some employers expressed specific concerns about students who commence an SBAT before setting foot in a relevant workplace. Experiential learning prior to commencing an SBAT is essential to ensuring that students are making informed pathway decisions.

A stakeholder suggested that:

one of the main reasons that apprentice and trainee completion rates are low is that young people don't have the opportunity to trial, experience and learn about a range of vocational options before having to 'sign up' to a long commitment

Apprenticeship Employment Network, submission

Programs such as the Multi Industry School Based and Pre-Apprenticeship Support Pilot Project (see Case Study 20) were developed to provide students with exposure to different industries before committing to an apprenticeship or traineeship.

CASE STUDY 20

Multi Industry School Based and Pre-Apprenticeship Support Pilot Project

The Multi Industry School Based and Pre-Apprenticeship Support Pilot Project (MIP) provided participants with the opportunity to have a 'hands-on' trial of three to four industries during a course. It was a two-year pilot that was rolled out in Victoria, NSW and Tasmania and was open to secondary students in Years 10, 11 and 12 (as well as unemployed young people under 25 years of age).

The program provides youth who are considering a vocational work and training pathway with multiple experiences to make an informed career choice, and ensures that youth entering an apprenticeship or traineeship are well informed about the tasks expected, the training required and employer expectations.

Of the 2,586 participants, over 56 per cent found that their career of interest differed to what they previously thought, and 92 per cent reported that the program helped them to make a career decision.

Source: Apprenticeship Employment Network (2016); Apprenticeship Employment Network, submission



Finding 24

Vocational tasters expose students to a variety of vocational pathways and support informed choices relating to senior secondary pathways. Although there are a range of successful models for delivering vocational tasters, their provision is ad hoc.

10.2.4 Opportunities for reform

The VCAA and the Department should take leadership roles in ensuring the delivery of applied learning to students through the F–10 curriculum and in promoting student access to vocational tasters.

The VCAA should develop additional guidance so that providers can explicitly build applied learning into the delivery of the Victorian Curriculum F–10. This guidance should include specific advice on how applied learning is integral to the Victorian Curriculum F–10 curriculum and how opportunities and requirements for applied learning in each of the learning areas may be identified. This guidance could include sample applied learning units and should focus on Years 9–10 in the first instance, as preparatory steps towards either senior secondary or successful post-school pathways. Some learning areas will have already been delivered with a high degree of applied learning, such as the arts, design and science; there is opportunity to support other learning areas to do the same. This guidance also needs to include a transition plan into the senior secondary certificate to support pathways and facilitate links between learning in Years F–10 and senior secondary pathways.

The recommended increase to the capacity of the VCAA's VCAL Unit will facilitate professional learning opportunities for teachers involved in the delivery of applied learning. Extending professional learning opportunities to those teaching Years 9–10 (and below) will facilitate the introduction of applied learning to these programs and build connections between the learning in Years F–10 and that in senior secondary.

The Department should promote access to vocational tasters to enhance student engagement and inform decision-making prior to senior secondary. Vocational tasters should be explicitly linked to pathways and should be an element of career education, rather than specific VET courses (noting that they may also inform choices about VET courses in senior secondary). They should also be linked to the Victorian Curriculum F–10.

Given the ad hoc provision of vocational tasters and the variety of successful models that have already been employed, a place-based approach to their provision should be adopted. Such an approach could include the expansion of existing proven models or could leverage existing structures like VET clusters. It could also include more support for schools to liaise with providers of vocational tasters, such as TAFEs.

The Department should also explore the potential for Tech Schools to deliver vocational tasters in STEM areas, as well as utilising TTCs. This recommendation is consistent with the recommendation that the Department should play a more active role in supporting all students to have access to a vocational and applied learning pathway (see Chapter 6.2.2).



RECOMMENDATION 32

To ensure all students are exposed to applied learning and to a range of vocational pathways prior to senior secondary:

- the VCAA should develop additional guidance for providers that identifies opportunities for applied learning in the Victorian Curriculum F–10
- the VCAA should provide advice on how experiential learning can be linked to the Victorian Curriculum F–10
- the Department should promote student participation in vocational tasters that are linked to the Victorian Curriculum F–10 by using Tech Schools to host tasters, promoting partnerships with TAFEs and increasing the use of Trade Training Centres.

10.3 Career education

Successful transitions to post-school vocational training rely heavily on the career activities and exploration that students undertake in their early and middle secondary years. Students must be exposed to early and ongoing career exploration to build awareness and understanding of career options and to ground their job and workplace expectations. Early career education also supports students to keep their options open during the initial years of secondary school and to make informed decisions regarding senior secondary.

In the new (and post-) COVID-19 world, career education will become even more crucial as young people are disproportionately affected in the labour market. Senior secondary students will need more support with entering the labour market as well as navigating prolonged periods of insecure employment (Shergold et al., 2020).

Stakeholders, including parents, indicated support for early and ongoing student exposure to career education prior to senior secondary:

Career education should start in the earlier years so young people are better informed before they select their [senior secondary] program. Many students spend much of their first term changing courses. This should not happen to the extent it does. More needs to be added to years 9 and 10 well before these programs are offered so students can make informed choices.

Outer Eastern LLEN, submission

Career education differs across school sectors. During the consultations, the Review heard of many career education initiatives that have been successfully implemented in schools across Victoria. These initiatives are welcomed and supported by the Review. For example, the recent suite of 'transforming career education' reforms for government schools have been positively received by most stakeholders, including students (see Case Study 21). The Morrisby online career discovery tool and one-on-one interviews were highlighted as being particularly valuable.

As part of the transforming career education reforms, the Department is also working with the VCAA to develop cross-sectoral advice and resources to support delivery of career education across the Victorian Curriculum F–10 and in senior secondary. These resources

are being released incrementally, with some resource templates anchoring career education teaching and learning activities in the content descriptions of the Victorian Curriculum F–10 that are already available on the VCAA website.

CASE STUDY 21

Transforming career education

The transforming career education reforms aim to ensure government school students have the skills and capabilities to navigate multiple careers and meet the challenges of the rapidly changing world of work. These reforms were developed in response to the findings of the review of career education in Victorian government schools (Dandolo Partners, 2017) and the Parliamentary Inquiry into Career Advice Activities in Victorian Schools. The reforms were implemented from 2019.

Specific reforms to strengthen career education include:

- all Year 7 and 8 students will participate in Career Self-Exploration Workshops to better understand their interests, strengths and aspirations
- all Year 9 students will be given a Careers e-Portfolio to translate their career exploration and planning into concrete action and have access to a Professional Career Planning Service, which provides one-on-one guidance and a professional diagnostic career assessment
- all Years 10–12 students will receive course and career counselling and will be asked to build Career Action Plans
- over 400 career practitioners in government schools are supported to complete the Graduate Certificate in Career Development/Education.

Source: DET (2020h)

The Career Education Framework has also been developed and will be tested with key stakeholders in Term 3, 2020 to make it as useful to schools and teachers as possible. Cross-sectoral professional learning to increase teacher awareness of the Career Education Framework and associated resources will also be designed and delivered.

The Victorian Careers Curriculum Framework, developed by the Career Education Association of Victoria (CEAV), provides the basis for a career education program for students in Years 7–12. The CECV supports the use of the Framework and produces an annual publication for Victorian Catholic secondary schools to guide provision of career development and workplace learning. The CECV also provides part sponsorship support for career practitioners to complete the Graduate Certificate in Career Development.

In the independent school sector, there are no guidelines for the delivery of career development services. However, many independent schools use CEAV resources to support their career development programs (Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee, 2018). The Review also heard from several schools who are using the Certificate I in Employment Pathways as a career education program in Years 9 and 10 (see Case Study 22).

CASE STUDY 22

Certificate I in Employment Pathways

The Certificate I in Employment Pathways is designed to support learners develop skills and knowledge to re-engage with learning and to improve their employability and work readiness skills.

Our Lady of Sacred Heart College in south-east Melbourne use the Certificate I in Employment Pathways to prepare Year 9 students for work experience and part-time employment through mock interviews and preparation of résumés. The school uses the certificate because it lends a structure to the career education program. The certificate also assists students with course selection by providing students with the opportunity to experience a wide array of career paths and training options, as well as providing students with skills for further study.

Source: Meeting with Our Lady of Sacred Heart College, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College (2013)

10.3.1 Insufficient promotion and understanding of vocational pathways

Stakeholders were concerned that, unlike those in the university sector, opportunities in the VET sector were not as well understood or promoted through school career education. Shergold et al. (2020) observed that university and vocational pathways are often presented to students as binary choices rather than nonlinear pathways that can intersect and indeed, merge:

There is concern that school careers advisors do not adequately understand or promote the opportunities in the VET sector. It is important for those providing careers advice to be aware of industry's emerging skill needs, including an increasing requirement for higher level skills at the trades and paraprofessional levels. Schools careers advisers should be expected to gather information about a wide range of industries and occupations that may appeal to their students, and not just rely on what is sent to them.

Ai Group, submission

That pathways are not vertical or separate, reinforces the need for school career advisers to be well-trained, current in their understanding and adequately resourced to proactively collect information on a broader range of industries and occupations. Much of this capability requires adequate time allocation and professional learning.

Peak industry bodies should also support the development and dissemination of industry information to career practitioners to enhance their understanding of a range of industries. There was concern that career education is not arming students with sufficient information about the different career pathways that are possible with the VCAL qualification, and that vocational learning is not being promoted as a viable alternative pathway entailing 'significant career trajectories' (Smith Family, submission):

There is a pressing need for clear and comprehensive information about different opportunities and career pathways in VCAL to assist young people, their families and the community to understand the full benefits this qualification can provide. School career practitioners also need to be skilled and equipped with this knowledge and information.

Victorian Council of Social Service, submission

Recent research with over 4,000 young people in Australia found that only 16 per cent of students, on average, have a good to strong understanding of pathways through VET, apprenticeships and traineeships. By comparison, 49 per cent of students claimed to have a good or strong understanding of university pathways (Shiple & Stubble, 2018). The 2019 On Track survey also showed that Year 12 completers (or equivalent) were more likely to have attended a university information session organised by the school than a TAFE information session organised by the school (DET, 2020e).

Reasons given by students as to why they had 'no idea' about what they wanted to do when they leave school included a lack of exposure to different careers (77 per cent), a lack of knowledge of all options (67 per cent) and a lack of career advice/support (55 per cent) (Shiple & Stubble, 2018, p. 35). Students were also concerned about bias in career advice towards university pathways, with 46 per cent of young people claiming they faced 'too much' pressure from their school to enter university and only 10 per cent saying they faced no pressure at all (Shiple & Stubble, 2018, p. 38). Parents were also likely to encourage their children towards university (Wyman et al., 2017).

There may be several real or perceived reasons for career advice bias towards university pathways, including that most teachers and career advisers are likely to be university educated themselves and may not have personal experiences with the VET sector.

The recent Shergold Review similarly found that non-university or blended pathways were less well understood than university pathways. For example, many teachers have limited career education knowledge, especially of non-university or blended pathways, and career advisers tended to know more about university selection procedures than apprenticeship requirements (Shergold et al., 2020). Parents also indicated they were less aware of vocational pathways and training options (Di Marzio et al., 2020).

The Department has informed the Review that it is providing PD to career practitioners and other relevant staff, including VET and VCAL teachers, in government schools to redress this knowledge imbalance. The Department is also providing these practitioners and teachers further information on national, state and local labour market data and employment trends.

To ensure senior secondary options are tailored to the needs of individual students, all school staff need to have a comprehensive knowledge of the diverse range of learning pathways and post-school pathways that are possible. All pathways need to be valued and celebrated to ensure students are aware of their options. Recent career education reforms are a platform from which to build and realise these opportunities.



Finding 25

A balanced career education is important for informed student decision-making about post-school pathways. However, university pathways are better understood by school career advisers, teachers and students than applied learning and vocational pathways.

10.3.2 Insufficient work experience opportunities

Some stakeholders raised concerns about the lack of work experience options in schools, options that provide students with an opportunity to observe and learn in a work environment. The value of work experience in developing work-related knowledge was recognised by stakeholders:

Workplace exposure helps students understand the reality of work, make career choices, build networks and link classroom learning to employment.

Inner Northern LLEN, submission

Work experience is typically undertaken by students in Years 9 and 10 to enable them to develop employability skills, explore possible career options, understand employer expectations, and increase their self-understanding, maturity, independence and self-confidence (DET, 2020j). Work experience placements are short term and the total number of work experience days cannot exceed 40 days in any school year (or 10 days in any term) (Minister for Education, 2010).

Not all students have the opportunity to undertake work experience. For example, only 20 per cent of schools mandate work experience and 20 per cent do not offer it at all (Local Learning and Employment Network, 2020b). Schools cited various reasons for not offering work experience opportunities, such as the increased compliance requirements of the Child Safe Standards, the administrative burden associated with organising work placements and the challenges with accessing these opportunities. The Structured Workplace Learning Statewide Portal established by the Department supports students and schools to source work experience opportunities, and links them with opportunities available through individual LLENs (as well as SWL and SBAT opportunities).

Some industry stakeholders also saw benefits from work experience as it increases student engagement with and awareness of their industry, but were concerned that work experience is not prioritised in many secondary schools:

The horticultural industry believes that students must be exposed to as many sectors as possible and assistance should be available to assist parents understand their children's choices. Immersion programs are a practical solution, but the lack of focus on traditional work experience or being forced to do it during school holidays is not appropriate.

Nursery and Garden Industry Victoria, submission

The Australian Curriculum: Work Studies was introduced as an optional additional subject for schools to provide Years 9 and 10 students with some structured vocational learning and to develop work-related skills. It aims to ensure that students develop knowledge of the world of work and the importance of lifelong learning and capacities to manage careers, change and transitions in an uncertain and changing future. Applied learning and work exposure (which may include work experience) are integral elements of this curriculum.

In Victoria, uptake of the unit is low due to the crowded curriculum, which is the primary reason it has not been promoted by the VCAA. Anecdotal evidence of its uptake in other states and territories similarly suggests that this unit 'has not been widely taken up due to tight competition for elective space in the timetable at these year levels' (Ithaca Group, 2019, p. 16).

Some of the content in the Work Studies unit could be included in the career resources being developed by the VCAA. In addition to work experience, the Work Studies unit provides other examples of valuable experiences of exposure to work that schools could consider offering, including those experiences that can be delivered in the classroom. Examples include visits from industry experts and private and public enterprises; presentation of labour market research; virtual tours of industries and workplaces; and industry, community, career or problem-based projects. Stakeholders saw value in enhancing access to experiential learning through exposure to work:

Access to experiential learning, through which young people can explore workplaces and meet employers and industry experts is critical.

Brotherhood of St. Laurence, submission

Stakeholders also indicated that the current COVID-19 pandemic environment has seen the emergence of virtual experiences (such as virtual tours of facilities) and that the outcomes of online access are worth exploring further (Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, submission).

The Department should consider how lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic could be applied to enhance access to work exposure opportunities, such as through the creation of virtual work-related experiences.



Finding 26

Opportunities for exposure to the world of work, including work experience, support students to make links between learning and work, and to develop work-related knowledge.

10.3.3 Opportunities to enhance career education

Building on the recent career education reforms for government schools, there is an opportunity to support enhanced career education in relation to applied learning and vocational pathways:

With high school providing a pivotal gateway for young people entering various industries, occupations and educational pathways, it is important that all opportunities are portrayed accurately and equally. Currently, this is not reflected in youth's understanding and consideration of different post-school options ...

Shipley and Stubbley (2018, p. 38)

Planning tool to map career-related initiatives

During consultations with stakeholders, the Review heard about a variety of initiatives that are successfully being implemented to support the delivery of career education in secondary schools. As some of these initiatives were recently implemented, their full impact remains unknown. These initiatives include the positively received 'transforming career education' reforms. Other initiatives are still in development, such as the development of Victorian Curriculum F–10 resources by the VCAA.

To support schools and NSSSPs bring all of these initiatives together, the Department should develop a planning tool that can help schools and NSSSPs to map all work-related activities. Schools should be expected to provide a clear account of how career education is expressed in their curriculum and other career-related offerings for students in Years 7–12. Such an account could include career development and planning activities, work experience, immersion opportunities and other initial learning of the workplace, and could draw on established frameworks (e.g. the Work Studies unit in the Australian Curriculum, VCE Industry and Enterprise units and the Certificate I in Employment Pathways).

This career mapping tool could be used to support coaching conversations with schools about the value and role of career education and work-related activities. It could also be used internally by schools and NSSSPs to identify other opportunities for students to participate in work exposure activities and support capability building for school leaders, teachers and career advisers.

Access to labour market analysis and information on higher-level VET pathways

Research suggests that career advisers struggle to keep up with the 'rapidly changing world of work, which impacts the quality and accuracy of advice provided to students in school' (Shipley & Stubbley, 2018, p.37).

Given the impact that informed career advice can have in raising student awareness of areas with good job prospects and those with growth and emerging industries, the Department should provide schools and NSSSPs with up-to-date, credible and localised labour market data showing the diversity of available pathways through both training and university. Central provision of this information will ensure consistency of advice for senior secondary students, could alleviate bias towards university pathways and puts the onus on career advisers to educate themselves about the pathways that are highlighted in the labour market data.

The Review acknowledges that the Australian Government's National Careers Institute (NCI) intends to strengthen the delivery of career information and a digital platform will be launched to provide a central online location for the most relevant, up-to-date and accurate career data. The Productivity Commission's interim recommendation that the information on the NCI be 'salient to students, trusted, used and interpreted correctly' is crucial to its effectiveness in informing student choice (Productivity Commission, 2020, p. 46). myfuture, another resource funded by Australian governments, is designed to offer unbiased career and occupation information (e.g. labour market information) that is explicitly aligned to identified interests, values and skills, and to their associated university and VET courses (Education Services Australia, 2020).

Decisions about higher-level VET pathways will also be enhanced by more granular information on graduate outcomes from VET qualifications, including graduate occupations. Research has found that there is a weak relationship between the jobs that VET graduates attain and the occupation that the VET qualification is designed to prepare students for. This discrepancy means that job outlook information will be insufficient to prepare students for informed decision-making about VET courses (Moschion et al., 2019). More granular information is an especially important factor in this decision, given the current skills shortage in many industry areas that need more young people interested in vocational pathways (Vocational worker, online survey).

The Department's dissemination of additional information should also include information about pathways to higher-level VET qualifications as well as pathways between VET and university. Such information could help to challenge the common misconception that VCAL only leads to VET:

the development of a suite of government-endorsed resources, explaining applied learning and pathway options, would be an asset. These resources would be designed to facilitate access to information; quality assured in content and accuracy of detail; presented in easily accessible language and highly engaging formats; and readily available to share at key pathways events and activities such as information sessions, and downloadable for use through various media avenues, for the benefit of students and their families.

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, submission

All teachers play an important role in guiding students develop their career aspirations and plans. As such, information regarding industry pathways should also be aimed at teachers and trainers, as well as career advisers.



RECOMMENDATION 33

The Department, with the VCAA, should support enhanced career education relating to applied learning and vocational pathways in all schools by:

- developing a planning tool that enables schools and non-school senior secondary providers to map their work-related activities
- supplying schools and non-school senior secondary providers with up-to-date, credible and localised labour market information showing the diversity of pathways possible through both vocational and applied training and university.

Additional reforms for consideration

- Additional reforms that the Department could explore to enhance career education include:
- promoting myfuture to students and families
- providing greater support, particularly for regional and rural students, to attend TAFE and university open days and information sessions: this could include TAFEs and universities running outreach sessions in rural schools, access to virtual tours and online information sessions (which most tertiary institutions are offering in the current COVID-19 climate)
- developing strategies that encourage and support schools and career advisers to work more collaboratively with industry and industry associations to better understand what jobs are in the market and what skills are needed.

