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## More eyes to cross the Ts in VCE exams

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More academics will be involved in the writing and editing of VCE exams in an effort to avoid the mistake-laden tests of previous years.

Education Minister Ben Carroll pledged yesterday to leave “no stone unturned” to ensure that 2024 VCE exams had gone through a “rigorous process” before they reach students’ desks.

Carroll said the former head of the NSW Education Standards Authority, Dr John Bennett, was reviewing previous errors. Carroll has been briefed on the initial findings and committed to releasing the full review when it is delivered next month.

He asked the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority to review its processes last November, after a series of “stuff ups” in VCE exams.

Thousands of general and specialist maths students were awarded bonus points due to errors in last year’s exams. A number of exams also had confusing typos, and six students were given the wrong Chinese language test.

Carroll said he had also refused the assessment authority’s board a pay rise as a result of the errors.

“I thought that was an important signal, not only to the authority but to the Victorian community and all VCE students how seriously I take those errors,” he told ABC radio.

Mistakes in the 2022 maths exam triggered a number of investigations, which found no “major

mathematical errors”, but identified “room for improvement” in language and grammar.

Carroll said he had met with academics who had raised concerns, and it was clear that Victoria needed “a lot more academic rigour” in the preparation and the writing of VCE exams.

He said he would implement recommendations in the Bennett review “to the best of my ability” but warned the system would never be “100 per cent foolproof”.

Carroll and the authority’s former chief executive Stephen Gniel apologised last year after an error was discovered in the second general mathematics paper.

Gniel, now the acting chief of the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, apologised again days later over an incorrectly labelled diagram in the second specialist mathematics test.

Teachers said at the time even typos could put off already anxious students.

Seventy university mathematicians wrote an open letter to Carroll urging a revamp of the process for setting and vetting the papers and seeking further investigation into five errors in 2022 papers.

One of the letter’s signatories, Dr Marty Ross, said mathematicians had been out of the loop on VCE exams for a generation and needed to be brought back.

But he said exams would never be error-proof. “There will always be something to nitpick, with the occasional large nit, no matter the care and the expertise employed,”

he said.

A Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority spokesperson acknowledged yesterday that last year’s exams did not meet the standards of the organisation or of students and the community.

The spokesperson said the authority had “engaged fully” with Bennett’s review and was working to ensure this year’s examination processes met expected high standards.

*Thousands of maths students were awarded bonus points due to errors.*