Inquiry into Academic Standards of School Education

**Submission by the
Victorian Government
May 2007**

Table of Contents

Introduction

Governments around the world recognise that education and training plays a significant role in a country's economic prosperity and social health.

Education is the Victorian Government's number one priority and is regarded as the key to creating a dynamic, successful community and improving the life opportunities of all Victorians.

The Victorian Government believes that all government school students are entitled to an excellent education and a genuine opportunity to succeed, irrespective of the school they attend, where they live or their home background. The delivery of a high quality education to all students across all areas of the state is the challenge that the Victorian Government has set for our government school system.

Victoria's curriculum provision draws upon extensive national and international research into patterns of student outcomes, the factors that influence them and the performance of schools in delivering them. The diverse range of initiatives that have been implemented have been informed by a robust process of consultation and by an understanding of the more complex world that students face when they leave school.

This submission outlines the priorities, strategies and initiatives that have been implemented by the Victorian Government to meet the challenges of education in the 21st Century and provides the evidence by which its achievements can be measured.

The submission responds to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference by demonstrating the following:

- the comprehensive and integrated approach used in Victoria to provide students with the knowledge, skills and understandings to progress successfully through the stages of their schooling, participate in further education or training and function as members of the community;

- the high standards of academic achievement expected of all Victorian students at all year levels, including those qualifying for the senior secondary school certificate in each state and territory; and

- how these high standards of achievement of Victorian students compare with those of other states and territories and with other countries.

The Victorian education system is internationally recognised and is the result of ongoing collaboration between all members of the education community. The Victorian Government is committed to the continuous improvement of the schools in its vision for a school system that delivers excellent outcomes for all students.

Term of Reference 1

Whether school education prepares students adequately for further education, training and employment, including, but not limited to:

a. the extent to which each stage of schooling (early primary; middle schooling; senior secondary) equips students with the required knowledge and skills to progress successfully through to the next stage; and
b. the extent to which schools provide students with the core knowledge and skills they need to participate in further education and training, and as members of the community.

Victoria employs a comprehensive and integrated approach to provide Victorian students with the knowledge, skills and understandings to progress successfully through the stages of their schooling, participate in further education or training and function as members of the community. Rigorous research and analysis underpin this approach, which is further informed through Victoria's participation in national forums, such as the Council for the Australian Federation, Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) and the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

Council for the Australian Federation report: The Future of Schooling in Australia

The Council for the Australian Federation comprises the Premiers and Chief Ministers of all States and Territories. In October 2006, the Council established a steering committee, chaired by the Secretary of the Victorian Department of Education, to review the *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century*.

The resulting report, *The Future of Schooling in Australia*, includes a new statement on the future of schooling in Australia, and a twelve-point action plan to which all States and Territories have agreed. The report proposes a national framework for schooling, based on the principle that the quality and performance of teachers, schools and jurisdictions are central to the life prospects of every student and to national prosperity.

The report also recognises that the process of collaborative federalism has helped States and Territories to produce student results that are recognised as among the highest in the OECD. The report outlines a strong emphasis on fundamental disciplines and collaboration to achieve national consistency. The Council for the Australian Federation has called on the Commonwealth to join this process of sensible and practical national quality and consistency in education, rather than a conformity which stifles flexibility and innovation.

The Council for the Australian Federation has endorsed the findings of *The Future of Schooling in Australia* and publicly released it.

Victoria, as Chair of the review steering committee, submits *The Future of Schooling in Australia* on behalf of all States and Territories.

Victorian Government Vision Statement: Growing Victoria Together

Education is the Victorian Government's number one priority and is regarded as the key to creating dynamic, successful community and improving all Victorian life opportunities.

Growing Victoria Together expresses the Victorian Government's vision to 2010 and beyond. Government goals are based on the priorities that the Victorian community have identified as important to them. Victoria is committed to a higher quality education and training system and has in place key priorities and initiatives across all stages of schooling, and in vocational and higher education and training to meet this commitment.

Blueprint for Government Schools

In 2003, the Victorian Government released the *Blueprint for Government Schools*, which introduced a series of reforms to lift student outcomes in Victoria. Through a process of extensive research and consultation with all members of the school education community, the Victorian Government identified three priority areas for reform of the school system:

1. **Recognising and responding to diverse student needs**
2. **Building the skills of the education workforce**
3. **Continuously improving schools**

The consultation and research process also demonstrated that many excellent practices are already established in Victorian schools. The purpose of the reforms is to ensure that best practice spreads across the school system.