11

Senior
secondary
outcomes





The VCAL, VDSS and SBATs in the senior secondary framework are designed to meet the fundamental purpose of facilitating and preparing students for successful post-school pathways (Chapter 2 details this purpose). The outcomes that are measured, reported and used to inform policy should also ultimately reflect this purpose.

The lack of system-level data that reflects the purpose of vocational and applied learning, and specifically VCAL, VDSS and SBATs, has prevented appropriate evaluation of whether this purpose has been achieved. For example, unlike the VCE which has a strong focus on the achievement of study scores, there is limited collection of achievement data for VCAL. This gap means that much focus on VCAL student outcomes relates to completion rates, which is believed by many stakeholders to be an inappropriately narrow indicator of success.

The Review visited some schools delivering high-quality programs that collected their own additional post-school destination data at a local level for two to three years (and sometimes longer) following student completion of school. For example, in addition to data on apprentice completion rates, Harvester Technical College collects post-school pathways information such as employment destinations. This data collection, and subsequent promotion of post-school pathways, sets a school culture that values successful transitions.

The lack of vocational and applied learning data in system performance and reporting frameworks reinforces perceptions by schools that VCE and VCAL are not equally valued. The Department's approach to outcomes measurement and reporting and to school accountability should treat and value the outcomes of students on vocational and applied learning pathways to the same extent as it does for the outcomes of other senior secondary students.

11.1 Data collection and outcomes reporting

Public reporting of and commentary on senior secondary outcomes are primarily centred around the VCE—the ATAR and study scores. When results are published in December, there is a public narrative that, among other things, links VCE achievement with positive post-school pathways. The community understands the relationship between the ATAR, study scores and prospects of entering university, albeit in a simplistic way.

Public discussion of university entry is largely based on an obsolete but persistent notion that virtually all post-school university selection relies solely on ATAR scores. This belief does not reflect the reality that the selection criteria of many courses entail additional information, some requiring only VCE graduation with alternative means such as a folio, auditions or interviews. Equally, entry via higher-level VET is rarely discussed. ATAR is still important but it is by no means the only means for students to enter university, either directly from school or subsequently. Nonetheless, this emphasis in the media and public discourse repeats every year, reiterating and reinforcing the relationship between achievement in the VCE and successful outcomes:

Undue emphasis on the ATAR diminishes the value attached to the importance of vocational education pathways, often determines the allocation of school resources, and places additional mental stress on students who think that their lives will be dependent on how they perform in the end-of-Year-12 examinations that significantly influence the ATAR score.

Shergold et al. (2020, p. 43)

The VCAA's publication of senior secondary results in December also include VCAL and VET unit completions. However, insufficient granularity in these results means they are largely overlooked in public commentary and student success stories. Community understanding of VCAL outcomes are limited to inspiring anecdotal stories focused on individual successes, such as the VCAL Achievement Awards. If there were more granular measures of achievement for VCAL as well as clear evidence linking these measures to post-school outcomes, there might also be a wider public conversation linking VCAL achievement and student outcomes at a system level.

Recommendation 1 includes more granular assessment and reporting of vocational and applied learning subjects and Recommendation 17 includes scored assessment of more VCE-VET subjects. These recommendations will enable greater consideration of VCAL and VCE-VET subjects and their outcomes in reporting frameworks.

The lack of measures and data collection on VCAL and VDSS achievement and the overemphasis on VCE results reinforce perceptions held by schools, the system and the broader community that senior secondary success is associated with the VCE and ATAR.



Finding 27

Public dialogue on senior secondary outcomes is unbalanced and focuses on the VCE, reinforcing widely held perceptions of VCE results and their positive post-school outcomes.

11.2 Performance, reporting and improvement frameworks

Performance, reporting and improvement frameworks use data on student outcomes to set system expectations for performance, drive improvement, inform decision-making across the system and specifically in relation to government schools. While some reported outcomes relate to all sectors, more granular outcomes are reported in relation to government schools.

The Department monitors and reports system performance through:

- Education State targets
- State Budget performance measures
- Department's Outcomes Framework.

The outcomes captured at the system level are reflected across regional and school performance and reporting frameworks. Regions use Regional Performance Frameworks, diagnostic reports, supporting dashboards and bespoke analyses to inform their planning processes.

The Department also works closely with government schools, providing them with data and support through reports, data dashboards and other means.

11.2.1 DET Outcomes Framework

The Department's Outcomes Framework is designed to provide evidence to inform strategic decisions and enable the monitoring and evaluation of contributors to student outcomes. The Outcomes Framework covers children, students and learners across the life course from early childhood to school education to tertiary education in the domains of engagement, achievement and wellbeing. Some outcomes are of students across all school sectors while others are only measured across government schools.

The outcomes, indicators and measures in the Framework are informed by best practice from national and international research and are aligned with the Department's strategic goals. They are reviewed every three years to keep pace with emerging evidence and to ensure they continue to be in line with strategic priorities.

Measures for student engagement and wellbeing domains of the Outcomes Framework are identical for all senior secondary students. However, the achievement domain uses measures that depend on a student's senior secondary enrolment and subject selection, which can create inequalities in reporting as only the results of VCE students are included.

The Outcomes Framework describes three long-term achievement outcomes for school students (DET, 2017):

- School-aged students have the literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills they need to actively participate in the economy.
- School-aged students have the 21st century skills they need to support active engagement in a knowledge economy.
- Young people leaving school access pathways to further education or employment.

However, the measures of these achievement outcomes do not always relate to senior secondary. For example, many of the outcomes for literacy and numeracy skills are measured using Year 9 NAPLAN results and Program for International Student Assessment results (which are also Year 9).

The achievement measures that are specific to senior secondary are:

- Year 12 or equivalent completion rates
- the proportion of early school leavers transitioning to further education or employment
- the proportion of Year 12 completers transitioning to university, VET or employment
- the proportion of students with a VCE English study score of 40+
- the proportion of students with a VCE Maths study score of 40+
- the proportion of students with a VCE Science study score of 40+.

Additionally, other measures of student outcomes—both in senior secondary and other years, are:

- the proportion of students who are positive about teacher effectiveness
- the proportion of students who have a positive perception of overall school climate
- the proportion of students who have a positive perception of classroom behaviour
- the proportion of students who have a positive perception of their ability as a student
- the proportion of students who are motivated to achieve and learn.

The Outcomes Framework is complemented by the relevant Regional Performance Framework and individual school's School Performance Reports.

The Review heard that performance and accountability discussions at the school, region and state level often had a too narrow focus on VCE study scores and very little on vocational and applied learning outcomes (see Chapter 3.3.2). For example, a measure might consider mean VCE English score, which completely disregards the performance of most VCAL students. Recommendation 1 includes the enhanced assessment of applied learning subjects, which will support their greater consideration in the Outcomes Framework.

11.2.2 Education State targets

Nine Education State targets were developed in four areas to measure progress towards:

- student development of skills needed to succeed in life
- student health and resilience
- reduction of disengagement and the effect of disadvantage on student achievement
- community confidence in our government school system (DET, 2020c).

Only one of the Education State targets is directly related to senior secondary education—halving the proportion of students leaving education during Years 9 to 12 by 2025.

While retention is important, it is only a partial indicator of whether senior secondary education is meeting the purpose. Completing secondary school is a means to successfully transition to post-school education—an outcome that is not included as an Education State target.

11.2.3 Post-school destinations

The On Track survey collects cross-sectoral destination data from students who completed Year 12 or its equivalent ('completers') or left school in either Year 10, 11 or 12 ('early leavers'). On Track utilises online and Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) technology to collect as many survey responses as possible from completers and early leavers. In 2019, the survey obtained responses from 46 per cent of Year 12 completers and 13 per cent of early leavers.

Post-school destinations for government school students are also recorded in the CASES21 database. The CASES21 data is relied on more extensively than the On Track data in diagnostic reports, Regional Performance Frameworks and early school leaver calculations.

11.2.4 Literacy and numeracy attainment

The measurement and reporting of senior secondary literacy and numeracy attainment will provide school completers with clear and explicit information to support them to choose future learning pathways. This data will also provide information at a school, regional and state level about the relative levels of literacy and numeracy attainment.

The Outcomes Framework identifies outcome measures that correspond with the policy purpose of senior secondary (see Chapter 2), of which vocational and applied learning is a subset. However, very little data is collected to measure and report on senior secondary outcomes in vocational and applied learning. There is also a lack of data on post-school preparedness, including student performance on general capabilities. While general capabilities are a component of the Victorian Curriculum F-10, they are not assessed, measured or reported in senior secondary.

The lack of general capabilities reporting in senior secondary makes it more difficult to evaluate the preparedness of students for post-school destinations. There is considerable work to be done before a set of general capabilities can be accurately and reliably measured and reported. Participation in jurisdictional collaboration to progress research and development in this area would be worthwhile.

In the meantime, the lack of information on general capabilities makes it more important that destinations data is collected and reported. The Outcomes Framework could complement destinations data with measures of career education use and confidence to provide more information about student preparedness.



Finding 28

While the outcomes and measures for Education State targets and the Outcomes Framework are broad and aspirational, the lack of achievement data for VCAL students means that current measurement and reporting focus disproportionately on VCE performance.

11.2.5 Assessment of good practice

The only achievement data on VCAL and VDSS (excluding scored VCE-VET subjects) is unit and certificate completions and post-school destinations six months after school completion.

The Review visited many schools with high-quality applied learning programs, but evaluation of these programs relied on qualitative, and in most cases, anecdotal evidence. It is not possible to evaluate the quality of applied learning programs using current performance and reporting frameworks. Many government school leaders reported that the effort they put into VCAL programs is not recognised by Departmental measures.

Characteristics of high-quality programs observed by the Review includes leadership that prioritises vocational and applied learning in staffing decisions and celebrations; personalised curriculum that incorporates real-life skills; a critical mass of students; community, industry and employer partnerships; and applied learning programs in Years 7–10 (see Chapter 3.1.1). There is little data being collected on these characteristics to assess program quality and to inform improvement frameworks.

Schools also reported that VCAL and VET are not typically part of school performance frameworks such as School Strategic Plans, Annual Improvement Plans and Principal Class Performance and Development Plans. The data currently available does not allow the preparedness of students to transition to post school pathways to be evaluated or any assessment of the ability of students to succeed in civic and personal life. Academic performance is used as a proxy for assessment of VCE students, which has limited relevance to the purpose of senior secondary. Additionally, as there is no comparable measure for VCAL or most VDSS subjects, they get left out of school improvement frameworks.



Finding 29

Limited data being collected on vocational and applied learning makes it difficult to assess the quality of its practice.

11.3 Vocational and applied learning outcomes

A re-imagined Outcomes Framework for vocational and applied learning needs to reflect the primary purpose of VCAL, VDSS and SBATs, which is to facilitate and prepare students for successful post-school pathways.

Stakeholders highlighted that little data is centrally collected and collated on how VCAL students are tracking and performing at school, and that the data collected needs to reflect student enrolments, progress, outcomes, attainment and transitions (Ai Group, submission). The range of outcomes that are measured and reported for VCAL are too limited and do not adequately reflect student achievement and pathways. Conversely, a focus on VCAL completion rates also masks the range of successful post-school pathways that VCAL students may and do take:

VCAL students achieve much more than can be conveyed by the simple acknowledgement of completing their course.

Victorian TAFE Association, submission

Stakeholders also emphasised that a successful outcome is highly dependent on each student's circumstances, which should be considered in outcomes reporting:

Successful outcomes for VCAL students [are] varied and complex and really depends on the student, the students background, expectations and support level from those around them. For some students they are only ever going to complete Intermediate VCAL due to varying circumstances, but this is success.

Former Principal, online survey

11.3.1 Definition of a 'successful' pathway

The Outcomes Framework should incorporate enhanced information on the post-school pathways of vocational and applied learners, including those students who do not complete Year 12.

Stakeholders had varying views on what 'successful' outcomes for vocational and applied learning students are and stressed that the definition of 'success' was dependent on the student:

Students finding a pathway, an entry point towards into a working life that they can be confident in and find security through opportunities to make money. For students who want to, transitioning into a full-time apprenticeship, is certainly a successful student outcome. Going into an apprenticeship, post-school education, training and work can be the best shift for some students. To hold young people who are ready and crying out for such a transition at school longer to try to serve them a senior secondary certificate could be detrimental to them. School is often not the right environment for some students to grow and flourish.

VCAL teacher, online survey

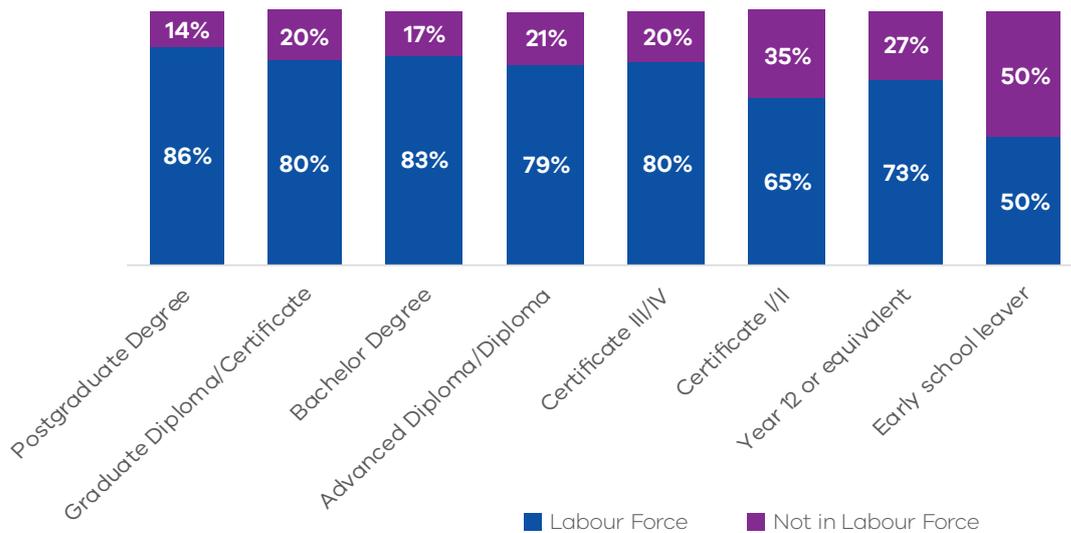
For most people, education is associated with better employment, income and broader health and wellbeing outcomes:

Individuals with higher levels of education have higher paying jobs, better general health, and a lower likelihood of engaging in crime. They also gain from a range of family household benefits, such as more effective household management and care of their children's health and education.

Lamb and Huo (2017, p. 10)

Income generally increases with educational attainment. For example, earnings for university qualified workers is more than 20 per cent higher than workers with a secondary school qualification (ABS, 2016).

The likelihood of labour force participation also increases with educational attainment. In 2019, people with a Certificate III or higher had higher labour force participation rates than those with lower-level certificates or secondary school qualifications (Figure 10).

Figure - 10 **Labour force status by educational attainment, 2019**

Source: ABS (2019)

While post-school education has the greatest impact on employment outcomes, transitioning directly to an employment that includes some form of training is a positive outcome. Several special school stakeholders emphasised that gaining meaningful employment in a student's study area should be considered a success—a view shared by an industry peak body:

Special schools that transition high proportions of their students direct from school to work are setting their students up for independent futures, but this is invisible in most measures of school success.

Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, submission

Students' initial transition out of senior secondary is associated with the relative success of their longer-term outcomes. For example, an initial transition into problematic post-school destinations (part-time employment, unemployment or not in the labour force, education or training) results in greater likelihood of remaining at risk in later years. Students who went to university (including those who initially deferred), became apprentices, trainees or started full-time employment were most likely to remain in full-time work or full-time study (Walstab & Lamb, 2007).

There were a range of views on whether a successful outcome includes transitioning to full-time work. While many school staff considered this a success, not all jobs lead to long-term career paths. Some full-time jobs may lead to other jobs; most career paths require further training. It is unlikely that Year 12 qualifications on their own are enough for a long-term career. Employment projections for jobs not requiring a post-school qualification are forecast to fall by 13 per cent over the next 15 years (Deloitte Access Economics, 2019). Young people are likely to have much more secure employment options if they transition into employment that includes a training component.

A student transitioning to further education or training is likely to have more secure employment and higher incomes over their lifetime.



Finding 30

A successful post–senior secondary outcome for a student is transitioning to university, higher-level VET or employment that has a vocational training component.

11.3.2 Targets to guide progress

The Review proposes that Victoria should set a target for student’s post-school engagement in education, training or employment whose progress is measured by indicators of successful transition to post-school education and training. This target and its indicators would reposition senior secondary education as the bridge between compulsory schooling and post-school training and university. The target would also acknowledge the credit across education sectors, bringing together educational engagement in both secondary and post-secondary sectors.

Indicators for this target should comprise at least two measures:

- the percentage of Victorians who have attained a senior secondary qualification or equivalent by the age of 24
- the percentage of Victorians at the age of 19 who are engaged in full-time post-school education or employment with a vocational training component.

Continued engagement with education at the age of 19 is a primary indicator of a student’s post-school pathway. Combining senior secondary completions with post-school destinations will overcome limitations of current retention and completion measures, each of which only provides a partial picture of success. For example, this measure will capture a student who does not complete senior secondary but successfully transitions into an apprenticeship or traineeship.

Measuring educational engagement and attainment at 19 and 24 years of acknowledges that young people out of senior secondary are continuing to explore different pathways, have different needs and timing, trajectories and aspirations. Lamb et al. (2015, p. 70) argued that:

[b]y age 24 many young people have completed their post-school study and are seeking to establish themselves in the workforce. It is an important age at which to measure how well our education and training system has served them and set them up for their careers and their wellbeing more broadly.

About 83 per cent of Victorians attain a Year 12 or equivalent by the age of 19 (ABS, 2016). In 2019, about 80 per cent of Victorians aged 19 attained a senior secondary qualification (VCAA, 2020). Additionally, about 3 per cent of Victorians aged 19 attained a Certificate III or higher qualification without a senior secondary qualification (ABS, 2016).

Year 12 equivalence should be defined as completion of a Certificate III or above. Certificate III should be the minimum requirement due to the volume, complexity of skills and knowledge equivalence to senior secondary, as well as the positive pathways of Certificate III compared to that of Certificates I or II (Keating et al., 2012; Lim & Karmel, 2011). In addition, Certificate III is often the minimum or entry-level qualification for an occupation. Mackenzie and Coulson (2015, p. 121) found that:

too many students are failing to complete their qualifications at a Certificate I or II level or go on to further training or employment ... students enrolled in Certificate I and II programs have consistently worse outcomes than Certificate III students.

The ABS Survey of Education and Work currently measures education levels by age; its data could be a source from which to measure this target.



RECOMMENDATION 34

The Department should adopt as a target the a proportion of 24-year-olds who are engaged in full-time education, training or employment. The Department should also adopt indicators of successful transitions to post-school education and training that include the following measures:

- the percentage of Victorians aged 24 years who have attained a senior secondary qualification or equivalent
- the percentage of Victorians aged 19 years who are engaged in full-time education, training or employment with a vocational training component.

11.3.3 Enhanced monitoring of post-school destinations

There is a need to enhance the tracking of students beyond secondary school to obtain an accurate picture of outcomes for vocational and applied learners. Improved data linkage is required to achieve this.

