THE VICTORIAN
CERTIFICATE OF
EDUCATION:
A NEW DIRECTION

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The Revised VCE: A New Direction

Introduction

This paper summarises the changes that have occurred in the Victorian Certificate of Education as an outcome of the recommendations of a Ministerial Committee of Review established in 1997. It is descriptive rather than analytical and seeks to ensure that any analysis of the changes being implemented is based on an understanding of the origins and state of play of the Revised VCE.

The VCE Review Committee

The Committee of Review was Chaired by Professor Kwong Lee Dow of the University of Melbourne and included the following membership.

Mr Peter Allen  Director of Schools
Department of Education
Ms Elida Brereton  Principal
Camberwell High School
Mr Ben Foskett  State Manager and Investment Manager
AMP Society
Ms Sharyn O’Brien  Managing Director
Aspect Public Relations
Ms Susan Pascoe  Coordinating Chairperson (Policy)
Catholic Education Office
Professor Ian Rae  Department of History & Philosophy of Science,
The University of Melbourne, formerly Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Victoria University of Technology
Mr Paul Sheahan  Headmaster
Melbourne Grammar School
Mr John Sweetman  Director of Corporate Services
Delware North (Australia) Pty Ltd

The Executive Officer of the Committee was Mr Dennis Bolster a senior officer from the Department of Education and he was supported by a Secretariat and senior officers from the Board of Studies.
The key outcomes of the Review

The Review sought and received over 400 submissions during its deliberations. These in the main were from schools and they provided a wide ranging and representative critique of the existing Victorian Certificate of Education while recognising its strengths and identifying those components that should be retained.

In particular the single certificate completed over a minimum of two years was endorsed as successfully drawing together under a common framework the range of certificates that existed prior to 1990. The stratification inherent in a senior secondary program that recognised completion through diverse certification had been successfully addressed by the single certificate. Vocational pathways had been included in the single certificate but required greater integration to ensure vocational education represented an equivalent pathway without obstruction by particular completion requirements. Moreover the completion requirements overall had been set at an appropriate level and the standards and workload they represented were seen as comparable nationally and internationally. The mix of school based assessment and external examinations was an important component of the senior secondary curriculum and needed to be maintained. And the policies for special provision and inclusion such as those for adult students had been quite successful.

A consistent criticism however was the unreasonable workload and stress for students and teachers associated with the existing VCE and the perception of cheating which was fed continually by rumour and gossip and widely reported in the media regardless of its veracity. In response the Board of Studies has put in place rigorous administrative requirements to ensure authentic student assessment however these requirements are too onerous to be sustained in the long term.

The Review directed the Board of Studies to ensure in the revised arrangements that workload and stress were reduced. The key vehicle they proposed to meet this goal was to replace school assessed common assessment tasks (CATs), where appropriate, with coursework assessment.

Similarly, the inflexibility of work requirements and work required assessment was to be replaced by outcomes which support more flexible ways of demonstrating satisfactory completion of course components. In turn the satisfactory completion requirements needed to be revised to support a broader range of study choice within the single certificate.

In the following sections consider the manner in which pathways and curriculum provision, curriculum design and assessment procedures were changed.

Pathways and Curriculum Provision
To receive the award of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) students currently need to satisfactorily complete 16 units of study (a unit constitutes a semester of study), including three Unit 3 and 4 sequences and three units of the common study English/ESL. Additionally students need to complete 2 units of study from a Mathematics/Science group of studies and 2 units from a humanities group.

The Review proposed that a further English study focusing on linguistics would be a valuable addition to the VCE and should be considered. A study of English Language was subsequently accredited however the existing completion requirements constrained the breadth of potential study in English. The Board agreed to the following more flexible arrangements for completion requirements for English.

*Effective from the 1 January 2001 the three units of English may be selected from VCE English/ESL Units 1-4; the new study VCE English Language Units 3 and 4; and VCE Literature Units 3 and 4.*

Similarly the integration of the VCE Vocational Education and Training (VCE VET) program into the VCE was constrained by the failure to acknowledge the VCE VET program in the core components of the completion requirements. The Board resolved that in the revised satisfactory completion requirements VCE VET units could contribute up to 8 Units including up to two of the three Unit 3 / 4 sequences required for satisfactory completion.