1. Recognising and responding to diverse student needs

The Victorian Government recognises that good reading, writing and numeracy skills are a key foundation of learning and increase students' ability to learn as they progress through the stages of their schooling. The Government also recognises that students need a range of other skills to operate effectively in our changing society.

The needs of students are central to the development of a new approach to the education and curriculum provided by Victorian schools. There is also a need to ensure that students are provided with a learning environment that promotes their health, safety and wellbeing in order to be active, life-long learners.

The Government is committed to increasing the number of students who successfully complete Year 12 or its equivalent. To make this possible, schools need to increasingly be seen as places where students want to be – where they are happy, engaged, stimulated, intellectually challenged, secure and confident. To make this happen, students are being provided with multiple pathways in the post-compulsory years of education and with coherent links between programs providing these pathways, leading to improved completion rates.

The priority includes the strategies *Student Learning* and *Developing a New Resource Allocation Model.* Key initiatives relating to this inquiry (described in more detail later in this submission) include:

- The Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS)
- Principles of Learning and Teaching (POLT)
- Assessment and Reporting

Other relevant initiatives which target student pathways in the post-compulsory years (detailed under *Further Education and Training Initiatives*) include:
- VET in Schools
- Local Learning and Employment Networks
- Youth Transition Support Initiative
- Youth Guarantee

- Careers and Transition Resources
- Managed Individual Pathways
- Community VCAL
- On Track
- Technical Education Infrastructure Investment

2. Building the skills of the education workforce

A strong teaching–learning relationship with high-quality teaching and leadership, focussed on students' learning needs, is at the core of continuous development and improved student outcomes at both the school and system level.

The school education community recognises the importance of leadership and a highly skilled workforce in maximising the benefits of the teaching–learning relationship for students and the Government is investing heavily in the development of school leaders and teachers to achieve this.

Consultation, data and research have shown the Victorian government school workforce to be both highly skilled and dedicated. Excellent workforce development practices already exist in the Victorian government school system.

The continuing challenge of the strategies is to ensure that these excellent practices are adopted and embraced across the whole system. The priority include strategies on *Building Leadership Capacity*, *Creating and Supporting a Performance and Development Culture* and *Teacher Professional Development* to assist teachers and principals at all career stages – beginning teachers, high-performing young teachers with leadership potential, experienced teachers, first-time and experienced principals.

3. Continuously improving schools

This priority includes the strategies *School Improvement* and the *Leading Schools Fund*.

The Government believes that strong teaching–learning relationships at the classroom level are dependent upon strong individual and system-wide accountability arrangements. However, in order to be effective and deliver improved student outcomes, accountability arrangements must be flexible in acknowledging and accommodating the differing requirements of schools. While many government schools are achieving excellent outcomes, the system should intervene when schools are not able to deliver an excellent education for all students. As such, accountability processes must be streamlined and targeted differently.

Accountability arrangements must also be sufficiently flexible to allow innovation in schools. The objective of striving for excellence for all students also requires greater levels of cooperation and planning between schools and the sharing of specialisation, expertise and facilities. Innovation is usually initiated at a school or local community level. The Government's role is to support and promote best practice and facilitate sharing across the system within a transparent, flexible and accountable framework.

Curriculum provision in Victorian Government Schools

The Victorian Government school system has specific responsibility to serve all young people in the state. It guarantees an education for all children, irrespective of their location or background. Therefore, the quality of the government school system and all government schools is critical to the pledge of this Government to govern on behalf of, and in the interests of, all Victorians.

Victoria's curriculum provision draws on extensive research into patterns of student outcomes, the factors that influence them and the performance of schools in delivering them. The diverse range of initiatives that have been implemented have been informed by a robust process of consultation and by an understanding of the more complex world that students face when they leave school.

The curriculum framework for the compulsory years of schooling, the Victorian Essential Learning Standards, is based on the most up to date national and international research. The framework is adaptable to the needs of individual schools and provides for a highly effective government school system which:

- is learner centred, personalising the education experience for young children and meeting their learning needs as they progress from Prep to Year 10;
- is knowledge based and has clear specification of core content;
- enables students to develop the skills and attributes expected of people in a modern knowledge society and to participate productively in the economy of the 21st century;
- encourages innovation through mastery of deep knowledge and pedagogy based on students thinking their way through issues and problems;
- promotes a diversity of teaching and pedagogical practice and supports a variety of mechanisms to impart knowledge;
- enables all students to undertake and succeed in the learning necessary to make a successful transition to post-compulsory education and training;
- identifies clear standards to be achieved by all students in essential areas; and
- promotes a range of assessment procedures which are clearly linked to content, enable achievement of standards to be demonstrated and point the way forward to further productive learning.

The Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS)

The knowledge and skills required for students to successfully progress to the next stage of schooling is clearly articulated through the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS). The VELS also provide the foundation upon which, further education and training initiatives can build as well as the knowledge of self and others that students need to participate as members of the community.

The Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) were published in 2005 for use by all Victorian schools as the basis for developing their Prep to Year 10 curriculum and assessment programs. The VELS are based on the best practice in Victorian schools, national and international research and widespread consultation with school communities, educators, professional associations and community groups.

The VELS propose that students need to develop a set of knowledge, skills and behaviours which will prepare them for success in a world which is complex, rapidly changing, rich in information and communications technology, demanding high-order knowledge and understanding and increasingly global in its outlook and influences. To succeed in that world, all students need to develop the capacities to manage themselves as individuals and in relation to others, understand the world in which they live and act effectively in that world.

The VELS specifically identify the essential knowledge, skills and behaviours students need not only to progress through each stage of compulsory schooling, but also into post-compulsory education or training, work and the community.

The structure of the VELS is based on the premise that there are three interrelated components - known as *strands* in the VELS - of any curriculum, which are necessary to

enable students to meet the demands of a modern, globalised world. These components are: the processes of physical, personal and social development and growth; the branches of learning reflected in the traditional disciplines; and the interdisciplinary capacities needed for effective functioning within and beyond school. Together, the three interwoven strands of VELS provide the basis for students to develop deep understanding and to relate and apply their knowledge and skills in new and different circumstances.

Within the strands, the VELS organises the curriculum into 16 domains, which provide the details of what students need to learn at each stage and level of their schooling. The strands and domains are as follows:

STRAND	DOMAIN
Physical, Personal and Social Learning	Health and Physical Education
	Interpersonal Development
	Personal Learning
	Civics and Citizenship
Discipline-based Learning	The Arts
	English
	The Humanities – Economics
	The Humanities – Geography
	The Humanities – History
	Languages Other Than English (LOTE)
	Mathematics
	Science
Interdisciplinary Learning	Communication
	Design, Creativity and Technology
	Information and Communications Technology (ICT)
	Thinking Processes

The traditional discipline strand is balanced in the VELS by a set of broader interdisciplinary capacities (the domains of Communication, Design, Creativity and Technology, Information and Communications Technology and Thinking), and linked to physical, personal and social development (the domains of Health and Physical Education, Interpersonal Development, Personal Learning and Civics and Citizenship), with all three strands being equally necessary.

An English as a Second Language (ESL) Companion and Students with Disabilities Guidelines are also available to assist schools in providing programs for these students.

For further information on the VELS see: http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/

Standards and Stages of Schooling: P – 10

The Victorian Essential Learning Standards provide explicit descriptions of the knowledge and skills required of students at each stage of their schooling.

As part of the preliminary work for the development of the VELS, two studies related to student development and learner characteristics in the stages of learning were undertaken. This research recognises that while student learning is a continuum from Prep through to Year 10, and that different students develop at different rates, they broadly progress through three stages of learning. The focus on stages of learning was a deliberate design element of the VELS and has a strong research-base.

The VELS include standards for student achievement at six levels over the years of compulsory schooling. The standards clearly specify the knowledge, skills and behaviours required of students in the 16 domains. They are set at a challenging, not minimum, competence level and are introduced in each domain when developmentally and age appropriate, as supported by the research. The different levels of achievement are organised into three stages of schooling as follows:

Years Prep to 4 – Laying the foundations (VELS levels 1-3)

In these years the curriculum focuses on developing the fundamental knowledge, skills and behaviours in literacy and numeracy and other areas including physical and social capacities which underpin all future learning. Specific standards are set for the end of Prep, Year 2 and Year 4.

Years 5 to 8 – Building breadth and depth (VELS levels 4-5)

In these years students progress beyond the foundations and their literacy and numeracy becomes more developed. An expanded curriculum program provides the basis for in depth learning within all domains in the three learning strands. Standards are set at the end of Years 6 and 8.

Years 9 to 10 – Developing pathways (VELS level 6)

In these years students develop greater independence of mind and interests. They seek deeper connections between their learning and the world around them and explore how learning might be applied in that world. They need to experience learning in work and community settings as well as the classroom. They are beginning to develop preferred areas for their learning. Standards set for the end of Year 10.