Data on student pathways is currently limited to destinations recorded in CASES21 (for government schools) and the On Track survey. The On Track survey is facing low and declining response rates, which limits understanding of short-term outcomes for both early leavers and Year 12 completers. Exploration of options to improve the response rate is necessary and would improve the value of this data collection.

In addition, the On Track survey only monitors destination outcomes six months after leaving school. Stakeholders were supportive of collecting more post-school destination data for vocational and applied learners, including information past the first year post school:

More post-school destination data should be collected and monitored to help the system, parents, higher and further education selection officers and the public to understand the personal, educational and skill development outcomes for vocational and applied learners.

Victorian TAFE Association, submission

Such monitoring is particularly important if the system is committed to schools being accountable for providing an appropriate pathway for all students who start in Year 7.

Longer-term data on student destinations also needs to be available to ensure schools are making reasonable attempts to re-engage identified students who are not in further education, training or secure employment. The Reducing Early Leavers Project did this and used the findings to contact students who had disengaged from education (see Chapter 6.3).

However, longer-term data is difficult to collect. A national policy initiative under the National School Reform Agreement is to implement a national unique student identifier (USI) to support a better understanding of student progression and improve the national evidence base. This initiative could support the collection of longer-term destination data for students, particularly those students going on to further education and training.

Shergold et al. (2020) recommended that governments should continue to invest in longitudinal studies, such as the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth, the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children and the HILDA Survey.

Data linkage

The cost of longitudinal data limits their collection and expansion. However, this can be worked around by the linkage of education data (including data on school, training and university) with employment and welfare data, which would inform greater understanding of post-school pathways:

access to more longitudinal destination data, which includes linking students that have previously undertaken VCAL, VET delivered to school students and SBATs, may help to capture and track outcomes for students that have pursued vocational and applied learning pathways.

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, submission

Post-school destinations data and secondary school data should be linked to provide a comprehensive picture of student pathways. The NSW Government has undertaken a comprehensive data linkage project to understand education pathways (see Case Study 23). The Review understands that in Victoria, the Department has begun linking and analysing data across school and sectors (e.g. school and training sectors). Building on and further linking school data with post-secondary education data to capture post-school outcomes will allow the Department to explore the impacts of policy changes on longterm outcomes.

CASE STUDY 23

Pathways for the Future: Education-to-work pathways in NSW

The NSW Department of Education is linking data on school education with post-school education, social security and income tax data to obtain greater insight into how people move through different parts of the education system and labour market across their lifetime.

This project draws on data collected on 3.5 million people who were aged 15 to 24 in New South Wales between 1996 and 2016. It will analyse the different pathways taken, determine individual and education factors that contribute to a 'successful' pathway and identify labour market trends and issues.

The findings will contribute to place-based approaches in areas experiencing high unemployment as well as inform local and state government education and employment policies.

Source: Quantum (2019), Training Services NSW (2019)

Understanding post-school pathways and the factors that lead to successful student transitions is important for policy design and informing future government investment. While the Department should continue existing data collection, it should also explore further data linkage of education, employment and welfare data.

**RECOMMENDATION 35**

The Department should continue to invest in longitudinal data collections and post-school survey data while also exploring opportunities for data linkage.

11.3.4 Retention

An estimated 10,000 Victorian students disengage from education each year (Bracks, 2015). Some may re-engage, but an estimated 13 per cent of all young people struggle to remain connected to employment or education (Lamb and Huo 2017).

Secondary schools should be aiming to retain as close to 100 per cent of their Year 7 student intake as possible. Government schools should be held accountable for the outcomes of their Year 7 cohort (see Chapter 6.3 for more detail). Such accountability requires better collection of data post-school outcomes and data linkage. The Victorian Student Number should be more widely used to track students between schools and sectors.

The Department could also provide more finely grained data and measure retention across senior secondary certificates. While many factors influence retention, measuring the proportion of students who remain in education across different senior secondary certificate would improve evaluation of program quality.

11.3.5 Completions

Leaving school early may be a positive outcome for some students, but as a rule students should be encouraged to complete senior secondary education. Completing senior secondary education ensures students have a better chance of long-term secure employment outcomes. In addition, young people have better training outcomes if they start their traineeship or apprenticeship at an older age. Completion rates are higher among apprentices and trainees over the age of 25 than among younger apprentices and trainees. Additionally, adult completion rates have been steadily increasing over time while completion rates among younger apprentices are falling:

If you can't last at school until year 12, then you have a much less chance of lasting through an apprenticeship.

Employer, as cited in Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry submission

Stakeholders held differing views on whether completing VCAL is necessary, or even desirable. Many stakeholders indicated that VCAL students exiting early is a successful outcome if they move into full-time employment or further training. Stakeholders generally perceived that employment, especially an apprenticeship, should be recorded as a successful outcome rather than as non-completion:

The view of the system that a student leaving mid-year for an apprenticeship is a failure needs to be challenged.

School leader, Inner East Principal forum

Several teachers explained that students who do not complete the VCAL but successfully transition to further training in their chosen vocation, should not be regarded as having failed. For example, in current reporting, a student may be eligible to complete VCAL, undertakes a work placement, exits the school system and transitions into a full-time apprenticeship. While this is a positive outcome according to post-school destinations reporting, it is a negative outcome for completion:

I believe I have been successful as a VCAL teacher if I have no students in my class by the end of the year, provided of course, they have all successfully transitioned into vocations that provide ongoing training. Every school reviewer in recent years has indicated we are failing as our completion rates are well below 100%, despite the fact that our town has the lowest youth unemployment in the State.

Current VCAL coordinator, online survey

Longitudinal studies found that apprentices and trainees had significantly more secure employment outcomes, which suggest that leaving secondary school early for the purpose of entering an apprenticeship or traineeship is a successful strategy for transitioning to secure employment (Walstab & Lamb, 2007).

However, this outcome is not universal. Stakeholders highlighted issues for students who have no safety net to fall back on if they cannot complete an apprenticeship or traineeship through no fault of their own (e.g. the business closes).

Some stakeholders emphasised that senior secondary school completion should be prioritised, with early leaving supported only in particular circumstances. For example, SBAT students who transition to full-time apprenticeships are an exception. In these circumstances students and employers are making an informed choice, having established a relationship and completed enough work-based training for both parties to understand what they have signed up for.

In contrast, exiting school for a Certificate III is less likely to lead to secure long-term employment. Further, apprenticeships and traineeships often rely on limited training packages (see Chapters 7 and 8).

While the Review notes that leaving secondary school early to start a full-time apprenticeship or traineeship may be a positive outcome for some students, where possible, students should be encouraged to complete their senior secondary qualification. Doing so ensures they are equipped with the necessary literacy and numeracy skills for today's labour market:

Completion of year 12. This is a given. Particularly in the trades. Employers often stress that they want students to have a minimum of year 12 completed. This is often driven by feedback related to maturity of the student, the level of skill acquisition or competency attainment, or practical requirements of the student being 18 and over so they can get a vehicle licence.

Current VCAL teacher, online survey



Finding 31

The Department should continue to monitor and report on student completion, noting it is only a partial indication of successful outcomes.

Measuring and reporting on completion data

Some principals suggested that while completion and non-completion should continue to be recorded as an important measure of VCAL outcomes, more granular data should also be collected, such as the reasons for non-completion and the student's destination.

VCAL unit results are recorded as 'Complete' and 'Not yet complete'. Many students have a 'Not yet complete' result because they complete VCAL—either at a unit or certificate level—over multiple calendar years. However, only about half of the students who do not complete a VCAL unit or certificate re-enrol the following year. Combining students who roll over their enrolment and students who genuinely fail to complete a unit or certificate may be an inaccurate estimate of completion rates.

Recording the reasons for not completing senior secondary will allow more granularity in the reporting of senior secondary outcomes. Such granularity is particularly useful given that VCAL is designed to be flexible and enable students to take multiple years to complete the certificate.



RECOMMENDATION 36

The VCAA should review and update the completion data collected on VCAL, to record reasons for non-completion and to exclude those students who receive a 'Not yet complete' because they are continuing with their senior secondary studies in subsequent years.

11.3.6 Additional data needs and considerations

Senior secondary outcomes, such as completions, academic achievement and post-school transitions can tell us how well senior secondary is preparing students to succeed in post-school education or training and employment. Yet, the data that is currently collected is limited and insufficient for the purposes of assessing the effectiveness of senior secondary education.

There are four capabilities taught in the Victorian Curriculum F–10, and all VCE study designs include employability skills. However, emphasis on employability skills in individual subjects is varied. VCAL has a stronger emphasis on capabilities in its Personal Development Skills Strand, but these capabilities are not measured or reported at a state level. Some surveys measure and report on student capabilities; however, these are not directly aligned to the capabilities in the Victorian Curriculum F–10 or the senior secondary qualifications. For example, civics and citizenship education aims to make students informed and active citizens and the National Assessment Program for Civics and Citizenship measures student knowledge and understanding of this learning area (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016).

Shergold et al. (2020) highlighted the lack of reporting of achievement of capabilities in senior secondary qualifications, and recommended that jurisdictions agree on common definitions across education and training systems and develop appropriate standards for Years 11 and 12. Such an undertaking would require a commitment to a substantial development project, given the complexity of developing an agreed set of fair, accurate and reliable measures that would be consistently reported.

The Review endorses Shergold et al.'s recommendations. Improved measurement and reporting of capabilities across the F–10 and the senior secondary curriculum would enable assessment of how well our education is preparing students for personal and civic life. The VCAA has undertaken substantial work in developing the assessment and reporting of capabilities for the Victorian Curriculum F–10. This important work can be the basis for possible further development of additional outcome measures for senior secondary years.



RECOMMENDATION 37

The VCAA and Department should work with other jurisdictions to develop common indicators of capabilities and associated measurement and reporting for the Victorian Curriculum F–10 and the senior secondary curriculum. The VCAA should explore the potential to extend its work on assessment and reporting of capabilities for the Victorian Curriculum to the senior secondary curriculum.

Stakeholders also pointed to the need to collect more data on the senior secondary years, including more granular data that can be used to distinguish between different senior secondary student pathways. To assess the efficacy of different programs, stakeholders are interested in obtaining access to engagement and attendance information that can be disaggregated according to student program. Data collected through existing surveys, such as the Attitudes to School Survey of government school students, could also be disaggregated according to student program. For example, a stakeholder at an Area Principal Forum indicated that information relating to resilience, motivation and self-efficacy in the Attitudes to School Survey should be made available to schools:

Given the often negative perception of VCAL as a program, I think it is important to collect data on student attitudes to the program. Students that feel proud of their program and appreciate its rigour and effectiveness in teaching them, will have better outcomes.

Current VCAL teacher, online survey

The Department could use this more granular data in its performance and reporting frameworks and to assess the quality of vocational and applied learning programs, such as by comparing satisfaction between and across cohorts (even within a single certificate). Providing schools and regions with more disaggregated information on their senior secondary students would provide a more comprehensive nuanced picture of senior secondary programs.

The Department should also collect more information on employer–school relationships and work-based learning activities to inform policy and ensure all students can access work-based learning as part of their senior secondary education. This information may be less relevant if senior secondary certificates are fully integrated (Recommendation 9).

Stakeholders highlighted a need for more detailed data on certificate and unit completions. While this data is available for government schools via supplementary reports and school information portal, it is not available for Catholic or independent schools:

it would be of value for individual schools to have access to a more detailed analysis of their own VCAL data ... access to reports, for example, on aggregated completion rates for individual VCAL units and aggregated completion rates for respective VCAL certificates would similarly present a catalyst for analysing student achievement outcomes.

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, submission

There is currently no data that clearly measures VDSS provider quality. VDSS has multiple purposes and students may enrol in VDSS for more than one reason. This heterogeneity makes it difficult to characterise quality through a single metric.

The Department, regions and schools would benefit from data that captures VDSS student experiences and outcomes, especially their post-school transitions. This data should be collected and incorporated into the Outcomes Frameworks and performance reporting. The improved data linkage referred to in Recommendation 35 will support but not fully address this data gap.

The Review found it difficult to source up-to-date information on a number of employer-based activities, such as the number of students who participated in work experience or SWL, or information about industry–school engagements.

Students' work-based activities have been shown to improve post-school outcomes, including the increased likelihood of secure employment (e.g. see Foundation for Young Australians, 2018; Polidano & Tabasso, 2014). Having more information would enable a better understanding of the work-based learning opportunities that are available for students, and help inform policy on employer–school relationships:

data on work learning activities and outcomes should be collected and examples of best practice used as evidence to schools not offering VCAL or wanting to improve existing programs, and to encourage businesses into work learning programs.

Ai Group, submission

Vocational and applied learning outcomes should reflect the purpose of senior secondary, which is to prepare students for successful post-school pathways. Measuring and reporting more granular data would introduce a more meaningful and nuanced narrative of vocational and applied learning and post-secondary success.



RECOMMENDATION 38

Schools should be provided with more granular senior secondary data:

- the Department should provide schools with results of existing surveys, such as the Attitudes to School Survey and School Staff Survey, broken down by cohort and senior secondary program
- the VCAA should collect and provide schools with more detailed and disaggregated results on unit completion as well as achievement, enrolment and satisfactory completion, similar to the reports produced on the VCE
- the Department should collect more information on VDSS outcomes, student experiences and student engagement with career education activities, including employer–school relationships, participation in work experience and structured workplace learning.

12

Next steps





The recommendations in this report are intended to operate as a whole but can be progressively rolled out over the next three years. However, their implementation should commence as soon as possible to deliver timely quality improvements to vocational and applied learning pathways and to provide enough lead time for preparatory work on the senior secondary framework. For example, work on many of the recommended reforms can begin immediately to support providers. Too many Victorian students will continue to miss out on a high-quality senior secondary experience unless these reforms are prioritised and expedited.

The implementation of some recommendations may be tied to normal budgetary processes. These recommendations include, for example, increasing VCAA resourcing to support the administration and delivery of vocational curriculum and assessment (Recommendation 4), providing schools with additional support in the form of in-school pathways coordinators (Recommendation 5) and facilitating specialised equipment replacement in TTCs and other VET facilities used by school students (Recommendation 19). Work and support for an enhanced quality assurance process for the existing VCAL certificate could begin from 2021.

Other recommendations can be implemented as part of ongoing Departmental work, including the intensification of the Department's role in developing a place-based approach to the provision of vocational and applied learning pathways (Recommendation 13), reviewing VDSS funding (Recommendation 21), prescribing minimum workplace hours for SBATs (Recommendation 26) and requiring schools to approve SBATs before training contracts are signed (Recommendation 28).

12.1 Senior secondary framework reforms

The senior secondary framework reforms outlined in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 can be sequenced in the following three phases to enable its full implementation in 2023. This timing is subject to adequate resourcing of the VCAA in 2020.

12.1.1 Phase One: Design and accreditation (2021)

The development of a vocational specialisation and improved delivery of vocational and applied learning should be prioritised in 2021.

This phase includes the development of a sequential curriculum and curriculum design of new vocational units, as well as the design of an enhanced Statement of Results (Recommendation 1). In designing the vocational specialisation, the VCAA should clearly articulate the purpose of specialisation and its underpinning principles to ensure that these are translated into practice. Such articulation will also assist with the communications strategy when the vocational specialisation is implemented in 2023.

As this work proceeds, the VCAA can work with the VRQA on the structural requirements for accreditation of the vocational specialisation so that, when the detailed development and design of the curriculum has completed, the work on its accreditation can also be completed expeditiously.

Preparatory work to improve support for program delivery, for example in relation to professional learning, can begin immediately to ensure it is rolled out to providers as soon as possible (Recommendations 4–6). The development of the Foundation Pathways Certificate (Recommendation 10) should also occur in this phase to enable the full senior secondary reform package to be launched at the same time.

Legal advice has been sought on whether legislative changes are required to enable the accreditation and award of the new certificate. If legislative changes are indeed required, preparatory work to enable this to occur must be prioritised in 2021 as such changes take time.

Following the completion of the development and design of the vocational specialisation and the work to embed this within the VCE, the accreditation of a revised VCE qualification can occur in the second half of 2021. Beginning this process as early as possible mitigates the risk that formal accreditation processes will affect the implementation target of 2023. The VRQA should also begin refining VCE registration processes in 2021 to ensure all providers will be registered to deliver the vocational specialisation by 2023.

12.1.2 Phase Two: Preparation and testing (2022)

This phase provides the required time for the revised qualifications to be prepared and tested with stakeholders, and for necessary refinements to be completed.

The communications and program implementation strategies should also be developed in this phase in preparation for implementation in 2023.

12.1.3 Phase Three: Implementation (2023)

The implementation of the reformed senior secondary framework means that the first senior secondary students will be able to commence the vocational specialisation in 2023.

Following the successful implementation of the vocational specialisation in the VCE, focus should shift to the development of a comprehensive plan by the VCAA to transition to an integrated senior certificate.

12.1.4 Complementary reforms

While the senior secondary framework reforms are important and will significantly shift the senior secondary landscape, complementary reforms are needed to ensure that the system works effectively. For example, the rollout of the new vocational specialisation and Foundation Pathways Certificate needs to be accompanied by a renewed promotional strategy (Recommendation 7) to transform perceptions, circulate accurate information and celebrate the enhanced senior secondary reform package.

APPENDIX A

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Largely as a result of significant State Government investment, nearly half a million new jobs have been created in Victoria since 2014. There is unprecedented demand for skilled workers to deliver the State's infrastructure projects and to work in our health, disability and education sectors.

We need to ensure that all Victorian school students are given the opportunity, experiences and training to take part in this jobs boom.

Victoria has some real strengths in vocational and applied learning pathways. The VCAL is unique in the context of Australia. It provides a relatively flexible way of engaging students in vocational learning. Vocational Education and Training delivered to school students (VETiS), which is undertaken as part of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and the VCAL, helps build students' technical skills and understand certain industries and occupations. Students can also commence apprenticeships and traineeships while at school, through a School Based Apprenticeship or Traineeship (SBAT) or a Head Start Apprenticeship and Traineeship.

However, the quality of these programs varies. While some schools deliver well-operating and highly regarded vocational pathway programs, other school's programs are less successful. Unfortunately, this means that some students are not receiving the education they deserve.

Students, parents, employers and other members of the community are unclear of the purpose of vocational and applied learning in schools and how it prepares students for life after school. As a result, perceptions towards VCAL are often negative and in some instances, this extends to VETiS and SBATs. These perceptions can affect students' decision-making about their school and post-school pathways as well as resource decisions made by schools.

Our students, their families, and employers need to be able to trust the quality of vocational and applied learning. Students need better information to support their decision-making and flexibility to achieve their career aspirations. Students also need a genuine choice of pathways that best match their strengths and interests. Employers need to be sure there is a pipeline of talent to give them confidence to invest in Victoria. There is a need to design a clear, consistent, credible and high-quality applied learning system that improves access to, and transitions between, school, post-secondary education and work.

Scope of review

The review will make recommendations to reform vocational and applied learning in senior secondary schooling for VCAL, VETiS and SBATs, with regards to:

Objective of applied learning

- What is the current purpose of VCAL, VETiS and SBATs?
- How well are they meeting their current purpose?
- What should their objectives be?

Design

- How can the quality and rigour of pedagogy, curriculum and assessment in VCAL or VETiS be improved?

- How could VCAL be redesigned to ensure effective pathways and opportunities available to students upon completion of their secondary school education?
- How can VCAL and VETiS better align with the needs of employers and industry?
- How can VCAL and VETiS better prepare students for real jobs in growth industries?
- What should the relationship be between VCAL and other certificates?
- How can students be better supported to make informed decisions about their pathways, and the benefits of applied learning?
- How can a reformed VCAL and VETiS continue to meet the needs of all students who may elect to pursue study in an applied stream, including those with special needs?
- How should VET training packages and accredited courses be designed or utilised for VCAL or VETiS?

