Enhancing their Futures: Report of the Committee of Review on the Victorian Certificate of Education.

State of Victoria, 1997 (Chair: Kwong Lee Dow)

Overview of the document

67 page report on the review of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). The Report recommends retaining key elements of the certificate, including retaining it as a single certificate over two years as well as a number of changes, including enhancing the breadth of choice, increasing the integration of VET, and the development of a set of standards-based outcomes.

Keywords

Technological change; equitable assessment; pathways; key competencies; life-long learning; enterprise skills; economic change; best-practice; post-compulsory education; academic and vocational outcomes; changing labour markets; advanced knowledge-based society; broad, general education; unhealthy levels of stress; workplace learning; democratic values.

Terms of Reference

In initiating the Review of the VCE, the Minister requested the Committee of Review to examine and provide advice on issues such as:

➢ the demands the present structure of VCE studies places on parents, teachers and students, and to recommend ways of reducing unnecessary stress and levels of work without diminishing levels of rigour and challenge in the curriculum improving the effectiveness in the links between the VCE and higher education;

➢ employment, and vocational education and training, giving particular consideration to the development of pathways to vocational education, training and employment;

➢ the number and range of studies offered, giving due regard to any overlap or duplication between existing studies and options;

➢ the level of challenge and rigour in existing VCE studies and any recommendations for the enhancement of these;

➢ any subjects of high priority or particular significance to the emerging structure of the Victorian economy;

➢ the balance of external assessment and school assessment in VCE units 3 and 4;

➢ the appropriateness of current assessment programs to the nature and purpose of the various studies;

➢ methods that might be used to enhance the credibility of the VCE assessment program in the community;

➢ appropriate methods of enhancing the standing of the VCE both nationally and internationally.

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Summary of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
- ➤ Notes that on 10 February 1997, Minister for Education, Phillip Gude, announced a review of the VCE and that the Minister noted the importance of monitoring and reviewing curriculum and assessment programs for them to be of consistently high standard.
- ➤ Notes that the Review recommends maintaining the best existing features of the VCE and addressing emerging needs in relation to the provision of schooling in the post-compulsory years.

- Notes the changes in retention in Years 11 and 12; changing patterns of higher education, vocational education and training and the youth labour market; policy shifts by the State and Commonwealth governments; and the need to accommodate technological change.
- Notes that the Committee has given priority to the need to revise assessment to ensure that it is fair and equitable for all students and has also considered:
  - the need to relieve "undue pressure" on teachers and students;
  - "the need to develop more clearly articulate pathways within the certificate"; and
  - "the requirement that VCE studies should be rigorous and challenging." (p. 1)
- Recommends a revised VCE "to accommodate the needs of an ever-widening clientele." (p. 2)
- Argues that the VCE as a two year single credential best serves the interests of all students and "that offering multiple credentials leads to a de facto streaming of students." (p. 2)
- Other recommendations include the redesign of school-assessed tasks, the introduction of new "school-assessed coursework" and "some realignment of the balance between external and internal assessment". (p. 2)
- Notes that the key recommendations recognise the significant growth of VET over previous 5 years and recommends more integration of VET into the VCE.
- Argues that the revised VCE:
  - caters in a flexible manner for the needs, interests and intended destinations of the total student population in the post-compulsory years of schooling within a single certificate;
  - strengthens and broadens the range of programs and pathways for students;
  - integrates VET in Schools more closely within a single VCE;
  - ensures that assessment of the VCE is fair, reliable and valid;
  - places greater emphasis on student learning outcomes and the achievement of generic key competencies;
  - ensures that there is an appropriate level of challenge and rigour in VCE studies;
  - reduces unnecessary stress and workloads for students and teachers; and
  - is comparable to other state and international certificates. (p. 3)

RECOMMENDATIONS
- Outlines the Report's 34 recommendations for changes to the VCE. Key recommendations include:
  - Retaining the VCE as a single certificate over 2 years.
  - Enhancing the breadth of choice through the provision of programs which articulate with tertiary courses and post-school training and employment options.
  - Increased integration of VET into the VCE.
  - That the Board of Studies undertake an analysis of the VCE curriculum to minimise overlap and duplication.
  - That a set of explicit standards-based learning outcomes be developed for each unit of study.
  - That graded assessment be a combination of examination and school assessment.

- o That the Board of Studies monitor the relevance and quality of all studies on an ongoing basis.
- o That a three year information technology strategy be developed by the Board of Studies.