Principles of Learning and Teaching P–12

The Principles of Learning and Teaching P-12 (PoLT) capture the essence of effective learning and teaching and support the VELS by providing a structure to help teachers review and develop their teaching practices to meet the diverse needs of students. The Principles strengthen learning communities within and beyond the school by building consistent, comprehensive and improved pedagogical approaches within and across schools, while still allowing flexibility, innovation and local decision making at the school level

In 2005, a Principles of Learning and Teaching professional development program was implemented. A suite of resources was developed to support the program. Evaluations conducted with participating schools in 2005 showed that 97 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that the resource increased awareness of effective teaching. In 2006 the Principles of Learning and Teaching professional learning program had an additional 400 schools participating in the program.

For further information on PoLT see:
http://www.education.vic.gov.au'studentlearning/teachingprinciples/default.html

Assessment and Reporting: Prep – Year 10

The standards define what students should know and be able to do at different levels or stages of schooling. They provide valuable information about the knowledge and skills students have acquired and form the basis of further teaching or intervention.

In recognition of the centrality of assessment to a robust curriculum which caters for the individual needs of students, significant resources have been developed to support Victorian teachers in the process of assessment and reporting. These include:

Progression points

Progression points are descriptors that indicate what typical progress towards a given standard may look like. They assist teachers to make on-balance judgements about progress towards the standards for the purposes of reporting to parents. Teachers use progression points to determine what students have achieved and inform the next stage of learning that will occur. Progression points are also used in reporting on student progress to parents.

For further information on progression points see:
http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/assessment/progresspoints.html

Assessment maps

Assessment maps are designed to illustrate student progress or growth in the domains of the VELS. They provide samples of student work typical of Levels 1– 6, annotated and linked to relevant aspects of the standards. Teachers use assessment maps to make on-balance judgments about student achievement or to refining judgments about pieces of student work. They are also used to communicate with student and parents and as a basis for professional development.

For further information on assessment maps see:
http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/assessment/maps/index.html

New report cards

New report cards have been introduced in Victoria to address concerns raised by parents across Australia about the degree to which reports are clear, consistent from one school to another and easy to understand. These report cards follow a common format and are written in plain English. They were introduced so that no matter what Victorian Government school a student attends, the parents would receive a clear picture of their child's progress that is reported in the same way and against the same state-wide standards in Years Prep to 10.

Report cards must include:

- A chart that shows achievement against the expected Victorian Essential Learning Standard during the reporting period, as well as (after one year) achievement in the preceding 12 months;
- An A to E rating indicating achievement against the expected standard at the time of reporting;
- A chart showing a child's work habits (effort and behaviour in class)
- Written information about what a child knows and can do, where the child may need extra support, how the school will provide that support, and what parents can do at home to help their child's learning;
- Student comments
- Parent comments
- Details of absences.

For further information on report cards see:
http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/studentreports/default.htm

Agreement to Nationally Consistent School Curricula

At the MCEETYA meeting on 12-13 April 2007, State, Territory and Commonwealth Education Ministers agreed to Victoria's proposal to develop nationally consistent school curricula that promotes consistently high standards across the country and maintains the flexibility to ensure that the curriculum is complementary to local circumstances and needs.

MCEETYA 'agreed that all jurisdictions commit to working together to share high-quality curriculum material. They will also work together and with other relevant organisations, including representatives of the Catholic and Independent school sectors, to develop nationally consistent curricula that will:

- set core content and achievement standards that are expected of students at the end of their schooling and at key junctures during their schooling, starting with English, mathematics and science;
- provide flexibility for jurisdictions, systems and schools to implement curricula for students to achieve these standards;
- establish the standards as the basis for the national testing and measurement program to be agreed by governments, to measure student progress;
- broaden options for students considering different futures, preparing students for further study in all areas of future employment across the trades and technical and professional fields and in new and emerging areas of knowledge; and
- ensure that student achievement is reported on the same scale and in a similar way nationally'.

MCEETYA requested the AESOC Senior Secondary Reporting Working Group, chaired by Victoria, to provide advice on implementation of nationally consistent curricula, and to provide a progress report to the next MCEETYA meeting.

Victoria's Commitment to Improving Literacy and Numeracy Standards

Victoria is committed to improving literacy and numeracy standards across the system and has invested significant resources to address this key priority.