Delivery

- What reforms are needed to ensure that every Victorian secondary school student will have access to consistently high-quality applied learning options? How can barriers to access, including infrastructure, funding and administrative processes, be addressed?
- Should a reconceptualised VCAL be available in all schools or accessible to all Victorian senior secondary students?
- What workforce reforms are required to consistently ensure: the supply of high-quality educators with the right skills and experience to deliver applied learning across the state; and that the teaching or training profession is well-supported and qualified in best practice applied learning approaches?
- What is the relative effectiveness of different types of providers at delivering the VCAL and VETiS?
- How can industry, the Department of Education and schools better coordinate the vocational education and training of school students?
- What should be the role of different providers of VCAL and VETiS to school students?
- How can delivery include strengthened integration of all current offerings including careers advice and Head Start so that there is a more coherent and joined up pathway?

Outcomes

- How should student outcomes and the success of VCAL programs be measured and reported at the system and school level?
- How should the outcomes of VETiS and SBATs be measured?
- How can pathways for students, including applications processes for higher education and training courses be simplified?

Reputation

- How can we improve public confidence in the vocational and applied learning pathway so that students, their families, employers and tertiary institutions value and understand the benefits of these options?

Final report

A final report will be delivered in May 2020 and provide advice on reforms to VCAL, VETiS and SBATs (including HeadStart apprenticeships and traineeships).

APPENDIX B

CONSULTATIONS

Stakeholders consulted

Extensive stakeholder consultations over November 2019 to August 2020 informed the Review's findings and recommendations. The Review met with stakeholders from 79 organisations, presented at 30 forums, visited 23 schools and non-school senior secondary providers, and staff from 227 organisations attended roundtables.

Reference Group

Over the course of the Review, the Reference Group met five times to advise on the Review's findings and reform directions.

The Reference Group was made up of the following members:

Jane Maine	Area Executive Director, Mallee region, Department of Education
John Kennedy, MP	Victorian Government (Chair)
John Polese	Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne
Katrina Currie	Executive Director, Jobs Victoria
Kelly Lackmann	Assistant Principal, Narre Warren South P-12 College
Marino D'Ortenzio	Vice-President, Secondary, Australian Education Union
Mary Faraone	Chief Executive, Holmesglen Institute
Melanie Brooks	Leading teacher, Lakeview Senior College
Pam Hargreaves	Education consultant, Pathways, Independent Schools Victoria
Peter Devery	Pathways and Transition, Catholic Education Commission of Victoria
Rob Duncan	Principal, Narre Warren P-12 College
Steven Wojtkiw	Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Stakeholder meetings

The Review met with the following stakeholders throughout the Review:

- Adult, Community and Further Education Board
- Association of Heads and Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA)
- Australian Centre of Further Education (ACFE)
- Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)
- Australian Education Union (AEU)
- Bairnsdale Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
- Bendigo Senior Secondary College
- Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV)
- Central Ranges Local Learning and Employment Network
- Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY)
- Chisholm Institute
- Country Education Partnership
- David Gallagher, VCAL Advocate
- Dimboola Memorial Secondary College
- Frankston Mornington Peninsula Local Learning and Employment Network
- Geelong Region Local Learning and Employment Network
- Geoff Masters, Australian Council of Education Research and Chair, NSW Curriculum Review
- Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative
- Gippsland East LLEN
- Gippsland TAFE
- Haileybury
- Hester Hornbrook Academy, Melbourne City Mission
- Highlands Local Learning and Employment Network
- Independent Education Union (IEU)
- Independent Schools Victoria (ISV)
- Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia (ITECA)
- Inner Eastern Local Learning and Employment Network
- iVET Group
- Jenny Macklin, Chair, Skills for Victoria's Growing Economy
- Jim Watterston and Megan O'Connell, Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne
- John Polesel and Shelley Gillis, Centre for Vocational and Educational Policy, University of Melbourne
- Kangan Institute
- Karen O'Reilly-Briggs, La Trobe University — Bachelor of Technical Education Course Coordinator
- Lakes Entrance Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
- Loddon Campaspe Regional Partnership
- Major Projects Victoria
- Mallacoota P-12 College
- Melbourne Polytechnic

- Mildura Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
- Moogji Aboriginal Council East Gippsland Inc.
- Nagle College
- North East Tracks Local Learning and Employment Network
- Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network
- Notre Dame College
- Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College
- Outer Eastern Local Learning and Employment Network
- Parents Victoria
- Parkville College
- Pavilion School
- Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education (PRACE)
- Principal Association of Special Schools (PASS)
- Principals Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools (PAVCCS)
- Professor Peter Noonan, Chair, AQF review
- Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA)
- Review of Senior Secondary Pathways secretariat (Shergold Review)
- Ross Patterson, Regional Pathways consultant
- Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative
- Rural Youth Ambassadors
- SEDA College
- Sonja Terpstra, MP
- South East Local Learning and Employment Network
- South Oakleigh Secondary College
- Swan Hill Specialist School
- Swifts Creek P-12 School
- Swinburne University
- TAFE Gippsland
- The Foundation for Young Australians (FYA)
- The Hon. Gayle Tierney — Minister for Training and Skills; Minister for Higher Education
- The Hon. Jacinta Allan — Minister for Transport Infrastructure; Minister for the Coordination of Transport: COVID-19; Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop
- Tom Bentley, Executive Director, Policy and Impact, RMIT University
- VET Cluster Coordinator, South East LLEN and Northern Melbourne VET Cluster
- VicSRC
- Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI)
- Victorian Applied Learning Association (VALA)
- Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals (VASSP)
- Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT)
- Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA)
- Victorian Skills Commissioner (VSC)
- Victorian TAFE Association (VTA)

School and Non-School Senior Secondary Provider visits

School and NSSSP visits included meetings with the Principal and leadership team, VCAL practitioners and students in Years 9, 10, 11 and 12. The Review visited the following schools and NSSSPs:

• Ballarat High School	• Lynall Hall Community School
• Box Hill Senior Secondary	• MacKillop Specialist School
• Catholic Regional College Sydenham	• Mentone Grammar
• Cranbourne Secondary College	• Mildura Senior Secondary College
• Croydon Community School	• Narre Warren South P-12 College
• David Scott School	• Orbest Secondary College
• Doncaster Secondary College	• Ranges TEC
• Emmanuel College	• St Joseph's College Mildura
• Hallam Senior Secondary College	• SuniTAFE Mildura
• Harvester Technical College	• Wodonga Flexible Learning Centre
• Kambrya College	• Wodonga Senior Secondary College
• Kooweerup Secondary College	

Stakeholder roundtables

The Review held roundtables and VCAL briefings in Epping, Geelong, Melbourne, Traralgon, Wangaratta and Wodonga, as well as several online roundtables. The organisations listed below participated in roundtables:

• 3IA	• Belmont High School
• Adass Israel School	• Belvoir Special School
• Adult Community Education Victoria (ACEVic)	• Benalla P-12 College
• Aitken College	• Bendigo Senior Secondary College
• Albury Wodonga Community College	• Bendigo TAFE
• Apprenticeship Support Australia	• Bentleigh Secondary College
• Aquinas College	• Berengarra School
• Ashwood School	• Berry Street School
• Australian Business and Community Network (ABCN)	• Borinya School
• Australian Centre for Rural Entrepreneurship (ACRE)	• Borinya Wangaratta Community Partnership
• Australian Industry Group	• Box Hill Senior Secondary College
• Bacchus Marsh Grammar	• Brauer College
• Ballarat Christian College	• Bright P-12 College
• Ballarat Group Training	• Broadford Secondary College
• Ballarat High School	• Café the Prevue
• Bayford Group	• Career Education Association of Victoria (CEAV)
• Beechworth Secondary College	• Cathedral College
• Belgrave Heights Christian School	• Catholic College Wodonga
• Bellarine Secondary College	• Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV)
	• Catholic Education Office — Diocese of Sale

• Catholic Education Sandhurst	• Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre
• Catholic Regional College Sydenham	• GO TAFE
• Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY)	• Gordon TAFE — Koori Liaison
• Charles La Trobe P-12 College	• Grace Christian College
• Chisholm Institute	• Hallam Senior Secondary
• Christian College	• Holmes Secondary College
• Cire Community School	• Hume Whittlesea LLEN
• Clonard College Geelong	• Independent Schools Victoria
• Cobram DSS	• Inner Melbourne VET Cluster
• Community College Gippsland	• Jackson School
• Concord School	• John Paul College
• Corryong College	• Kalianna Special School
• Craigieburn Secondary College	• Kangan Institute
• Cranbourne Secondary College	• Kilbreda College
• Croydon Community School	• Kolbe Catholic College
• Daylesford College	• Koo Wee Rup Secondary College
• Diamond Valley College	• Kurnai College
• Doncaster Secondary School	• Latrobe University
• Drouin Secondary College	• Leongatha Secondary College
• East Preston Islamic College	• Lighthouse Christian College
• Eastern Ranges School	• Lightmare Studios
• Echuca College	• Lorne P-12 College
• Emerald Secondary College	• Lowanna College
• Emerson School	• Lowther Hall AGS
• Emmaus College	• Lynall Hall Community School
• Epping Secondary College	• Marcellin College
• Euroa Secondary College	• Maribyrnong Secondary College
• FCJ Benalla	• Marist-Sion College
• Federation College, Federation University	• Mary MacKillop Regional Catholic College
• Fitzroy High School	• Marymede Catholic College
• Foster Secondary College	• McClelland College
• Foundation Learning Centre	• McDonalds Australia
• Fountain Gate Secondary College	• McGuire College
• Frankston High School	• Melba College
• Frankston Mornington Peninsula LLEN	• Melbourne Polytechnic
• Galen Catholic College	• Melton Christian College
• GAN Australia	• Melton Specialist School
• Geelong Lutheran College	• Mentone Grammar School
• Geelong Technical Education Centre (GTEC)	• Methodist Ladies' College
• GForce Employment Services	• Monivae College
• Giant Steps Melbourne	• Monterey Secondary College
• Gilson College	• Montmorency Secondary College
• Gippsland Grammar	• Mount Lilydale Mercy College
• Glenallen School	• Mount Ridley P-12 College

• Mount Rowan Secondary College	• SEDA College
• Mount St Joseph's Girls' College	• Siena College
• Mountain District Learning Centre	• Simonds Catholic College
• Nagle College	• Skilling the Bay (Gordon TAFE)
• Narre Warren South P-12 College	• Skills Plus & Brace
• National Food Institute (NFI)	• Southern Restaurants
• NE Tracks LLEN	• St Albans Secondary College
• Newcomb Secondary College	• St Augustine's College
• Northern Bay College	• St Bede's College
• Northern College of the Arts & Technology	• St Columba's College
• Northside Christian College	• St Ignatius College
• Norwood Secondary College	• St Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre
• Notre Dame College	• St Joseph's College, Echuca
• Numurkah Secondary College	• St Mary of the Angels Nathalia
• Our Lady of Mercy College	• St Monica's College
• Our Lady of Sion College	• Sunbury and Macedon Ranges Specialist School
• Padua College	• Sunbury College
• Pakenham Secondary College	• Sunraysia Institute of TAFE
• Parade College	• Swan Hill Specialist School
• Parkdale Secondary College	• Swifts Creek P-12 School
• Parkville College	• Swinburne University
• Pascoe Vale Girls College	• Sydney Road Community School
• Pavilion School	• TAFE Gippsland
• Penola Catholic College	• Tallangatta Secondary College
• Peter Lalor Vocational College	• Taylors Lakes Secondary College
• Point Cook Senior Secondary College	• Templestowe College
• PRACE College	• Terang College — Secondary Campus
• Prahran Community Learning Centre Inc	• The Centre Wangaratta
• Principals Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools	• The Grange P-12 College
• Ranges TEC	• Thomas Carr College
• Recruitment1	• Tomorrow Today Foundation
• Ringwood Secondary College	• Trafalgar High School
• River Nile School	• Utrain
• Rosamond School	• Verney Road School
• Rutherglen High School	• Victoria University Polytechnic
• Sacred Heart College Geelong	• Victoria University Secondary College
• Sacred Heart College Kyneton	• Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc (VAEAI)
• Sacred Heart College Yarrowonga	• Victorian Applied Learning Association
• Salesian College	• Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
• Sandringham College	• Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS)
• Santa Maria College	• Victorian Youth Congress
• Sarina Russo Group	

• Victory Lutheran College	• Western Heights College
• Viewbank College	• Whitefriars College
• Wangaratta District Specialist School	• Wodonga Senior Secondary College
• Wangaratta High School	• Wodonga TAFE
• Water 2 All	• WPC Group
• Waverley Christian College	• Wyndham Community and Education Centre
• Wellington Secondary College	• Yarra Hills Secondary College
• Werribee Secondary College	• Yarrawonga College P-12
• Western Health	

Forum presentations

The Review consulted with stakeholders at the following forums:

• Barwon Area Principal Forum	• Outer Eastern Melbourne Area Principal Forum
• Bayside Peninsula Area Principal Forum	• Outer Gippsland Area Principal Forum
• Brimbank Melton Area Principal Forum	• Primary Industries Industry Advisory Group
• Business Services Industry Advisory Group	• Public Safety, Public Sector, Corrections, Water and Local Government Industry Advisory Group
• Central Highlands Area Principal Forum	• Resources, Forestry, Pulp and Paper Industry Advisory Group
• Community Services and Health Industry Advisory Group	• Rural Youth Ambassador Workshop
• Construction Industry Advisory Group	• Service Industries Industry Advisory Group
• Education State in Schools Guiding Coalition: Future of Secondary Schooling Working Group	• Southern Melbourne Area Principal Forum
• Electro Technology and Electrical Industry Advisory Group	• TAFE Education Leaders Network
• Hume Moreland Area Principal Forum	• TAFE Network Leaders Forum
• Inner Eastern Melbourne Area Principal Forum	• Transport and Logistics Industry Advisory Group
• Inner Gippsland Area Principal Forum	• VAEAI Representative Council
• LLEN Statewide Conference	• Victorian TAFEs VET Delivered to Secondary Students Network
• Loddon Campaspe Area Principal Forum	• Western Melbourne Area Principal Forum
• Mallee Area Principal Forum	
• Manufacturing Industry Advisory Group	
• North Eastern Melbourne Area Principal Forum	

Written submissions

Written submissions were received through the Engage Victoria website or sent directly to the Review team. Written submissions were received from the individuals and organisations listed below. Anonymous submissions have not been included.

• Ai Group	• Mountain District Learning Centre
• Andrew Hardiman — Pathways Manager Ballarat	• Nursery & Garden Industry Victoria
• Apprenticeship Employment Network (AEN)	• Outer Eastern LLEN
• Ashwood School	• Parents Victoria
• Barbara Ashworth — Former VCAL coordinator	• Pines Learning
• Brotherhood of St Laurence	• River Nile School
• Catholic Education Commission of Victoria	• SDA National
• Catholic School Parents Victoria	• Skilling the Bay (Gordon TAFE)
• Chisholm Institute	• South Gippsland Bass Coast LLEN
• Community Health Advancement and Student Engagement (CHASE)	• St Brigid's College
• Future Connect	• Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation
• Harvester Technical College	• The Smith Family
• Hume Valley School	• Victorian Applied Learning Association
• Independent Education Union Victoria Tasmania	• Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce
• Inner Northern LLEN	• Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
• Jesuit Social Services	• Victorian Council of Social Service
• Mackenzie Research Institute	• Victorian Farmers Federation
• Mildura Senior College	• Victorian TAFE Association
	• Western VCAL Network
	• Yea High School

Former VCAL students

The Review spoke with former VCAL students from the following schools and NSSSPs:

• Chisholm TAFE	• David Scott School
• Elizabeth Murdoch Secondary College	• Narre Warren South P-12 College
• Nepean School	• Western Port Secondary College

Engage Victoria survey questions

Survey for current and former students

1. Please select one of the following:

- I am currently completing VCAL (go to questions 2–11 & 15)
- I have completed VCAL (go to questions 2–11 & 15)
- I am currently completing VCE with VET (go to questions 8–15)
- I have completed VCE with VET (go to questions 8–15)
- I am currently completing VCE without VET (go to questions 12–15)
- I have completed VCE without VET (go to questions 12–15)

Current/former VCAL students

Please complete the following questions if you are currently completing, or have previously completed, VCAL:

2. After senior secondary school, I intend to/I have:

- Complete(d) an apprenticeship or traineeship
- Study/studied at TAFE
- Study/studied at university
- Start(ed) working
- Other (please specify)

3. My experience of VCAL has been/was:

(Provide star rating out of 5)



4. Why did you choose VCAL over VCE? (select all that apply)

- More hands on learning
- I wanted to study VET
- I wanted to do an apprenticeship
- I was influenced by my friends
- I was influenced by my family
- I was influenced by the advice of teachers, careers practitioners and/or the principal
- I was influenced by students who had previously undertaken VCAL
- The VCE did not appeal to me
- I don't know
- Other (please specify)

5. How helpful was your school's careers guidance and support when you were choosing between VCAL and VCE?

- Very helpful
- Helpful
- Not very helpful
- Unhelpful

6. How well do you think VCAL is preparing/prepared you for further education and/or work?

- Very well
- Well
- Not very well
- Not at all

7. Would you recommend VCAL to other students?

- Yes
- No
- Other (please specify)

Vocational Education and Training (VET) delivered to senior secondary students

Please complete the following questions if you are currently undertaking VET (in either VCAL or VCE) or have previously undertaken VET.

8. My experience of VET is/was:

(Provide star rating out of 5)

9. Are you travelling, or did you have to travel, to another school to access VET?

- Yes
 No

10. Does/did your school provide you with the resources and facilities needed to complete your VET subject(s)?

- Yes — my school was well equipped with all of the resources and facilities required
 Partly — my school has some of the resources and facilities required
 No — my school was not equipped with the resources and facilities required

11. Would you recommend VET to other students?

- Yes
 No

Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) students

Please complete the following questions if you are currently completing, or have previously completed, VCE:

12. Why did you choose VCE over VCAL? (select all that apply)

- I wanted to go to university
 I did not have a good understanding of VCAL and the career opportunities available to me
 My school did not have adequate VCAL resources or facilities
 VCAL has a poor reputation at my school
 VCAL only has a small number of students
 VCAL is not offered at my school
 My parents did not want me to choose VCAL
 My teachers did not want me to choose VCAL
 None of my friends were enrolling in VCAL
 Other (please specify)

13. How helpful was your school's careers guidance and support when you were choosing between VCE and VCAL?

- Very helpful
 Helpful
 Not very helpful
 Unhelpful

14. What is your perception of VCAL?



Additional thoughts and comments

15. Do you have any additional thoughts or comments you would like share with the Review?

Survey for parents and carers

Please briefly describe your personal relationship to the subject of this Review.

For example, 'My child is currently undertaking VCAL in a regional town.' or 'My child has completed VCE with VET in Melbourne'.

Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL)

Overall, my perception of VCAL is:



My understanding of the VCAL program and the career opportunities available to my child is:

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Poor
- Very poor

Does your child's school promote and encourage VCAL as a program of choice for all students?

- Yes, all students are encouraged to do VCAL if they wish
- Yes, but it is only encouraged for students who are not academically inclined
- No, VCAL is not promoted at my child's school

Have teachers, career counsellors and/or principals provided you with sufficient information about VCAL to support your child's decisions regarding senior secondary pathways?

- Yes, I have received sufficient information about the VCAL program
- No, I have received little or no information about the VCAL program
- I did not know VCAL was an option for my child
- VCAL is not available at the school my child attends

Are you interested in receiving more information about VCAL?