CHAPTER ONE: THE REVIEW PROCESS
- ➢ Outlines the Terms of Reference. (p. 11)
- ➢ Outlines the consultation process, which included 400 written submissions, school visits, focus groups, phone-ins, research survey and consultations with organisations.

CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXT AND RATIONALE FOR AN ENHANCED POST-COMPULSORY CERTIFICATE
New Expectations and Demands in Post-compulsory Education
- ➢ Discusses the challenge of new social and economic forces and "calls for a far-sighted educational response". (p. 14)
- ➢ Notes that the new emphasis on benchmarking reflects best-practice and that the VCE requires continual improvement to meet changing needs.

Enhancing the VCE
- ➢ Notes that further integration of VET into VCE is required to facilitate pathways between TAFE and higher education.
- ➢ States that the "process of 'integration' should be seen as the enhancing of a broad general education for all students in the post-compulsory years." (p. 15)
- ➢ Argues that the existing strength of VCE is the balance between breadth and specialisation and that this needs to be further supported.

Balancing the Competing Claims in the Post-compulsory Years
- ➢ States that: "To enhance the VCE, all of the competing claims in the post-compulsory years must be attended to and continually reviewed. The VCE must meet:
  - o the need for challenging and rigorous studies of an international standard
  - o the needs of employers, and the higher education and training and further education sectors
  - o the particular challenges of assessment and selection in the 'high stakes' environment confronting senior secondary students
  - o the need to provide reasonable and manageable student and staff workload expectations
  - o the need to avoid unhealthy levels of stress, allowing time and space for students to enjoy learning and to promote their personal and social development in the final years of secondary education
  - o the need to recognise these years as an important phase in its own right as well as the crucial interface for post-school destinations." (p. 16)
- ➢ Notes that "The key issues and recommendations that follow are designed to meet this challenge." (p. 16)

CHAPTER THREE: STRUCTURE OF THE VCE
A Single Credential
- ➢ Notes the background to the VCE as based on "the belief that the interests of all students are better served through a single credential that attempts to cater for the

needs of all students". (p. 17)
  ➢ Notes that in general this has worked well and recommends that the VCE continue as a single certificate.

Enhanced Role for VET within the VCE
  ➢ Describes VET in schools arrangements as a major addition to the VCE and recommends greater recognition of VET within the VCE.
  ➢ Argues that VET programs "have the potential to complement VCE studies by providing a focus on workplace learning". (p. 19)
  ➢ Notes that current programs have been successful but there remains a "lack of clarity regarding appropriate arrangements for provision and the status of VET within the VCE". (p. 19)
  ➢ Notes the recommendations endorsed by MCEETYA from the report from the Taskforce on New Apprenticeships in Schools (June, 1997) including the adoption of a set of Principles and a Framework "which calls upon boards of studies in consultation with the ANTA and State training authorities to develop consistent approaches to the integration and certification of VET and senior secondary components of New Apprenticeships in schools." (p. 19)
  ➢ States that "In proposing a greater recognition of VET within the VCE, the Committee is endorsing the direction and intentions of the MCEETYA recommendations. VET is not targeted at a particular group of potential VCE students—it is of value to the whole range of students." (p. 20)

VCE Satisfactory Completion Requirements
  ➢ Makes some specific recommendations about the completion of units including that the current level of 16 units for satisfactory completion should be retained and that to reflect the enhanced role of VET, up to 8 of the units other than English should be able to be VET units.

Tertiary Entrance
  ➢ Recommends the addition of VET to the Tertiary Entrance Rank.

CHAPTER FOUR: CURRICULUM
Curriculum Principles
  ➢ States that "the VCE curriculum must negotiate between breadth and depth, general and vocational, generic and specialist courses." (p. 24)
  ➢ Proposes that VCE studies be of two types – those devised by the Board of Studies, and the VCE VET units, which will be developed by industry and be accredited courses that meet the requirements of the VCE.
  ➢ Notes that VET can be strengthened if underpinned by explicit curriculum principles and recommends the adoption of the following curriculum principles:
      o "provides appropriate challenge for the intended student cohort
      o contributes to the provision of coherent programs to provide students with access to further study, training and work
      o encourages and rewards excellence of achievement
      o makes explicit the key competencies that are appropriate to the study area
      o promotes a commitment to the development of life-long learning
      o incorporates and promotes the use of multimedia technology in student

learning and assessment
- o is comparable in standard to national and international best practice
- o avoids undue duplication and overlap between VCE studies, including endorsed VCE VET studies." (p. 26)

Number and Range of Studies
- ➢ Notes the reduction in areas of study that accompanied the introduction of the VCE.
- ➢ Notes the disparity in enrolment levels across various areas of the curriculum and the quality assurance problems this poses.
- ➢ Recommends that the Board of Studies undertake an analysis of relationship and the coherence of student programs.