In the 2006/2007 State Budget, substantial funding was provided for initiatives aimed at improving literacy and numeracy skills as well retention rates and the identification and targeting of individual student needs. These included:

- An investment of $11.7 million over three years to establish Literacy Improvement Teams to help target schools where the reading and writing skills of Years 3 to 8 students are falling behind. This initiative will see 45 literacy specialists employed across Victoria to work with teachers in these targeted schools ensuring these students receive grounding in fundamental literacy skills. A panel of prominent literacy specialists will provide expert advice on programs to assist literacy outcomes at all schools. The program will also focus on improving outcomes for Koori students.

- $24.1 million over two years will be invested to continue the Schools for Innovation and Excellence program to improve literacy, numeracy, attendance and retention for students in Years 5 to 9. This program has won international recognition for improving the participation and achievement of students

- A new $5.1 million initiative to issue every Victorian student with an Academic number to allow information on students' educational progress to be tracked over time, from school

to school or school to training. This will assist to identify individual students who may need additional support or targeted programs to meet their individual needs

In the 2005/2006 financial year, a range of Early Years and Middle Years initiatives targeting literacy and numeracy were implemented.

Early Years initiatives aimed at continuously improving literacy and numeracy in the Years P-4 included the following:

- 100 per cent of government schools had an early years numeracy coordinator;

- Funding was allocated to all primary schools to support early years literacy coordination;

- Reading Recovery programs were delivered in approximately 80 per cent of schools with Year 1 enrolments. Reading Recovery programs assist children in Year 1 who need extra support in reading and writing. Over 88 per cent of participating students successfully completed the program with the help of strategies that allowed them to participate fully in reading and writing activities in the classroom;

The Victorian Premier's Reading Challenge targets students in Prep to Year 9 in all schools. Students in Prep to Year 2 are challenged to read or experience 30 books over a seven month period, and students in Years 3 to 9 to read 15 books over the same period. In 2006 more than190, 000 students participated and more than 106,000 completed the Challenge. In 2007, students have again been challenged to read 30 or 15 books over a seven month period. Registrations exceeded 185,000 by mid May 2007, with the Challenge due to close on 31 August.

Middle Years initiatives aimed at improving student learning in literacy and numeracy and the attendance of student in Years 5-9 included the following:

- an extension of funding to 70 clusters of primary and secondary schools to enable every school with middle years students to continue to participate in the Schools for Innovation and Excellence program, which encourages and supports innovation in curriculum development, and learning and teaching in the middle years.

- Additional funding was allocated to identified schools to enable the employment of up to 805 additional teachers to support improvement in literacy for students with greater needs.

Victoria's Plan to Improve Literacy and Numeracy Outcomes

The Victorian Government recently released its draft literacy and numeracy plan for community consultation. The paper sets out a ten year vision for the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments to work together to:

- value good teaching and make sure we have the best teachers possible in all our schools;

- build a culture of improvement in our schools; and

- direct our resources to where they can most make a difference.

COAG has noted a broad set of policy directions with the potential to have a significant impact on literacy and numeracy outcomes. These policy directions have framed the development of Victoria's plan for literacy and numeracy. The plan calls for action and commitment from the Commonwealth Government in line with the National Reform Agenda principle of a 'fair sharing of costs and benefits'. The plan calls on the Commonwealth to

contribute over the first four years to both direct actions in areas of Commonwealth responsibility (around $180 million) and additional funding (around $400 million) to enable Victoria to progress the plan. The policy directions outlined in the plan, which share considerable overlap with established initiatives, are:

Improving the quality of teachers and school leaders

Teacher quality is widely acknowledged as the single most important in-school determinant of student achievement. The central role played by teachers in delivering improved literacy and numeracy outcomes should be recognised and supported.

A culture of continuous improvement in schools, based on rigorous accountability frameworks and performance information.

The use of performance data is critical to determining and then responding to individual student learning needs. The rigorous use of performance data will help drive continuous improvement in the classroom, in the school and across the education system. The use of performance data will also underpin a school based accountability framework that encourages and supports school leaders to develop and implement tailored strategies to improve performance.

Implementation of national literacy and numeracy tests

Victoria is committed to the implementation of national literacy and numeracy tests for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in 2008. This commitment was reaffirmed at the meeting of the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) on 12-13 April 2007. Victoria is currently working with other jurisdictions on arrangements for these tests.

Directing resources to where they are needed most.

While Australia's overall literacy and numeracy performance compares favourably internationally, urgent attention is needed to close the gap in literacy and numeracy achievement for students who are currently performing below the benchmarks. It is also necessary to do more to challenge and engage our students – especially in maths and science– and to provide our gifted and talented students with more opportunities to fulfil their potential.