- Yes
- No

If you answered yes to the above question, what information would be useful to you as a parent or carer?

Vocational Education and Training (VET) delivered to secondary school students

Overall, my perception of VET is:



My understanding of VET and the career opportunities available to my child is:

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Poor
- Very poor

Have teachers, career counsellors and/or principals provided you with sufficient information about VET as an option for your child?

- Yes, I have received information about the VET program
- No, I have received little or no information about the VET program
- I did not know VET was an option for my child
- VET is not available at my child's school

In your experience, has your child's school promoted and encouraged VET as a program of choice for all students?

- Yes, all students are encouraged to do VET if they wish
- Yes, but it is only encouraged for students who are not academically inclined
- No, VET is not promoted at my child's school

Are you interested in receiving more information about VET?

- Yes
- No

If you answered yes to the above question, what information would be useful to you as a parent or carer?

Relationship between programs

Did you know that VET can be undertaken as part of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and VCAL? (select all that apply)

- I knew that VET could be undertaken as part of the VCE
- I knew that VET could be undertaken as part of VCAL
- I am aware that VET is part of senior secondary but I don't fully understand its role
- I was not aware of this

Do you understand the difference between VCAL and VCE with VET?

- I understand the difference
- I have some understanding of the difference
- I have no understanding of the difference

Do you, or would you, support your child if they chose VCAL over VCE?

- Yes, I would fully support my child in their choice
- Maybe, but I would want to understand why my child has chosen VCAL over VCE
- Maybe, but I would need further information about VCAL and the career opportunities it would provide my child
- No, I would not support this choice

Additional thoughts and comments

Do you have any additional thoughts or comments you would like to share with the Review?

Survey for education, training, industry and community stakeholders

The Review does not expect or require you to complete every question in this survey. Please complete the questions that are most relevant to you.

Please briefly describe your personal or professional relationship to the subject of the Review.

For example, 'I am a current VCAL teacher at a Government secondary school!'

Objectives of applied learning

The Review understands that vocational and applied learning is currently serving multiple purposes in Victoria, including student retention, student engagement and re-engagement, inclusion and post-school transitions for students. While these purposes may appear to be in tension, they should be seen as being on a continuum towards a successful post-school transition. For example, viewing re-engagement through vocational and applied learning as an initial step towards enhanced learning and a successful post-school pathway.

What should the primary objectives of VCAL, VET delivered to school students and School based Apprenticeships and Traineeships be?

Design

The Review understands that there is some concern that the current VCAL structure is too complex (for example, the relationship between different strands and levels) and that there is a lack of rigour in relation to assessment and curriculum content, particularly within the Literacy and Numeracy Skills Strand, and reporting of VCAL achievement.

How could we make VCAL less complex to understand for students, families, teachers and schools?

What improvements could be made to improve the quality and rigour of curriculum and assessment in VCAL and VET delivered to school students?

The Review has heard that there are a number of design issues relating to VCAL, including the overall Victorian senior secondary certificate framework and the relationship between VCAL and VCE. Feedback suggests that there is a desire for more flexibility and permeability between the VCE and VCAL.

What are the relative benefits and risks of maintaining the dual-certificate framework (i.e. VCAL and VCE) or moving to a single-certificate framework (with both academic and vocational pathways)?

If there was a single-certificate framework, how could a strengthened vocational pathway be described and designed?

The Review has heard that VCAL plays an important role in providing pathways for students with special needs or in special settings, and students reengaging with education. Initial feedback from stakeholders involved with these student cohorts is generally positive about VCAL and the opportunity it provides students to continue with secondary school education.

How do we ensure that VCAL and VET delivered to school students continue to meet the needs of all students who want to study in an applied stream?

Delivery

The Review understands that there are range of challenges impacting the delivery of vocational and applied learning, including difficulty accessing VET in rural and regional areas, and the cost of delivery and associated administrative burden relating to VCAL and VET.

Infrastructure, funding and administrative burden are raised as the key barriers to delivering vocational and applied learning. What specific supports would help schools to address these barriers?

What could we do to support all secondary school students, including in rural and regional areas, to have access to high-quality applied options?

During initial consultations, the Review heard that workforce challenges are also a barrier to delivering high-quality vocational and applied learning. These challenges include difficulty attracting and retaining high-quality vocational and applied learning teachers and trainers, capability gaps for existing applied learning teachers and limited opportunities for professional development.

What reforms would encourage high-quality teachers and trainers with the right skills and experience to deliver applied learning in secondary school?

What supports should we offer new and existing teachers and trainers to ensure they are qualified in best practice applied learning practices and feel prepared to deliver high-quality applied learning?

Student outcomes

Feedback suggests that the lack of a clear objective and some design features of VCAL, VET delivered to school students, and SBATs are leading to differing views regarding what a 'successful' student outcome is. For example, is it a successful VCAL outcome if a student exits school early but successfully transitions into a full-time apprenticeship? Or is it a more desirable outcome for that student to complete their senior secondary certificate before transitioning into post-school education and training or work?

The current design of vocational and applied pathways also limits what outcome measures are available. In contrast to VCE, which focuses on achievement of study scores, much of the focus of VCAL student outcomes relates to completion rates. Some post-school destination data are also collected and monitored to help the system understand the outcomes for vocational and applied learners. However, post-school destination data are often not reported alongside completion rates.

The Review understands that further granularity of senior secondary student data could support schools and the system to measure success for vocational and applied learners and drive accountability for outcomes.

What is a successful outcome for VCAL students, VET delivered to school students, and School-based Apprenticeship and Traineeship students?

What additional data should schools and the system collect/be provided with in relation to students undertaking vocational and applied learning?

Reputation

Feedback suggests that the separation of the VCE and VCAL has led to VCAL being seen as the inferior senior secondary certificate, or as some stakeholders have phrased it, 'not the VCE'.

The Review understands that for public confidence to improve, the design and delivery challenges outlined above need to be highlighted and addressed. It will not be enough to simply rebrand VCAL.

In consultations to date, the Review heard many examples of the benefits and career opportunities associated with vocational and applied learning. More could be done to improve public awareness and understanding of these benefits.

What reforms and actions would improve your perceptions, and public perceptions more generally, of vocational and applied learning pathways?

What could the system do to support students, families, employers and tertiary institutions to value and understand the benefits of vocational and applied learning pathways?

Additional thoughts and comments

Do you have any additional thoughts or comments you would like to share with the Review?

APPENDIX C HISTORY OF SENIOR SECONDARY QUALIFICATIONS

There have been several significant reviews of, and policy shifts in, senior secondary schooling since the 1970s (Figure 11). The VCE was introduced almost 30 years ago to encourage more students to complete Year 12, based on recommendations made in the *Ministerial Review of Postcompulsory Schooling* (the Blackburn Review). The Blackburn Review called for a 'radical reshaping' of senior secondary schooling so that its curriculum, credentials and structures would provide for the increase in students staying on to Year 12 (Blackburn, 1985, p.1). It sought to transform senior secondary schooling to be more inclusive and cater for a wider range of students.

The Blackburn Review was commissioned when there were five separate senior secondary certificates. It noted the number of certificates was confusing, had segregated and reduced expectations for some students, did not lead to equal opportunities and could exacerbate access restrictions into higher education.

It made 45 recommendations that set out to:

- make senior secondary relevant and useful for an increasing proportion of young people, irrespective of whether they would be going on to further education;
- enable all students to develop 'capacities and skills valuable both to the individual and to the society' (p. 1); and
- to 'extend educational opportunities to all young people' (p.2) and 'make provision at postcompulsory levels more congruent with contemporary needs' (p. 18).

The Blackburn Review recommended the creation of a single certificate that incorporated the positive features of the current certificates.

Following the Blackburn Review, the five senior secondary certificates were bought under a single qualification framework between 1987 and 1991 as they were phased out. A single senior secondary certificate, the VCE, was created in 1991.

Despite the objective of a single certificate that catered for a diversity of learners, the lack of vocational options was noted in several reviews (for example Finn, 1991 and Deveson, 1992). VET delivered to school students (originally called Dual Recognition) was introduced into the VCE in 1994, allowing students to undertake a limited number of VET courses and senior secondary qualifications simultaneously. In 2001 changes allowed VET courses taken while in school to be counted towards both a nationally recognised qualification and a secondary school certificate. Previously many VET courses did not count towards a secondary school certificate or did not count towards a national qualification.

In 2000, the *Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria* (the Kirby Review) called for better access and increased levels of participation in post-compulsory schooling through greater flexibility in the VCE and articulation to a broad range of further education and training and employment destinations. Many of the findings and recommendations in the Kirby Review are still relevant.

The Review found that VETiS (now VDSS) had resulted in positive student outcomes, however, it faced cost, organisational and perception barriers. The Kirby Review noted that the Blackburn report 'strongly emphasised the ideal of the new VCE serving common cultural purposes' and that 'this ideal has not been realised within the VCE' (Kirby, 2000, p.88–89). Kirby recommended the Blackburn Review proposals be revisited and a more coherent senior secondary framework, including modifications to the VCE that allow 'greater flexibility in program deliver and learning approaches and contexts' be designed (Kirby, 2000, p. 91).

The Kirby Review found that the two most frequently cited reasons by early leavers was 'the desire for work and the lack of interest in schoolwork' (Kirby, 2000, p. 54). During the 1990s, many concerned schools had already independently developed programs to engage students at risk of disengaging. The Kirby Review's findings represented a strong endorsement of this effort by schools and proposed the development of a more coherent and statewide framework (Geelong Region Local Learning and Employment Network, submission). The Review recommended the Victorian Qualifications Authority (now the VRQA) should ensure that they are quality programs, supporting positive student outcomes.

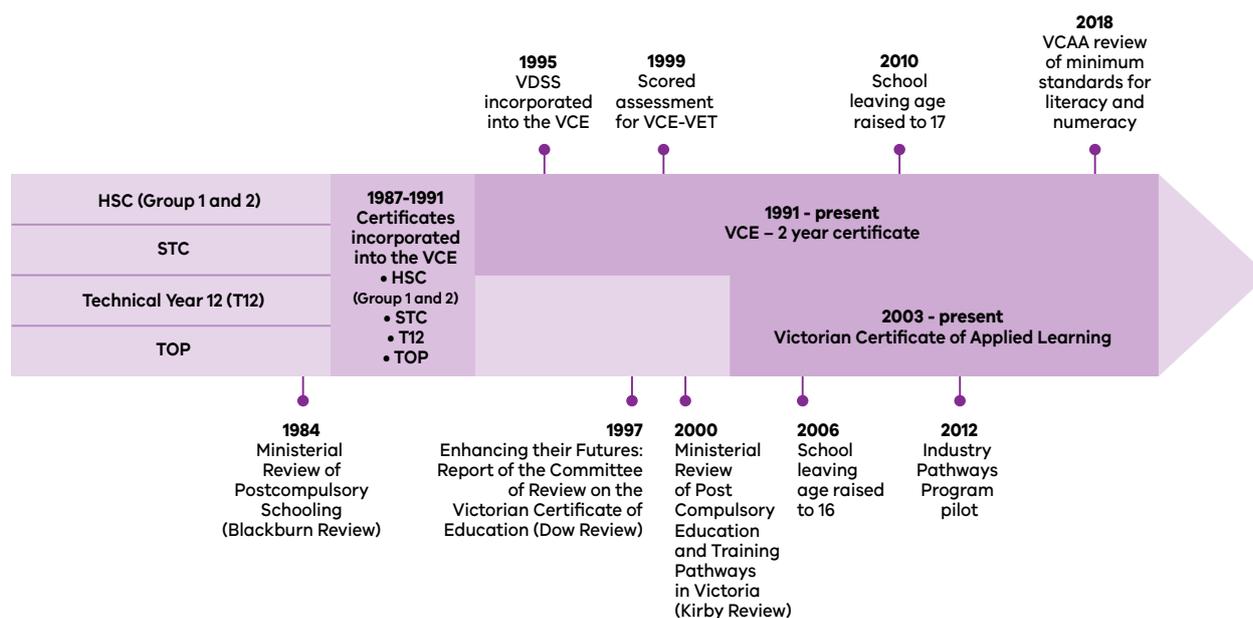
In 2003, the VCAL was introduced across the state as second senior secondary certificate after being trialled in 2002. The VCAL was designed to provide an alternative to the VCE with a focus on work readiness and pathways into vocational training and employment. Since the introduction of the VCAL, enrolments have grown to more than 24,000 in 2019, with 469 providers offering VCAL (VCAA, 2020).

Increases to the school leaving age have also contributed increasing retention rates. In 2006 the school leaving age was raised to 16. In 2009, all states and territories agreed to prioritise young people's engagement in education through the *Compact with Young Australians* (COAG, 2009), which ensure all young people have access to the education or training they need through:

- increasing the school leaving age to 17
- changing Youth Allowance eligibility, requiring young people without a year 12 certificate to undertake at least 25 hours of study or training per week, and
- ensuring all young Australians are eligible for government funded training.

Following this, the school leaving age was raised to 17 in 2010.

Figure - 11 Major senior secondary changes since 1970



There have been incremental changes to VCAL since 2002. These include:

- The introduction of Themed VCAL from 2003, which provides a learning program focus that is linked to priority areas in the labour market and/or to job opportunities. Themed VCAL is still available but no providers have registered with the VCAA in the last 3 years.
- The Industry Pathways Program pilot, which runs industry-themed pathways in VCE and VCAL across four school clusters from 2011 until 2014.
- Withdrawal of VCAL coordination funding from government schools in 2012. This had a strong impact on the prioritisation of VCAL in many schools.
- Changes to dual credit in 2014, which prevented students gaining dual credit towards both the VCE and the VCAL for the same subjects and some students were able to graduate with both VCE and VCAL qualifications.
- VCAL Senior Extension which was designed to enable students to undertake work in folio enhancement around the Arts after completing a VCE or Senior VCAL.
- Several VCAL models have been developed at the provider level. These include:
 - programs designed around specific industries, which may include, but is not limited to, those recognised by the VCAA
 - programs designed around specific student cohorts, such as English as an Additional Language or Indigenous students
- In 2018, as part of Education State initiatives, the Victorian Government invested in VDSS including through the Head Start Apprenticeship and Traineeship program, increased VDSS funding and a VDSS quality assurance framework. In 2019, the Victorian Government also invested in increasing the supply of VET teachers and improving the quality of vocational teachers and trainers through:
 - Professional learning for VCAL teachers and VET trainers
 - Retraining industry professionals to become VET teachers
 - Exploring the feasibility of including applied learning in Initial Teacher Education.

APPENDIX D

THE VICTORIAN SENIOR SECONDARY SYSTEM

The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) and the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) are the two senior secondary certificates of education in Victoria.

The VCAL is designed to provide the skills, knowledge and attributes necessary for students to make informed choices about employment and education pathways. It is a student-centred qualification, with flexibility of implementation and opportunities, that provides an individualised learning program through a range of curriculum options, including VCAL and VCE curriculum, VET and further education certificates as well as structured workplace learning. The VCAL curriculum is skills focused, allows for content that is context- and cohort-specific, and develops in complexity over the three levels of the certificate. The VCAL curriculum is assessed by the provider and tasks are developed to ensure that the assessment is valid, reliable, fair, flexible and efficient.

The VCE provides a range of subjects, with certification for a level of achievement. It supports diverse pathways to further study or training at university or TAFE, and to employment. The VCE curriculum is based on design principles that optimise connections and pathways from the Victorian Curriculum F–10 through VCE and then beyond into further education, training and employment; reflect the democratic values and community standards expected across Victoria; balance the challenge of the study with the needs of the individual student; and reflect both the enduring and dynamic aspects of the field or discipline. All VCE studies are benchmarked against the curriculum in leading national and global jurisdictions and have a shared approach to assessment, to ensure that all assessment is valid, reasonable, equitable, balanced and efficient (VCAA, 2018b).

VCAL

The VCAL has been designed to accommodate multiple entry and exit points at the appropriate level to suit a student's learning needs, abilities and interests. The VCAL has three award levels: Foundation, Intermediate and Senior. Intermediate and Senior VCAL completions are recognised as a Year 12 equivalent.

VCAL levels are unrelated to year levels, meaning that Foundation, Intermediate and Senior VCAL do not equate to Years 10, 11 and 12 respectively. However, most VCAL students, particularly in mainstream schools, typically undertake Intermediate VCAL in Year 11 and Senior VCAL in Year 12 (see Figure 16).

To obtain a VCAL qualification, students must successfully complete a minimum of 10 credits that must include:

- at least one credit for Literacy Skills and one credit for Numeracy Skills (both within the Literacy and Numeracy Skills Strand)
- at least one credit for each of Industry Specific Skills, Work Related Skills and Personal Development Skills strands
- a minimum of two VCAL units, of which one must be a Personal Development Skills unit at or above the award level
- a minimum of six credits at or above the award level.

Students may carry up to four credits forward from one award level to the level above. For example, credits from the Intermediate level can contribute towards successful completion at Senior level (see Table 6).

Table 6 - VCAL strand requirements

Strands	Foundation	Intermediate	Senior
Literacy and Numeracy	1 credit for Literacy at or above certificate level; 1 credit for Numeracy	1 credit for Literacy at or above certificate level. At least 1 credit for Numeracy which can carry forward credits from a previous level.	1 credit for Literacy at or above certificate level. At least 1 credit for Numeracy which can carry forward credits from a previous level.
Industry Specific Skills	At least 1 credit; can include VCE subjects	At least 90 hours of VET Can carry forward credits from previous level	At least 90 hours of VET Can carry forward credits from previous level
Work Related Skills	At least 1 credit	At least 1 credit Can carry forward credits from previous level	At least 1 credit Can carry forward credits from previous level
Personal Development Skills	At least 1 credit at or above certificate level	At least 1 credit at or above certificate level	At least 1 credit at or above certificate level

VCE

The VCE requires satisfactory completion of at least 16 units, which must include three units from the English group, including a Unit 3–4 sequence, and at least three other sequences of Unit 3–4 studies. The VCE is usually completed over two years, but students can accumulate units over any number of years.

Relationship between the VCE and the VCAL

There is limited, one-sided permeability between the VCE and the VCAL. VCAL students can include selected VCE subjects in their VCAL program, but VCE students cannot include VCAL subjects in their VCE program.