Additional English and Mathematics units
- ➢ Recommends that the Board of Studies investigate the feasibility of the inclusion of additional mathematics and English units to strengthen foundational literacy and innumeracy.

Compulsory English Requirement
- ➢ Supports the existing compulsory English requirement.

Additional Humanities
- ➢ Recommends that further humanities subjects based around theories of knowledge and approaches to philosophy be added.

Extension Studies
- ➢ Recommends the continuation of the existing extension program.

Languages Other Than English
- ➢ Notes the recent increase in LOTE enrolments but also the disparity between different language offerings. Notes that some maintain strong student numbers but that of the 40 languages offered 9 regularly had enrolments of less than 10 students per year, which poses particular difficulties.

Science
- ➢ Notes the concern about a drift away from the sciences and mathematics and the importance of the Board to continually monitor this but does not make any particular recommendation.

CHAPTER FIVE: ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING
- ➢ States that "In reviewing the VCE assessment and reporting procedures, the Committee of Review identified four key issues to be addressed:
  - o the need to ensure standards of achievement for the award of a certificate that is rigorous and challenging for all students
  - o the need to eliminate excessive levels of stress and workload for students and teachers
  - o the authentication of students' work
  - o the structured integration of VET courses within the VCE." (p. 33)
- ➢ Notes that "The consultation process confirmed the importance of these issues,

particularly the need to resolve concerns regarding unnecessary stress and workload, and authentication of school-assessed Common Assessment Tasks (CATs)." (p. 33)

Stress and Workload
➢ Notes the high level of stress associated with CATs.

Satisfactory Completion
➢ Recommends that "a set of explicit standards-based learning outcomes be developed to replace current work requirements. Learning outcomes will incorporate key areas of knowledge, skills and generic competencies." (p. 34)

The Mix of External and School-based Assessment
➢ Notes the importance of school-based assessment and recommends that it should be retained, but that there should be an increase in the proportion of external assessment.

School-based Assessment
➢ Notes that school-based assessment is valid, reliable and cost-effective but that it also has problems which need to be addressed. Notes that concerns raised in consultation included excessive workload, authentication and ensuring comparability of schools' assessments.
➢ Recommends that those tasks that are susceptible to these problems should be redesigned in the form of "school-assessed coursework". (p. 36)

Authentication
➢ Recognises problematic tasks as those that:
  o "involve large amounts of unsupervised work undertaken outside the classroom
  o involve considerable drafting and redrafting, or
  o have identical, similar or predictable topics each year that can be anticipated and planned for in advance by publishers and other commercial enterprises, or can be readily obtained from previous students." (p. 37)

Comparability of Schools' Assessments
➢ To ensure statewide consistency, a model is proposed that uses statistical moderation using examination and GAT results.

Reporting of Assessments
➢ Recommends the continuation of the existing system of reporting as grades (A+ to E, UG).
➢ Recommends that each student's overall Relative Position in each study continue to be calculated and reported on a scale of 0-50.

Assessment of VCE VET Units
➢ Argues that the incorporation of VET units into standard VCE will enhance the standing of VET.

Interim Arrangements
➢ Recommends the phased reaccreditation of VCE studies as an interim arrangement.

CHAPTER SIX: ACCREDITATION AND BENCHMARKING
Accreditation
> Recommends that VCE Accreditation Guidelines be revised.

Benchmarking
> Recommends procedures for bench-making, including the appointment of expert panels representing universities, the training sector, schools and employers, in consultation with interest groups, and ongoing review of all studies by the Board

CHAPTER SEVEN: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
> Notes that "developments in information technology are rapidly changing the way we live and work." (p. 46)
> Recommends that a three-year information technology strategic plan be developed.
> Notes that in particular, the plan should lead to the development of systems and structures to:
>> o "expand teacher and student access to on-line learning resources
>> o utilise information and communication technologies in the design and delivery of VCE school assessment and examinations
>> o increase the capacity of schools to deliver a wider range of student programs
>> o facilitate student access to on-line interactive information to support course planning and the exploration of post-school options and career pathways." (p. 47)

CHAPTER EIGHT: IMPLEMENTATION
Implementing the Changes
> Notes that the introduction of recommended reforms to the VCE should be "implemented in a carefully considered and planned way".

Implementation Time Line for the Revised VCE
> Outlines implementation guidelines for the revised VCE.