> In years 3 and 5 Victorian students outperformed all other states in writing and numeracy as evidenced by the 2005 National Report on Schooling in Australia. Year 7 students' reading levels were the highest in Australia with more than 95% of students achieving or exceeding the national benchmark.

Further Education and Training Initiatives

The Victorian Government has implemented a suite of initiatives aimed at developing alternative pathways for students which provide them with the knowledge and skills to participate in further education or training:

VET in Schools

The Victorian Government has continued to expand access to the broadest range of nationally recognised Vocational Education and Training certificates. Within this choice, approximately 30 VET certificates provide formal recognition within the VCE through credit arrangements that mirror VCE studies. These unitised programs are called VCE VET programs and have been formally approved by the VCAA as part of the VCE and VCAL.

Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs)

Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) bring together education providers, industry, community organisations, and individual and government organisations to improve

the education, training and employment outcomes for young people. Many secondary schools are active members of their local LLEN, which provides assistance in developing relationships with other organisations and brokering local initiatives designed to improve transitions.

Youth Transition Support Initiative

The Youth Transition Support Initiative is being implemented in 2007 and provides 24 transition workers in areas of disadvantage to assist young people aged 15-19 who have disengaged from education, training and employment to navigate existing government services and education and training opportunities. Funding of $10M over four years for the initiative was announced in August 2006 under the Victorian Government's Future Directions Youth Policy.

Youth Guarantee

The Youth Guarantee initiative also came into effect in 2007 and provides a guaranteed place at a TAFE or other public training provider for young people aged 20 and under who have not completed Year 12 or equivalent.

Careers and Transition Resources

The Victorian Government provides *Careers and Transition Resources*, such as online teaching materials, careers education scholarships and industry placements, to assist careers teachers to support young people to make successful transitions from school to education, training and/or employment.

Managed Individual Pathways

The *Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs)* initiative ensures that all students 15 years and over in government schools develop individual pathway plans and are provided with appropriate support to enable successful transitions from school to further education, training and employment.

Community VCAL

Community VCAL programs have been introduced to support young people not suited to school to complete a qualification away from the mainstream school setting, usually through an ACE provider or other community organisation.

On Track

The *On Track* survey tracks the destination of Year 12 completers and early school leavers from government and non-government schools six months after they leave school. On Track data publication contributes to better understanding by parents, students and schools of the destinations of young people after their final school year and celebrates the broad range of outcomes that all schools create for students. At the time of survey, assistance and advice is offered to those students not in education, training or full-time employment.

The 2006 On Track survey found that, for young people who completed Year 12 at government and non-government schools in 2005, 75.7 per cent of students were in education or training (compared with 76.5 per cent last year). Of those not in education or training, 13 per cent were employed full or part-time, and 3.3 per cent were looking for work (down from 3.8 per cent last year). Key findings were the increase in the percentage of Year 12 or equivalent completers who were university-enrolled at the time of the survey (46 per cent compared with 43 per cent in 2005) and the high proportion (29.5 per cent) of VCAL students who have continued on to apprenticeships or traineeships.

Technical Education Infrastructure Investment

In 2007, the first intake of 150 students occurred at Holmesglen Vocation College, Moorabbin Campus. The new $3M college is a component of the Victorian Governments focus on building the skills of young Victorians and addressing industry shortages. The college will meet the learning and social needs of students between 16 and 18 years of age who want to learn technical and trade skills within the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL).

The college is the forerunner of the Government's four new Technical Education Centres (TECs). These TECS will provide young people with the industry standard training facilities, career advice and life skills.

> The Victorian Government announced $32M to establish the TECs as part of its $241M skills investment *Maintaining the Advantage: Skilled Victorians.* The Government will also build technical wings at 30 government secondary schools and update equipment at all other government secondary schools at a cost of $50M.

Completion and participation rates

Greater diversity in post compulsory pathways is likely to be a factor in improved attendance in the upper secondary years as evidenced by a decline in the average number of days absent per student between 2003 and 2005. As more students take up Vocational Education and Training within the VCE and Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning programs as alternative or complementary pathways to the VCE, they are more likely to remain engaged in their schooling and attend more regularly.

> Victoria has highest completion rate and post compulsory participation rate of any state as evidenced in the Productivity Commission Report on Government Services 2007. Post compulsory completion rates (15-19 yr olds) in Victoria well above national the average, 81.4% in 2005 compared with Australian average 76.0%.
> In 2005, 85% of Victorian 20-24 year olds had completed Year 12 or equivalent, compared with 82.9% in 1999. This figure is higher than the national average (82.9%) and all other States.