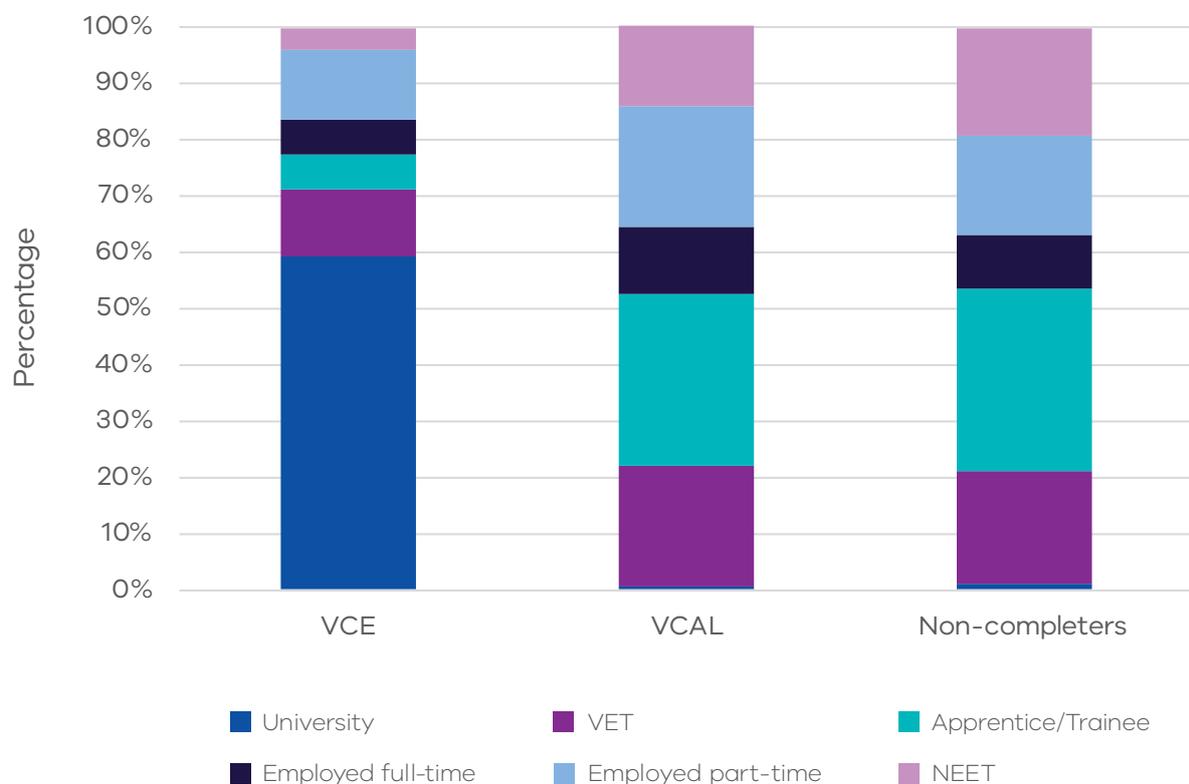
There are also specific rules relating to credit contributions for students who either move from VCAL to VCE, or from VCE to VCAL. Students who have successfully completed the VCAL at Intermediate or Senior level and who enrol in the VCE only need to satisfactorily complete four unit 3 and 4 sequences, including Unit 3–4 sequence from the English group (effectively meaning they only need to complete Year 12). Students who have not yet completed a VCAL certificate must satisfy minimum VCE requirements but can count completed VCAL units towards their VCE program.

Senior secondary trends

Post-school pathways

In 2019, 77.4 per cent of VCE completers were in education and training compared with 52.4 per cent of VCAL graduates (see Figure 12). However, significant proportions of both VCE and VCAL graduates did not transition directly to education and training (22.6 and 47.6 per cent, respectively). Given that this cohort is characterised by young people who are unemployed or in part-time, and likely low-skilled and low-paid, employment, this is concerning for graduates from both certificates. This outcome is particularly stark for VCAL graduates: around one in three graduates are in these problematic destinations.

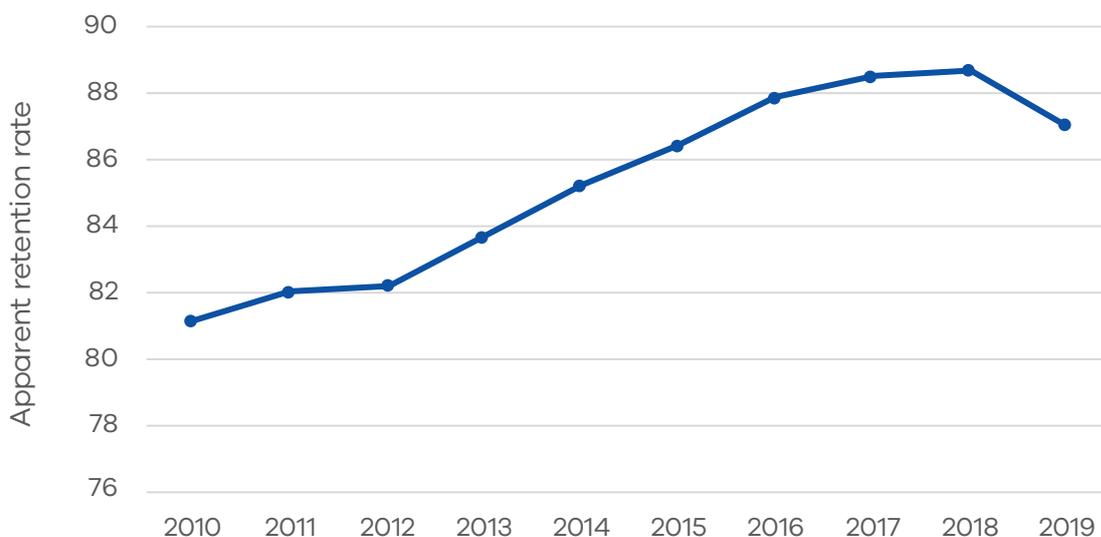
Figure - 12 **Post-school destinations by certificate, 2019**



NEET: Not in employment, education or training
Source: DET (2020d)

Retention

Retention is an important measure of the effectiveness of senior secondary certificates. Over the 16 years since the introduction of VCAL, secondary school retention rates in Victoria have increased by approximately seven percentage points, resulting in a current retention rate that approaches 90 per cent (see Figure 13).

Figure - 13 **Secondary school apparent retention rate, Victoria, 2010–19**

Explanatory note on 'apparent retention rate' is available from the ABS (2020b).
Source: ABS (2020b)

Victoria's apparent retention rate in 2019 was 87 per cent—above the national average but lower than that of the Australian Capital Territory, Queensland and South Australia (see Table 7).

Table 7 - Secondary school capped apparent retention rates (states and territories), 2019

	NSW	Vic	QLD	WA	SA	Tas	NT	ACT	Australia
Apparent retention rates (%)	77	87	91	84	93	76	54	94	84

Explanatory note on 'capped' and 'apparent retention rate' is available from the ABS (2020b).
Source: ABS (2020b)

Victoria's Year 12 certificate completion rate in 2015 was 78 per cent. This is above the national average and the highest of all states and territories (see Table 8).

Table 8 - Year 12 certificate completion rates (states and territories), 2015

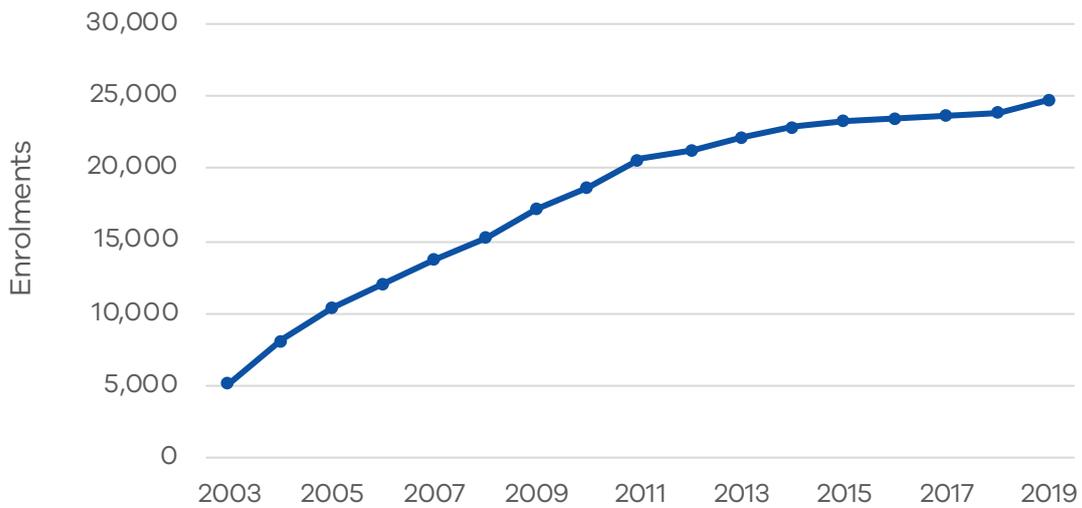
	NSW	Vic	QLD	WA	SA	Tas	NT	ACT	Australia
Apparent completion rates (%)	75	78	72	74	72	70	48	77	74

Source: Rowan and Ramsay (2018)

Senior secondary enrolments and completions

VCAL has experienced significant growth since its introduction in 2003. Enrolments in 2003 were just over 5,000 but grew to more than 20,000 (see Figure 14) in 2011. Since 2011 this growth has continued, albeit more slowly.

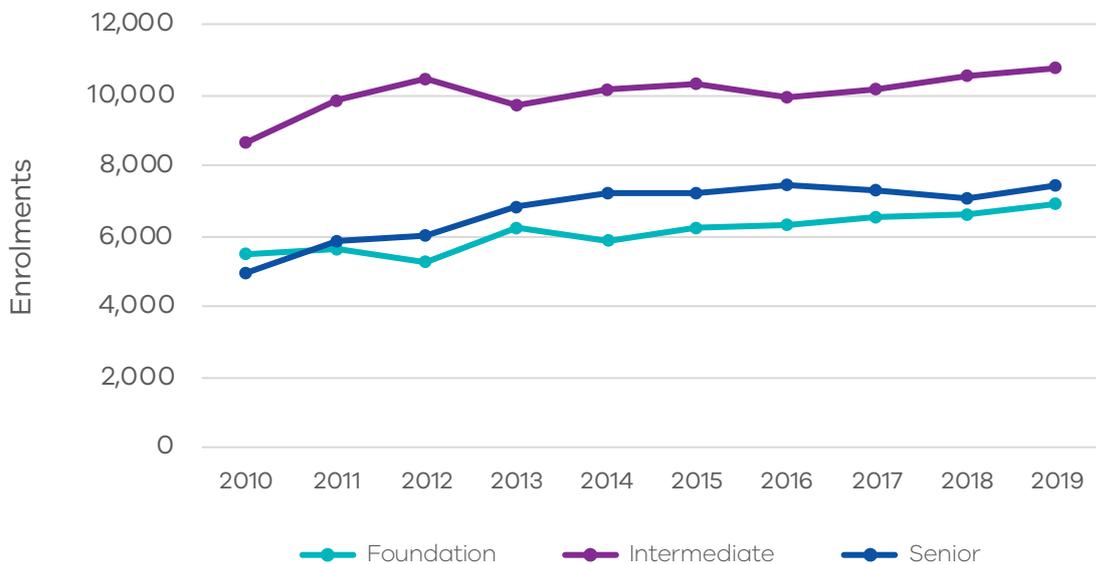
Figure - 14 **VCAL enrolments 2003–2019**



* Some VCAL students were enrolled in two or more VCAL certificates in the same year. In the above table these students were counted only once in their respective year.
Source: VCAA (2020)

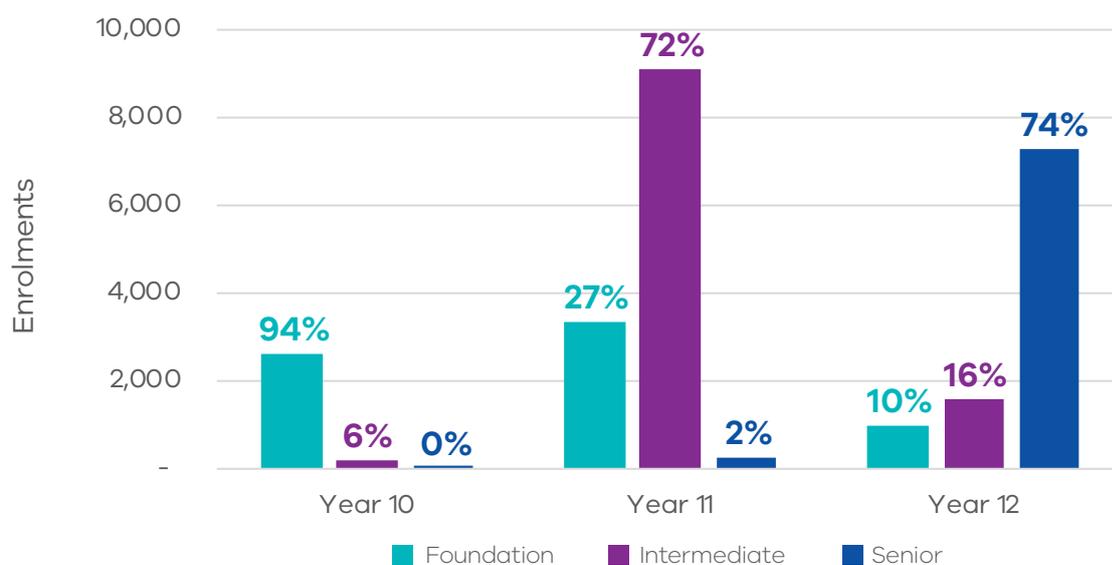
Enrolments in each VCAL certificate level has varied over the past decade. More students enrol in Intermediate VCAL than in the other levels, but enrolments in Senior VCAL has increased relative to enrolments in Foundation VCAL (Figure 15).

Figure - 15 **VCAL enrolments by level, 2010–2019**



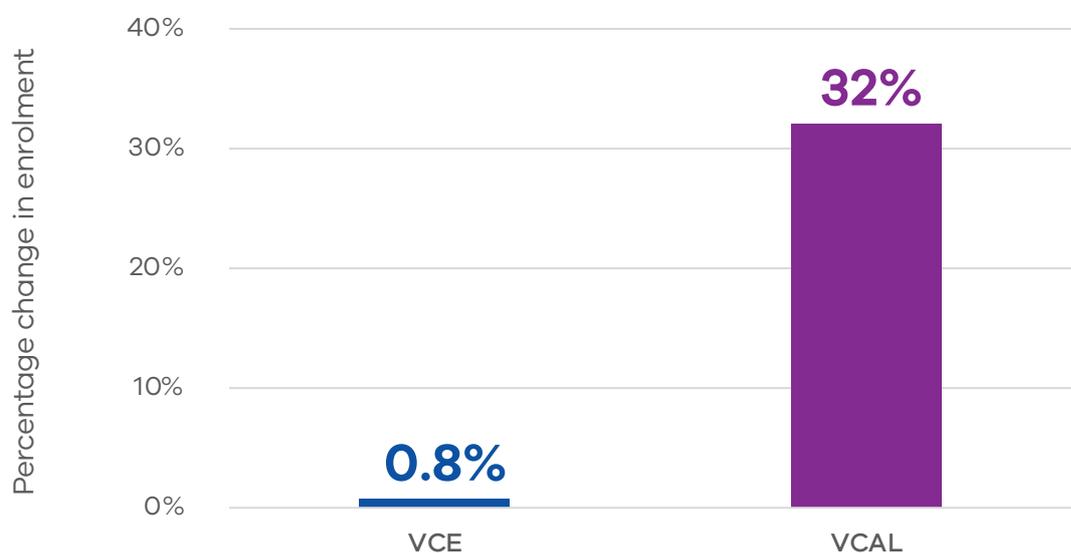
Source: VCAA (2020)

While the three levels were not designed to be sequential and matched to year levels, most Foundation level enrolments are Year 10 students, Intermediate level enrolments are Year 11 students and Senior level enrolments are Year 12 students (see Figure 16).

Figure - 16 **VCAL enrolments at each level by year level, 2019**

Based on Victorian enrolments only, excludes students not classified in a year level (e.g. students at some special schools).
Source: VCAA (2020)

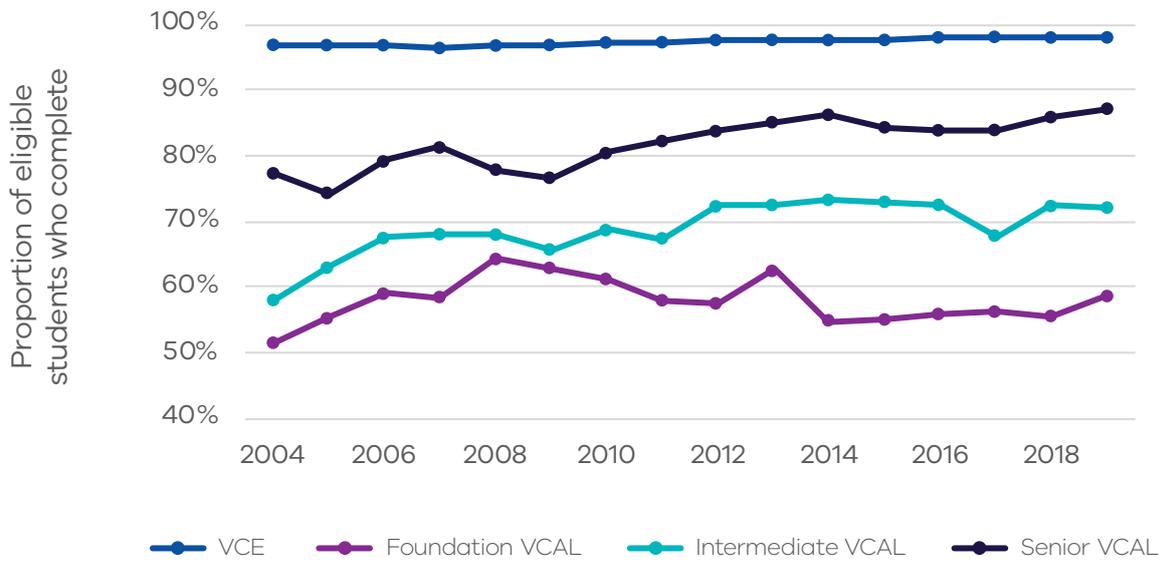
VCAL enrolments have increased 32 per cent over the last 10 years to nearly 25,000 in 2019. IN contrast, VCE enrolments have increased by less than one per cent since 2010 (see Figure 17).

Figure - 17 **Proportional change in enrolment from 2010 to 2019, VCE and VCAL**

* Some VCAL students were enrolled in two or more VCAL certificates in the same year. In the above table these students were counted only once in their respective year.
Source: VCAA (2020)

VCAL certificate completion rates are lower than VCE completion rates. This difference may reflect the flexibility of the VCAL certificate as students can take multiple years to successfully complete units (see Figure 18). It may also indicate a lack of expectations from many school leaders to complete the certificate. The Review heard from VCAL coordinators and teachers who reported that leaving school early to commence postsecondary study was perceived as a positive outcome.

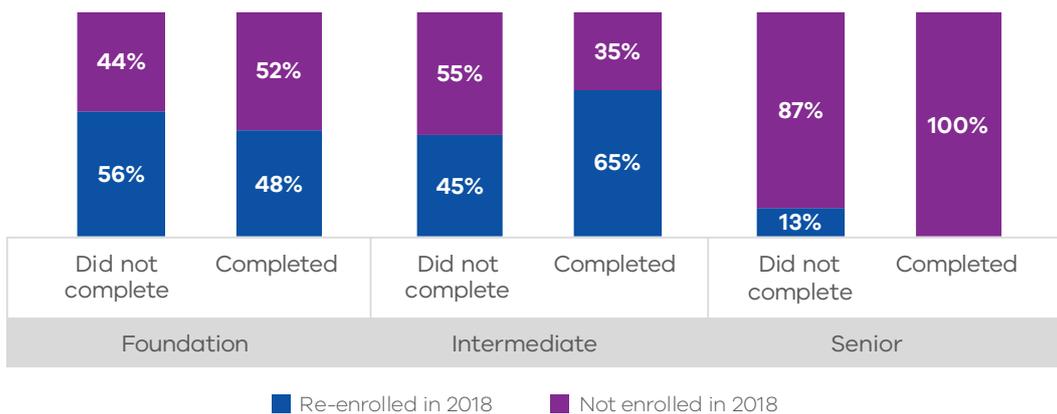
Figure - 18 **Senior secondary completions by certificate, 2004–2019**



Students enrolled in units that, if completed, would allow them to complete the certificate in the relevant year. Source: VCAA (2020)

The flexibility of VCAL, particularly the ability to complete units and the certificate over multiple years, is important for students with special needs or those re-engaging with education. In 2017, around half of Foundation and Intermediate VCAL students who completed the certificate re-enrolled in 2018 (see Figure 19). Many of those who did not re-enrol were not engaged in education or further training in 2018.