In curriculum provision the Review required the Board to ensure that overlap and duplication between VCE studies (including VCE VET) should be avoided and that studies offered should attract a sustainable cohort. The Board commissioned a number of analyses of groups of studies where overlap and duplication was evident, where enrolments were low or declining and identified where there were gaps in current provision.

The changes to the current offerings arising from the analyses included:
- merging Health Education and Human Development to create a single study of Health and Human Development
- merging Systems and Technology and Technological Design and Development to create a single Systems and Technology Study
- merging Materials and Technology and Technological Design and Development to create a single Design and Technology Study
- incorporating the studies of VCE Science, VCE Australian Studies, VCE Outdoor Education and VCE Environmental Studies into new or continuing studies.

The Board established accreditation panels for each revised VCE Study and those panels proceeded to rewrite VCE studies according to guidelines for accreditation approved by the Board.
A number of new VCE studies were recommended;
- Philosophy
- English Language
- Foundation English
- Foundation Mathematics
- Environmental Science
- Outdoor and Environmental Studies
- Food and Technology

The study of Contemporary Society is still under review and VCE Dance Styles will be developed as a VCE VET study.

In VCE VET all the curriculum based programs are being revised with a VCE Unit 1 - 4 structure and mainly with a Unit 3 - 4 sequence by 2000.

The full list of the revised VCE and VCE VET offerings are included in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.
Curriculum Design

The basic design features of the existing VCE have been maintained in Revised studies. Each study is designed around four semester units of 50 hours classroom instruction with Units 3 and 4 taken as a sequence.

Each design includes a rationale and areas of study which define the content associated with each unit. In most cases the areas of study or content of most studies has not been significantly changed. This has allowed the introduction of units 1 - 4 of studies concurrently, streamlining the process of curriculum change.

The new components include the introduction of an outcomes framework in place of a work required approach to curriculum design and the replacement of school-assessed Common Assessment Tasks (CATs) with coursework assessment and/or school assessed tasks.

Outcomes are nationally and internationally acknowledged as an improved approach to curriculum design. An outcomes framework recognises that there are multiple pathways to the same end point. Focusing on what students know and can do as an outcome of the teaching and learning program promotes greater flexibility in course design and removes the constraints which arise from requiring all students to complete the same work to demonstrate their achievements.

The outcomes in the VCE are of a different nature to learning outcomes as they are commonly portrayed in vocational education. In vocational education learning outcomes are often competency driven and smaller in scope than those adopted for revised VCE studies. In the revised VCE each outcome includes a summary statement and the key knowledge and key skills that underpin it. This was an important design feature and allowed Accreditation Panels in each study to audit the emphasis on content and process across the study identifying where either was overemphasised and improving the balance in each study between knowledge and skill.

Finally in developing the study designs accreditation panels were asked to place more emphasis on the use of technology in learning. The designs include an Advice to Teachers section where examples of approaches to teaching, learning and assessment are provided. Learning activities that might lend themselves to the use of technology are identified in each design. Further in the case of particular studies the use of technology has been mandated. In Accounting, Visual Communication and Design and Mathematics the use of software essential to the study has been included in the areas of study and in the assessment.

Assessment Procedures
The significant change in the assessment procedures was to replace school assessed Common Assessment Tasks (CATs) with coursework assessment or school assessed tasks.

School assessed tasks are for product/model assessments in the Arts and Technology studies. These are similar to the current school assessed CATs and are teacher assessed, monitored using the General Achievement Test (GAT) and reviewed where necessary.

Coursework assessment has been introduced to reduce the workload and stress associated with the school assessed CATs. Assessment tasks in the Revised VCE are not lengthy out of class tasks which involve multiple drafts but rather are much smaller, take less time and are to be a part of regular classroom activity.

The following is an example of coursework assessment for VCE Australian History Unit 3 Outcome 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment tasks</th>
<th>Marks allocated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An essay and</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• a short-answer test</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• analysis of visual material</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• analysis of written documents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• a short biographical study</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In this case all students must complete an essay and a choice of tasks is provided for the other component of the assessment for this outcome.
Coursework assessment for Unit 3 contributes 25% to the final assessment.