International Recognition of Victorian Education

> The quality and standards of the Victorian education system has received international recognition.

The United Arab Emirates like other countries of the Middle East are undertaking significant reform of their educations systems and the Victorian Department of Education is currently assisting with a number of these initiatives.

Victoria has entered into a partnership with the United Arab Emirates, to develop the *Victoria International School of Sharjah*. The Prep to year 10 curriculum will be based on the Victorian Essential Learning Standards and the VCE will be offered at years 11 and 12. This is the first time the Victorian model of school education has been exported in its entirety. To ensure the integrity of the Victorian curriculum a significant proportion of the school staff will be recruited from Victoria.

Victoria has also been asked to submit a proposal to develop a school based apprenticeship system for senior secondary school students in the Kingdom of Bahrain. This interest by Bahrain is evidence of increasing international recognition in Victoria's education system.

Term of Reference 2

The standards of academic achievement expected of students qualifying for the senior secondary school certificate in each state and territory.

The Victorian Education system sets high standards of academic achievement expected of students and provides students with a choice of pathways in their senior secondary years. There are three senior secondary qualifications – the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) and the International Baccalaureate (IB).

The Victorian Certificate of Education

The Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) is a certificate that recognises the successful completion of secondary education. It is an outstanding qualification that is recognised around the world.

The VCE provides pathways to further study at university, Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and to the world of work. A wide range of VET certificates are available for selection that contribute to satisfactory completion of the VCE. It is even possible to undertake a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship within the VCE. Courses are developed to enable VCE students to acquire skills and knowledge in a wide range of studies. The VCE is accepted for entry to leading Australian universities subject to the same conditions applied to local students.

The VCE is accepted for entry to most international universities subject to the same conditions applied to local students. Top ranking universities in the world accept the VCE and Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank (ENTER) score in applications for undergraduate admissions.

The VCE includes general education curriculum components (VCE studies) as well as vocational training and experience in the workplace through programs from Vocational Education and Training qualifications (VCE VET). Schools are able to offer senior secondary students programs selected from the range of industry areas approved by the VCAA.

Each VCE study and VCE VET program is designed to provide a two-year program. Units at 1 and 2 level are nationally and internationally benchmarked to a Year 11 standard. Similarly, Units at 3 and 4 level are benchmarked to a Year 12 standard. In many studies there are multiple options for students to choose for their program, such as a choice of mathematics studies and histories. Units 1 and 2 can be completed as single units and Units 3 and 4 are designed to be taken as a sequence.

Satisfactory completion of VCE units

The award of satisfactory completion for a unit is based on a decision that the student has demonstrated achievement of the set of outcomes specified for the unit. This decision will be based on the teacher's assessment of the student's performance on assessment tasks designated for the unit. Designated assessment tasks are provided in the details for each unit. The learning outcomes and associated assessment tasks are specified in the currently accredited VCE study designs. The key knowledge and skills and the advice for teachers included in the study design will assist teachers in making this judgment.

Completion of a unit will be reported on the Statement of Results issued by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority as S (Satisfactory) or N (Not Satisfactory). Schools may report additional information on levels of achievement.

Assessment in the VCE

Students' levels of achievement for Units 1 and 2 are determined by the school and not reported to the VCAA.

Students' levels of achievement for Units 3 and 4 sequences are assessed using school-based assessment and external examinations. Each VCE study has three graded assessment components, either one school assessment and two examinations, or two school assessments and one examination. Each of the three graded assessment components contributes to a study score. VCE VET studies have two assessment components, comprising one school assessment and one examination.

Graded assessments are reported on an 11-point scale as grades A+ to E or UG (Ungraded). There are two examination periods each year; there are six written examinations in June, and the General Achievement Test (GAT) is also conducted at this time. The performance and oral examinations occur in October and the majority of written examinations in November.

There are two forms of school assessment – School-assessed Coursework and School-assessed Tasks. The score for each school-assessment is reported to the VCAA.

School-assessed Coursework is based on an assessment of each student's overall level of achievement on the assessment tasks specified in the study design for assessing achievement of the unit outcomes. Schools provide a score for each component of coursework specified in the study design. The VCAA aggregates these scores into a single total score for each student which is then statistically moderated against the examination scores in the study. The GAT is also used in statistical moderation.

School-assessed Tasks are set by the VCAA to assess specific sets of practical skills and knowledge. Teachers assess the students' level of achievement on the basis of a rating against criteria specified by the VCAA. Schools provide a single score for each student which is then either confirmed or reviewed by the VCAA on the basis of the schools' GAT results.