Figure - 19 **Proportion of 2017 VCAL students who re-enrolled in VCAL in 2018, by certificate level and completion status**



Source: VCAA (2020)

CASE STUDY 24

Comparing VCAL and VCE enrolments and completions

There are several issues with directly comparing VCAL enrolments or completions with those of the VCE:

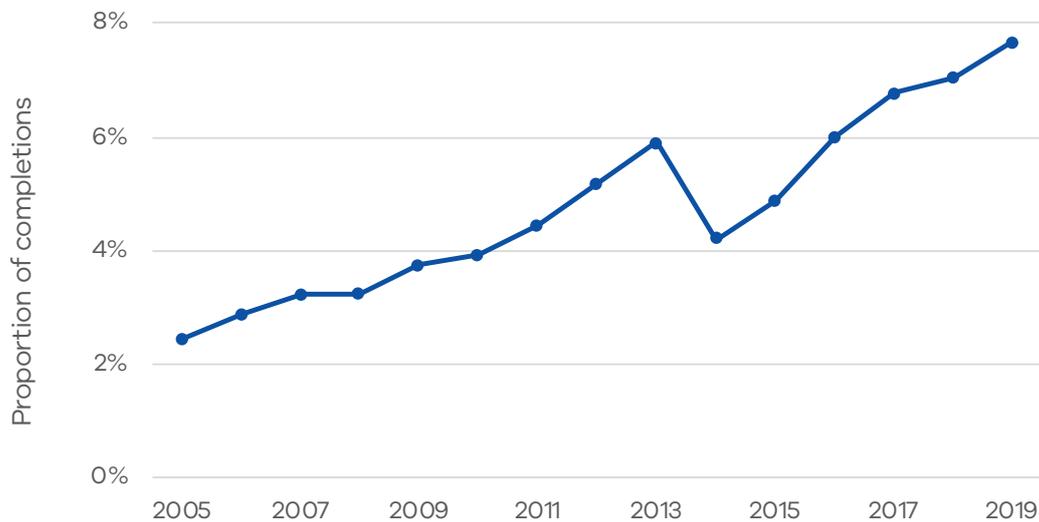
- Many VCAL students complete Intermediate VCAL in Year 11 and Senior VCAL in Year 12. However, comparing the number of VCAL completions and the number of VCE completions will count many Intermediate students who are only part way through their senior secondary studies. Figure 19 shows that 65 per cent of students who completed Intermediate VCAL in 2017 enrolled in Senior VCAL in 2018.
- VCAL is not always delivered in a single school year, with enrolment in units or certificates continuing in subsequent years. While these are recorded as 'Not yet complete' they are often interpreted as 'Did not complete'.
- Foundation VCAL is included in the number of VCAL enrolments or completions but is not typically considered a senior secondary certificate and so is not an equivalent qualification to VCE. In 2019, Foundation VCAL made up 27 per cent of total VCAL enrolments and 14 per cent of VCAL completions (VCAA, 2020). Similarly, many students enrol in a VCE subject in Year 10 and are thus considered enrolled in VCE even though this constitutes a minority of their school learning.
- As VCAL is often used as a re-engagement pathway, a greater proportion of VCAL students are likely to leave school earlier. VCAL and VCE are complementary parts of a single education system and so it is better to consider the completion rate of the system than its individual parts.
- Additionally, as there is little incentive for a school to update a student's enrolment during the year, many students start attending VCAL classes substantially before the school formally changes the student's enrolment (this would not usually affect end-of-year figures).

Combined, these issues can mean some comparisons between VCE and VCAL can be misleading. For instance, the number of students enrolled in VCE and VCAL in 2019 was 150,897 and 24,763 students, respectively. These figures imply that VCAL constitutes 14.1 per cent of senior secondary students, but these figures include Year 10 VCE students and Foundation VCAL students, respectively. When we consider only Year 11 and 12 VCE and Intermediate and Senior VCAL students, then VCAL constitutes 14.5 per cent of senior secondary students (VCAA, 2020).

There are similar complications when considering completions. In 2019 there were 49,366 VCE completions and 14,061 VCAL completions—which includes Foundation and Intermediate VCAL completions even when students re-enrol the following year. A clearer picture is provided when one follows a cohort of students rather than looks at a point-in-time measure of current enrolments or completions. In 2019, about 79 per cent of Victorians aged 19 attained VCE and/or VCAL. Of these, 11 per cent had a Senior or Intermediate VCAL and 68 per cent had VCE. VCAL contributes about 13.5 per cent of Victorian senior secondary completions by age 19 (VCAA, 2020).

Unscored VCE has tripled since 2005 (see Figure 20). The increase can be divided into two distinct periods. Up to 2013, these increases were largely due to the allowance of dual certification (undertaking VCE and VCAL at the same time). When dual certification ceased, the proportion of unscored VCE completions quickly declined. The increase from 2014 onwards is due to the increasing use of unscored VCE as a pathway.

Figure - 20 **Unscored VCE as a proportion of completions, 2005–2019**

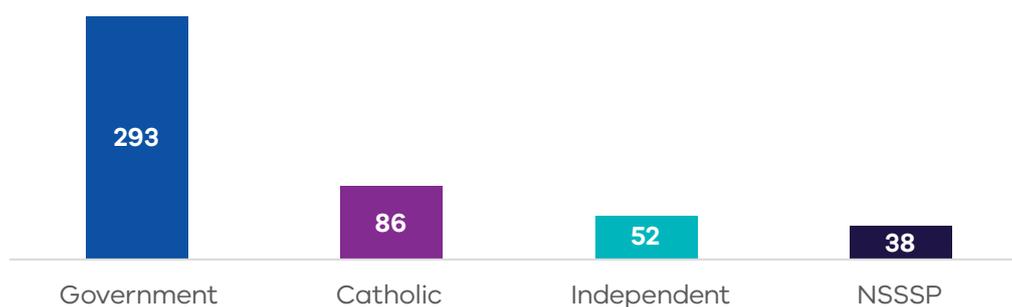


Unscored VCE is defined here as a VCE completion with fewer than four study scores, which means that an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) cannot be calculated.
Source: VCAA (2020)

VCAL provision

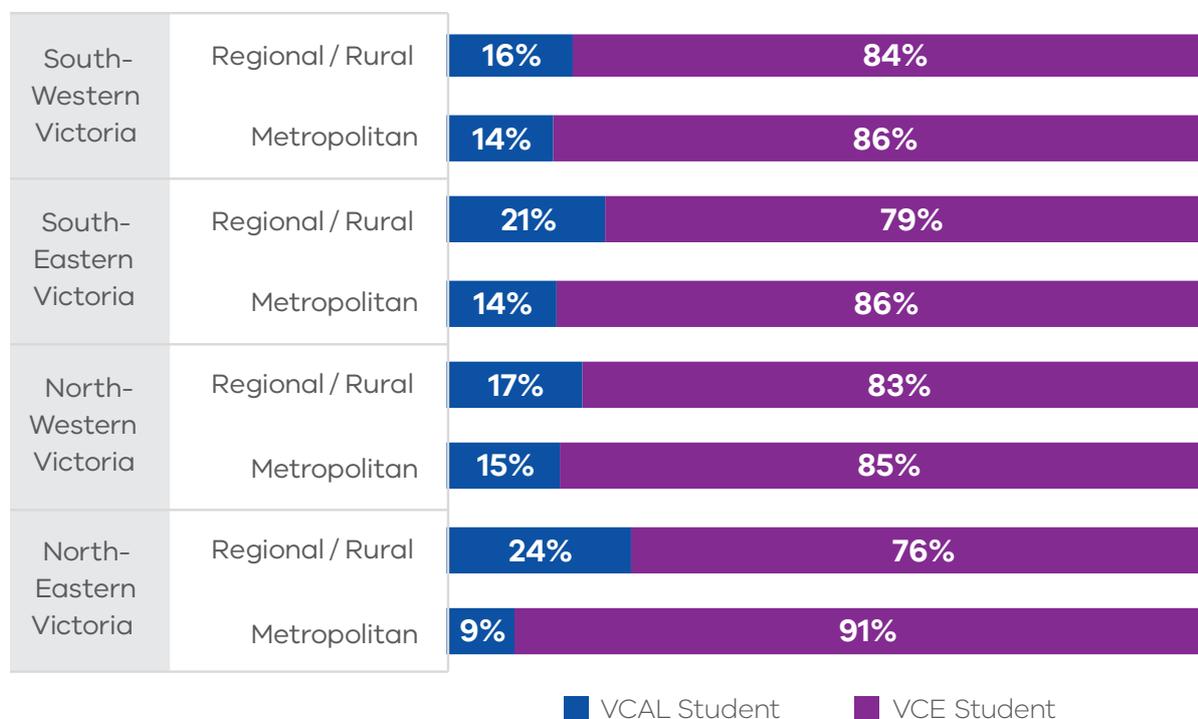
The composition and number of providers have shifted considerably since 2003. In 2019 there were 469 providers across the state—431 schools and 38 NSSSPs (see Figure 21).

The share of NSSSP enrolments has declined over the past decade, due to both changing registrations as NSSSPs become independent schools, as well as declining enrolments. However, despite falling enrolments, TAFEs remain an important VCAL provider in the adult sector. All 19 TAFE campuses offer VCAL (with 2,581 VCAL students in 2019) and TAFEs make up four of the top 10 VCAL providers. In comparison, there are fewer than 900 VCAL students enrolled across 19 community and further education providers.

Figure - 21 **Number of VCAL providers by sector, 2019**

NSSSP: Non-school senior secondary providers
Source: VCAA (2020)

Within all Departmental regions of the state, the proportion of VCAL students in regional/rural areas is greater than that in metropolitan areas (see Figure 22). However, within each Departmental region, this trend is most evident in North-Eastern Victoria. Compared to rural areas of other Departmental regions, regional and rural North-Eastern Victoria has the highest proportion of its senior secondary enrolments in VCAL. Compared to metropolitan areas of other Departmental regions, metropolitan North-Eastern Victoria has the lowest proportion of its senior secondary enrolments in VCAL.

Figure - 22 **Share of senior secondary enrolments by geographic area, 2019**

Source: VCAA (2020)

VCAL cohort

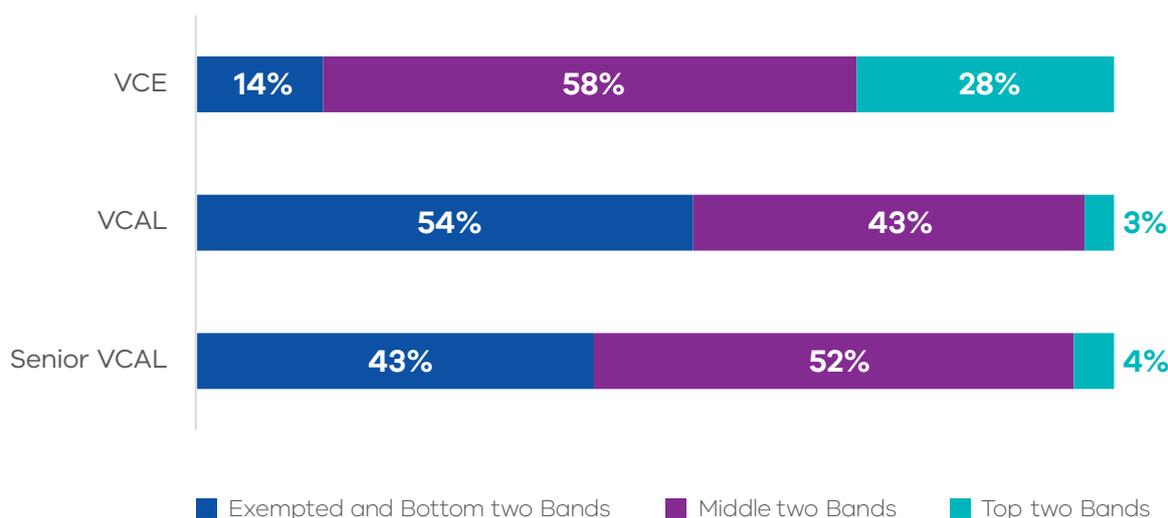
VCAL students tend to be more disadvantaged across a range of measures than VCE students. Some groups—regional and remote students, students with a disability, students from low socio-economic families and Indigenous students—are all over-represented in VCAL enrolments.

More male students undertake VCAL than female students, with around 60 per cent of VCAL enrolments being male. Female students make up a slightly higher proportion of Senior VCAL enrolments (42 per cent) and a slightly lower proportion of Foundation VCAL enrolments (35 per cent). By comparison, 53 per cent of VCE enrolments were female students.

VCAL students are less likely to have university-educated parents than VCE students. VCAL parents were also more likely to be employed in lower-skilled jobs than parents of VCE students. Almost 80 per cent of parents of VCAL students work as a tradesperson and service staff, labourers and related workers, or have not been employed for over 12 months. In contrast, a greater proportion of students who enrol in VCE have parents who work as professionals or associate professionals.

VCAL students tend to, on average, record lower academic achievement. A greater proportion of VCAL students scored in the lower two NAPLAN bands in Year 9 or were exempt (i.e. they were at or below the national minimum standard with few exceeding the standard; see Figure 23). In 2019, 64 per cent of the students enrolled in VCAL had a reading or numeracy score in the lower two NAPLAN bands or were exempted in their Year 9 NAPLAN, compared to under 18 per cent of the students enrolled in VCE. Further, 35 per cent of the students enrolled in VCAL had both a reading and numeracy score in the lower two bands or were exempted in their Year 9 NAPLAN, compared to 5 per cent of the students enrolled in VCE.

Figure - 23 **Year 9 NAPLAN reading band category for 2019 senior secondary students**



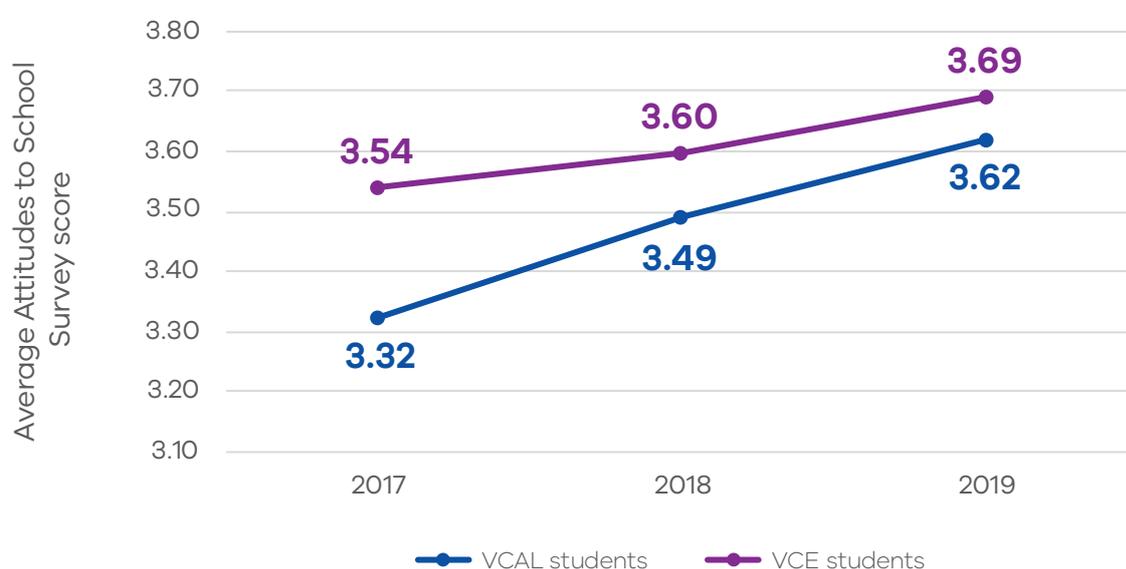
* Note that bottom two bands includes students exempted from NAPLAN as is standard practice.
Source: VCAA (2020)

Student attitudes towards school

VCAL students tend to be less engaged in schooling in the middle secondary years, even when student demographics (e.g. socio-economic status, gender, levels of parental educational and occupation) are controlled for.

However, the average Attitudes to School Survey score on 'Attitudes to Attendance' for VCAL students increased from Year 10 to 11 and from Year 11 to 12 significantly more than for VCE students (see Figure 24). Students who were the least engaged in their middle years showed a greater increase in engagement if they did VCAL than if they did VCE (DET, 2020d). Note that in addition to Attitudes to Attendance, a similar pattern of improved attitudes was found for VCAL students compared to VCE students for 6 of the 19 factors in the Attitudes to School Survey. These results suggest that VCAL, as a program, may be improving student attitudes towards school.

Figure - 24 **Average Attitudes to Attendance Survey score for 2019 Year 12 students in VCE and VCAL**



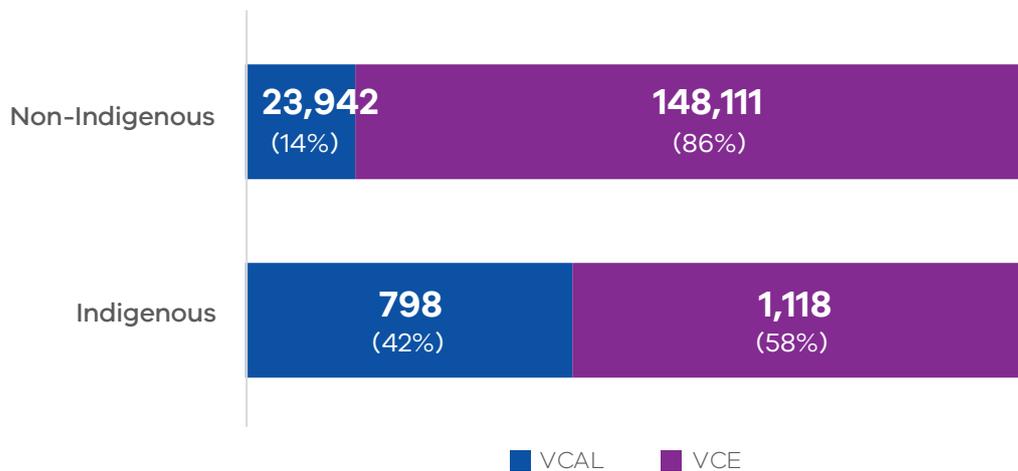
Source: DET (2020d)

Indigenous students

There were 1,916 Indigenous students enrolled in senior secondary in Victorian schools in 2019. Indigenous students were more likely to enrol in VCAL than non-Indigenous students (see Figure 25).

Indigenous students are less likely to complete senior secondary than non-Indigenous students, although their completion rates are improving. For example, the number of Indigenous students who completed VCE, VCAL or a VET certificate while at school has increased from 272 in 2011 to 688 in 2019 (VCAA, 2020).

The proportion of Indigenous students who successfully transition to positive post-school destinations is also increasing. In 2019, 92 per cent of surveyed Indigenous students who completed senior secondary had transitioned to further education or employment, up from 89 per cent in 2010 (DET, 2014, 2020e).

Figure - 25 **Indigenous and non-Indigenous enrolments in VCAL and VCE, 2019**

* Excludes interstate students.
Source: VCAA (2020)

Students with disability and additional needs

In 2019, the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) identified that a greater number of students enrolled in VCAL than students who enrolled in VCE. Among students who received adjustments for special needs, a greater proportion were enrolled in VCAL relative to VCE. Also, a greater proportion of students who received more extensive adjustments were enrolled in Foundation VCAL relative to Senior VCAL.