There are four assessment tasks for Unit 3 equally weighted so that each assessment task contributes 6.25% of the end of year assessment. The scope of each task is detailed in an Assessment Guide and the criteria for assessing the task are also provided.

For the example provided for Unit 3 Outcome 2 in Australian History the essay is of 600-750 words and completed in 80-100 minutes in class over one week.

Generally the balance between school assessment and examination assessment has been maintained in the revised VCE. Each revised VCE study has three components.

For the majority of studies these are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit 3</th>
<th>Coursework Assessment</th>
<th>25%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unit 4</td>
<td>Coursework Assessment</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>End of year examination</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In science studies the components are:

| Mid year examination | 33% |
| Coursework assessment for Unit 3 and 4 | 34% |
| End of year examination | 33% |

Mathematics has two end of year examinations each worth 33% and a coursework assessment component for Units 3 and 4 of 34%.

**Statistical Moderation**

To ensure comparability of school assessments of coursework from different schools the Board will introduce and apply statistical procedures to each school group, study by study.

The statistical moderation adopted uses a common reference distribution to make school assessment from different schools comparable. It does not change school rank order but the level and spread of student scores may change as a result of the moderation process.
Further Information

Dow, Professor K.L. (Chair)  *Enhancing their Futures. Report of the Committee of Review on the Victorian Certificate of Education December 1997*


Board of Studies  *Study Designs (various)*

Board of Studies, Victoria, 1999.

Board of Studies  *Assessment Guides Revised VCE 2000 (various).*

Board of Studies, Victoria, 1999.

Authors

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The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors alone and should not in any way be attributed to the Board of Studies
Appendix 1

Revised VCE Studies Commencing in 2000
Accounting
Agricultural and Horticultural Studies
Art
Biology
Business Management
Chemistry
Classical Societies and Cultures
Economics
English/ESL
Geography
Health and Human Development
History
Information Technology: Information Processing and Management
Information Technology: Information Systems
International Studies
Legal Studies
Literature
Mathematics
Media
Physics
Physical Education
Political Studies
Psychology
Studio Arts
Visual Communication and Design

Revised VCE studies commencing in 2001
Contemporary Society*
Dance
Design and Technology
Drama
English Language
Environmental Science
Food and Technology
Foundation English (Units 1 and 2)
Industry and Enterprise
Languages Other than English (LOTE)**
Music History and Styles
Music Performance (Units 1 and 2)
Music Performance: Group (Units 3 and 4)
Music Performance: Solo (Units 3 and 4)
Outdoor and Environmental Studies
Philosophy
Religion and Society
Systems and Technology
Texts and Traditions
Theatre Studies

*Working title, subject to confirmation in 1999
**19 LOTE studies will be implemented in 2001 and the remaining 27 in 2002**

### VCE VET PROGRAMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Certificate II in Agriculture and New Apprenticeship program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate II in Arts (Interactive Multimedia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate II in Automotive (Technology Studies) and New Apprenticeship programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate II in Business (Organisational Practices)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate II in Business (Office Administration) and New Apprenticeship program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate III in Community Services (Community Work) and New Apprenticeship program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate II in Clothing Design and Production</td>
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<tr>
<td>Certificate II in Desktop Publishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate II in Electronics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate I in Engineering and New Apprenticeship program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate IV in Food Technology and New Apprenticeship program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate II in Food Retail (McDonald’s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET in Schools Forest Industries Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate II in General Construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate II in Horticulture and New Apprenticeship program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate II in Hospitality (Operations) and New Apprenticeship programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate II in Horse Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate III in Information Technology and New Apprenticeship program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate III in Laboratory Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate II in Music Industry Skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Certificate II in Polymer Processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate II in Printing (Production and Graphics Support)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET in Schools Retail Operations and New Apprenticeship program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate II in Small Business Practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Certificate II in Sport and Recreation
and New Apprenticeship program