VCAL is prevalent in Victorian specialist schools (see Figure 26). A substantial proportion (80%) of students in specialist schools enrolled in Foundation VCAL. However, VCE, Intermediate VCAL and Senior VCAL are also delivered in specialist schools.

Figure - 26 **VCAL and VCE enrolments at special schools, 2019**

Source: VCAA (2020)

1 Information on educational adjustments is captured annually by schools through the NCCD, which report on the level and type of adjustments students require with the goal of enabling schools, education authorities and governments to better understand the needs of students with disability and how they can be best supported at school.

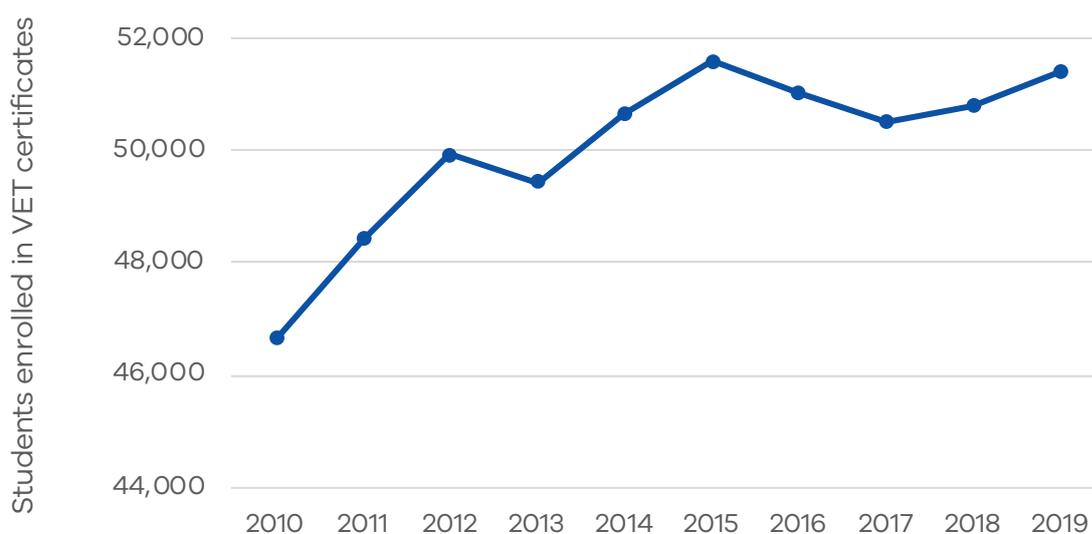
VET delivered to school students

Vocational education and training delivered to school students (VDSS) are vocation-oriented programs that lead to nationally recognised qualifications. They provide an opportunity for students to undertake a nationally recognised VET qualification in the Australian Qualifications Framework and receive credit towards their VCE or VCAL. There are different models for VDSS delivery:

- school-based RTOs: VDSS is delivered at school by a school-based RTO
- auspice arrangements: VDSS is delivered through an arrangement between the school or cluster and the RTO in which the secondary school delivers the VET program and the RTO is responsible for quality assurance and issuing the awards
- off-site RTOs: VDSS is delivered at an RTO and students typically travel to the classes.

VET has grown as a mainstream part of senior secondary since its introduction in the mid-90s (see Figure 27). In 2019, around 50,000 school students studied a VET course (representing 34 per cent of senior secondary students). Most of these courses were part of a senior secondary program, although 1,713 were undertaken as VET in Year 9 and 11,530 in Year 10.

Figure - 27 **VDSS students, 2010–2019**



Source: VCAA (2020)

The five most common VDSS certificate enrolments in 2019 were:

1. Certificate III in Sport and Recreation
2. Certificate II in Building and Construction pre-apprenticeship
3. Certificate II in Business
4. Certificate II in Kitchen Operations
5. Certificate III in Community Services.

These VDSS certificates, being the top five in terms of attracting the highest number of enrolments, are similar to the top five certificates in 2010, except the Certificate III in Media was the fifth most popular VDSS course instead of the Certificate III in Community Services.

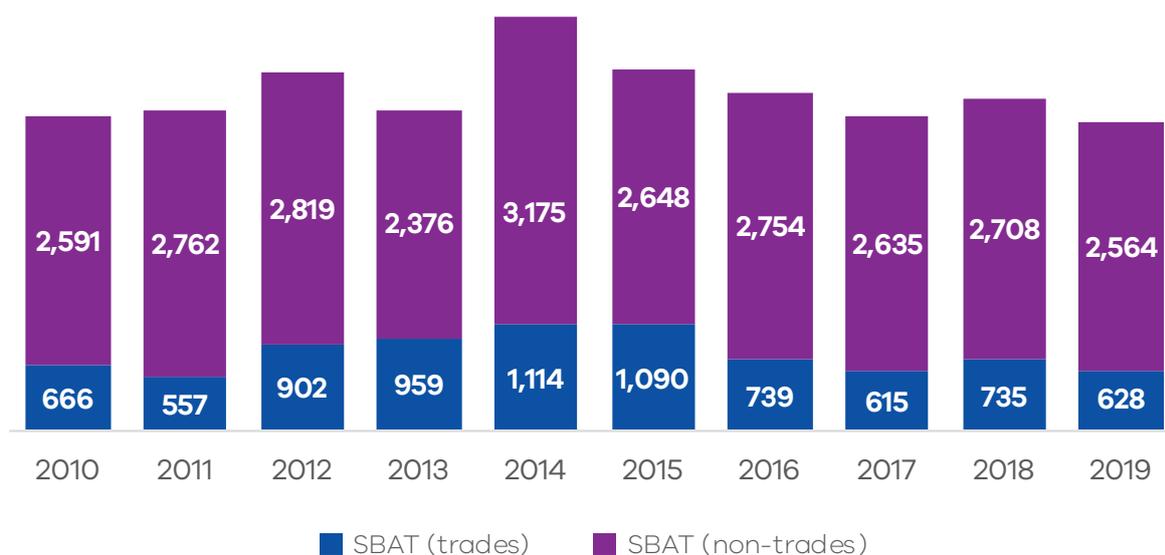
School based apprenticeships and traineeships

SBATs combine senior secondary programs with VET training and part-time employment. SBATs allow secondary students to undertake an apprenticeship or traineeship part-time while still at school. Students typically spend at least one day a week in employment and structured training.

In 2019, 3,486 students commenced an SBAT—around 2 per cent of senior secondary students. Over 80 per cent of these were traineeships (2,866 commencements) with only 620 students starting an apprenticeship.

SBAT commencement rates have been steadily declining, falling from a peak of nearly 4,600 in 2014 (see Figure 28). School based traineeship commencements in Victoria have decreased by 26 per cent since 2014. School based apprenticeship commencements have decreased by 15 per cent since 2014 and 31 per cent since 2010. These trends are part of a general declining trend of commencements in full-time apprenticeships and traineeship, which has fallen by 31 per cent since 2014 (NCVER, 2020).

Figure - 28 **SBAT commencements, 2010–2019**



Source: NCVER (2020)

Other reviews

Several reviews of senior secondary education in other jurisdictions have completed recently that have considered similar themes to this Review.

Review of Senior Secondary Pathways

The Review of Senior Secondary Pathways (Shergold et al., 2020) examined how students can be supported to choose the best pathway into work, further education and training. Some of the recommendations reinforce those in this Review, including restricting senior secondary certification requirements so students are not forced into a binary choice between vocational and higher education pathways, supporting all students to undertake some form of vocational learning at school, and ensuring all students can access VET while at school.

NSW Curriculum Review

The recommendations of the NSW Curriculum Review (Masters, 2020) advocate the integration of the senior secondary curriculum. The review found that the current focus of senior programs is on preparing for specific post-school destinations, and it questions whether this focus provides the foundations needed for success in post-school education, employment and life. It recommends that the senior secondary curriculum should be more focused on providing a broad education that prepares students for ongoing learning, life and work. The report recommends that reforms to the NSW senior secondary framework be undertaken by developing specialised subjects that combine theory with the practical application of knowledge and by requiring every student to undertake a major investigative project.

Queensland Certificate of Education reforms

Queensland introduced a new Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) system starting with Year 11 students in 2019. The core components of the new QCE system were decided in 2015 in response to an independent Queensland Review of Senior Assessment and Tertiary Entrance (Matters & Masters, 2014). These components include:

- a new approach to senior assessment that combines school-based assessment with external assessment, set and marked by the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA)
- new processes that strengthen the quality and comparability of school-based assessment
- transferring responsibility for tertiary entrance ranking from the QCAA to the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre.

APPENDIX E

VCAL LEARNING OUTCOMES

Table 9 - VCAL Literacy Reading and Writing learning outcomes

	Foundation	Intermediate	Senior
Learning outcome 1 Writing for Self-Expression	Write a simple recount, narrative or expressive text on a familiar subject.	Write a recount, narrative or expressive text.	Write a complex recount, narrative or expressive text.
Learning outcome 2 Writing for Practical Purposes	Write a simple instructional or transactional text on a familiar subject.	Write an instructional or transactional text.	Write a complex instructional or transactional text.
Learning outcome 3 Writing for Knowledge	Write a simple report or explanatory text on a familiar subject.	Write a report, explanatory or expository text.	Write a complex report, explanatory or expository text.
Learning outcome 4 Writing for Public Debate	Write a simple persuasive and/or argumentative text expressing a point of view on a familiar subject.	Write a persuasive, argumentative or discursive text.	Write a complex persuasive, argumentative or discursive text.
Learning outcome 5 Reading for Self-expression	Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a simple narrative, recount or expressive text.	Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a narrative, recount or expressive text.	Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a complex, sustained narrative, recount or expressive text.
Learning outcome 6 Reading for Practical Purposes	Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a simple instructional or transactional text.	Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading an instructional or transactional text.	Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a complex, sustained instructional or transactional text.
Learning outcome 7 Reading for Knowledge	Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a simple explanatory or informative text on a familiar subject.	Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading an explanatory, expository or informative text.	Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a complex, sustained report, explanatory, expository or informative text.
Learning outcome 8 Reading for Public Debate	Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a simple persuasive or discursive text on a familiar subject.	Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a persuasive, discursive or argumentative text.	Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a complex, sustained persuasive, argumentative or discursive text.

Table 10 - VCAL PDS Unit 1 learning outcomes

	Foundation	Intermediate	Senior
Learning outcome 1	Plan, organise and carry out a simple activity.	Plan, organise and carry out a complex activity or project.	Plan, organise and carry out a complex, self-directed project.
Learning outcome 2	Demonstrate knowledge specific to a simple activity.	Demonstrate knowledge and skills in the context of a complex activity or project.	Evaluate the impact of environmental, cultural or social issues in a complex, self-directed project.
Learning outcome 3	Demonstrate skills specific to a simple activity.	Demonstrate self-management skills for goal achievement in the context of a complex activity or project.	Implement decision-making skills in a complex, self-directed project.
Learning outcome 4	Solve a problem specific to a simple activity.	Demonstrate interpersonal skills to communicate ideas and information.	Apply strategies to improve communication in a complex, self-directed project.
Learning outcome 5	Demonstrate teamwork skills in a simple activity.	Demonstrate leadership skills and responsibilities.	Demonstrate leadership skills for group work and teamwork in a complex self-directed project.

APPENDIX F GLOSSARY

Apparent retention rate	The apparent retention rate to Year 12 is an estimate of the percentage of students who stay enrolled full time in secondary education from the start of secondary school (year 7) to Year 12
Applied learning	A pedagogical approach where students learn through doing in circumstances that emulate the real world. This may include both vocational and academic knowledge and skills.
Apprenticeship	A structured training and employment arrangement that combines paid on-the-job training and formal study with a registered training organisation.
Auspicing	An arrangement between a secondary school and an RTO where the school has responsibility for delivering the VET program and the RTO has responsibility for the quality assurance and issuing of the awards.
Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)	The national framework comprising all regulated qualifications in the Australian education and training system.
Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR)	The rank that student receive at the end of the VCE that shows student's relative position compared to all other students. It is used by higher education providers either on its own or in conjunction with other selection criteria, to rank and select students for admission to tertiary courses.
Career advice	Services intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers. Consists of a range of interventions, including career education, counselling and information that help people to move from a general understanding of life and work to a specific understanding of the realistic learning and work options that are open to them.
Career education	The development of knowledge, skills and attitudes through a planned program of learning experiences in education and workplace training settings that will assist students to make informed decisions about their study and/or work options and enable effective participation in working life.
Credential	Formal certification issued for successful achievement of a defined set of outcomes, for example, successful completion of a course in recognition of having achieved particular knowledge, skills or competencies; successful completion of an apprenticeship or traineeship.
Digital literacy	The ability to access, manage and evaluate digital information, including information and communications technology, social media, hardware and software, and an awareness of issues such as cybersecurity.
Flexible learning options (FLOs)	Settings that provide alternative, tailored education and support for children and young people who are disengaged, or have been at risk of disengaging, from mainstream school. They provide an opportunity for these students to achieve positive learning outcomes through engagement in a more flexible learning environment, coupled with wellbeing supports.
Capabilities	Encompasses the knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions that, together with curriculum content in learning areas and the cross-curriculum priorities, assist students to live and work successfully in the 21st century. The four capabilities in the Victorian Curriculum are: critical and creative thinking, personal and social, ethical and intercultural.
Higher education	Education involving qualifications under the Australian Qualifications Framework at associate degree and above, as well as diploma and advanced diploma qualifications accredited under higher education arrangements.
Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN)	Statewide network of 31 organisations that work with schools, education providers, industry and community to build and maintain partnerships. They support schools to source work placements, SBATs and other school–employer engagement activities to support career education. They are primarily funded by the Department and provide services to all secondary schools.
Middle years	Years 9 and 10 of secondary schooling.
Pathways	The different options available to young people as they progress through their schooling and transition to further education or work.
Registered Training Organisations (RTOs)	Training providers registered by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) or in some cases, a state or territory registering and accrediting body to deliver training and/or conduct assessments and issue nationally recognised qualifications in accordance with the Australian Quality Training Framework or the VET Quality Framework. RTOs include TAFE colleges and institutes, adult and community education providers, private providers, community organisations, schools, higher education institutions, commercial and enterprise training providers, industry bodies and other organisations meeting the registration requirements.

Senior secondary schooling	Year 11 and Year 12 of school, which can be studied either at secondary school, college or through a further education institution.
Senior secondary qualification	A senior secondary certificate that is accredited by the VRQA and marks the completion of secondary schooling. In Victoria, there are three: the VCE, VCAL and International Baccalaureate Diploma.
Skill	An ability to perform a mental or physical activity, which may be developed by training or practice.
Statement of Results	A cumulative record of all results for a senior secondary student who has graduated either the VCE or VCAL.
Student Resource Package (SRP)	A funding model that reflects the specific funding amounts provided to schools in each school year. It comprises student-based funding (the major source of funding for schools), school-based funding (funding for school infrastructure and school-specific programs) and targeted initiatives funding (for programs with specific criteria or defined lifespans).
Structured Workplace Learning (SWL)	Work placement where students are provided an opportunity to practise skills and develop competencies aligned to a vocational education program (such as VCAL, VETDSS or VCE Industry & Enterprise). The student is not paid a salary. Unless the employer is exempt, the student receives a minimum payment of \$5 per day from the host employer.
Tech schools	Education programs in specialist facilities that give students practical experience, with access to the latest technology and equipment. They are managed and operated in partnership with local schools, local government, TAFE, university and industry, and offer students a unique learning environment.
Tertiary education	Study towards degrees, diplomas or certificates in vocational education and training and/or academic disciplines.
Trade Training Centre (TTC) also known as Trade Skills Centre	Specialised trade training facilities that enable school students and adult community members to undertake accredited training in purpose-built facilities.
Traineeship	A structured training arrangement that combines paid on-the-job training and formal study with a registered training organisation. Traineeships are generally shorter than apprenticeships and cover a broader range of industries.
Units of competency	The nationally agreed statements of the skills and knowledge required for effective performance in a job or job function. They identify the skills and knowledge, as outcomes that contribute to the whole job function. Units of competency are an endorsed component of training packages.
Unscored VCE	The option to complete VCE without obtaining study scores and an ATAR. Students are scored as 'satisfactory' or 'non-satisfactory' and do not sit exams.
Vocational education and training (VET)	Study leading towards a nationally recognised qualification, issued by a registered training organisation within a regulatory framework.
VET clusters	Locally based partnerships between senior secondary education providers, RTOs, industry and other community organisations who have joined forces to improve the quality and breadth of VET programs available.
VET delivered to secondary students (VDSS)	Vocational education and training qualifications undertaken by secondary school students, either as part of school studies delivered and resourced by a school RTO, or by enrolling in a qualification with an external RTO. Previously known as VET in Schools (VETiS).
VET trainer	A person who delivers theoretical and practical VET training, either in an educational institution, training institution or at a workplace. In a school context, this includes registered teachers with the relevant VET qualifications. VET trainers are required to have: a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, the relevant industry qualification they are teaching or higher, and relevant industry currency.
Vocational learning	Vocational learning delivered in secondary schooling sits within the broader school curriculum and helps secondary students explore the world of work, identify career options and pathways, build career development skills and in certain settings, develop entry-level technical skills for use within a job. It can include VET, SWL, SBATs, career education, work experience, volunteering and other school-based learning designed to build preparedness for the workforce.
Vocational tasters	Courses that are designed to contain a limited number of skillsets to provide learners with an opportunity to sample a vocational pathway and see what it would be like to study and work in a chosen field.
Work experience	Work experience is the short-term placement (usually one or two weeks) of secondary school students, generally from Years 9 and 10, with employers to provide insights into the industry and the workplace in which they are located.

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ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

AASN	Australian Apprenticeship Support Network
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACSF	Australian Core Skills Framework
ATIP	Auspiced Training Industry Partnership
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
ASHE	Academy of Sport, Health and Education
ASQA	Australian Skills Quality Authority
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
ATIP	Auspiced Training Industry Partnership
BKI	Bendigo Kangan Institute
CATI	Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing
CEAV	Career Education Association of Victoria
CECV	Catholic Education Commission of Victoria
CEDA	Committee for Economic Development of Australia
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CRCS	Catholic Regional College Sydenham
CSF	Community Services Funding
Department (DET)	Department of Education and Training (Victoria)
FLO	Flexible learning option
FTE	Full-time equivalent
HILDA Survey	Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey
HTC	Harvester Technical College
IAG	Industry Advisory Group
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
LLEN	Local Learning and Employment Network
MIP	Multi Industry School Based and Pre-Apprenticeships Support Pilot Project
MPSG	Major Projects Skills Guarantee
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NCCD	Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability
NCI	National Careers Institute
NVCER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NSSSPs	Non-school senior secondary providers

NSW	New South Wales
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PD	Professional development
PDS	Personal Development Skills
PLC	Professional Learning Communities
PRACE	Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education
PTT	Permission to Teach
QA	Quality assurance
QCAA	Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority
QCE	Queensland Certificate of Education
QCIA	Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement
RTO	Registered training organisation
SACE	South Australian Certificate of Education
SBAT	School based apprenticeship or traineeship
SHSM program	Specialist High Skills Major program
SRP	Student Resource Package
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
SWL	Structured workplace learning
SWLR	Structured Workplace Learning Recognition
TTC	Trade Training Centre or Trade Skills Centre
VALA	Victorian Applied Learning Association
VASS	Victorian Assessment Software System
VCAA	Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
VCAL	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education
VDC	VET Development Centre
VDSS	Vocational Education and Training (VET) delivered to school students
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VETiS	VET in Schools (now known as VDSS)
VETRO	VET Readiness Orientation
VIT	Victorian Institute of Teaching
VRQA	Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority
WRS	Work Related Skills