For VCE VET programs, all assessment for competence must comply with the training package or curriculum document requirements and must be conducted in accordance with the regulatory requirements of the Australian Quality Training Framework.

Minimum requirements for the award of the VCE

The minimum requirement is satisfactory completion of 16 units which must include:
- three units from the English group, with at least one unit at Unit 3 or 4 level
- at least three sequences of Unit 3 and 4 studies other than English, which may include any number of English sequences once the English requirement has been met and may be comprised of VCE VET sequences.

The Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC) calculates Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank (ENTER) and advises that for the calculation of a student's ENTER satisfactory completion of both Units 3 and 4 of an English sequence is required.

Statistical Moderation in the VCE

To ensure comparability of assessments of School-assessed Coursework from different schools, the VCAA applies statistical procedures to each moderation group, study by study. Moderation groups are defined as the cohort of students in each school undertaking the study, or the total cohort of students from schools that combine for the purposes of assessment and moderation for a particular study.

The statistical moderation adjusts the level and spread of each school's assessments of its students in a particular study, to match the level and spread of the same students' scores on a common external score. Because the external score is based on examinations done by all students across the State, it is a common standard against which schools' assessments can be compared.

General Achievement Test

It is VCAA policy that all students enrolled in a VCE Unit 3 and 4 sequence, including students whose only Unit 3 and 4 enrolment is one or more VCE VET scored sequences, are required to sit the General Achievement Test. Although the GAT does not count directly towards satisfactory completion of the VCE, it plays a very important part in final assessments of VCE studies. The GAT is used to ensure that students' final results in VCE studies are as fair and accurate as possible.

GAT results are used to check that examinations, School-assessed Tasks (SATs) and School-assessed Coursework (SACs) have been accurately and fairly marked.

If the student is ill, has an accident, or experiences severe personal hardship at the time of an examination, they may apply for a Derived Examination Score (DES). GAT results can contribute to the calculation of the DES.

The GAT is used in these ways because GAT results are a good predictor of achievement in VCE studies. If a student has done well on the GAT, then they are likely to do equally well on their school assessments and examinations.

The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL)

In 2003, the Victorian Government commenced the state-wide implementation of the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) to improve the pathways for young people from secondary school to work and/or further education and training.

The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) was developed in response to the Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria 2000 (The Kirby Report). The Kirby Report indicated that a broader range of programs was required to meet the needs of some young people who are in the post-compulsory years.

Many young people felt constrained by the current education system because their individual learning, personal development and transition needs could not be fully met by traditional approaches. As a result, many did not achieve their best results and others left school early, inadequately prepared for work and future learning.

Personal development, the utilisation of students' particular interests and new pathways for senior secondary students in the context of applied learning are the underpinning principles of the VCAL. The VCAL acknowledges this within:

- the development of knowledge and employability skills that help to prepare the individual for employment and for the participation in the broader context of family, community and lifelong learning; and

- the development of knowledge and skills that assist the individual to make informed vocational choices within specific industry sectors and/or to facilitate pathways to further learning.

Assessment of a VCAL Learning Program

VCAL providers coordinate the assessment and collection of results for all curriculum components within the VCAL learning program. Assessment processes and practices must be consistent with any assessment requirements and guidelines outlined in the curriculum documents for the units delivered in the learning program.

- All assessment of VCE units must be in accordance with VCAA guidelines.

- All VCAL units must be assessed in accordance with the VCAA quality assurance guidelines to ensure validity, reliability, flexibility and fairness.

- All assessment of vocational education and training and further education units, modules or certificates must be in accordance with the accredited curriculum or training package and be compliant with the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF).

For VCAL Units, students will receive a satisfactory complete (S) or not complete (N) result for each unit and accredited course/module/unit successful outcome.

Assessment of VCAL units

A VCAL unit provides learning outcomes that are not linked to a particular curriculum or syllabus design. The learning outcomes encompass broad generic skills important for active citizenship, work and further study. Teachers must develop learning programs that provide opportunities for students to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes. Assessment of VCAL units should enable:

- an integrated or project approach to the development of assessment tasks that recognises learning that has occurred in the context of work, and community settings

- assessment at times that are linked to authentic tasks and activities

- more than one opportunity to demonstrate a learning outcome successfully if appropriate

- successful completion of all learning outcomes through either the one integrated assessment task or spread over a number of different tasks

- assessment that does not unduly disadvantage any student and that provides flexibility in the range of methodologies which cater to the needs of individual students.

The award of satisfactory achievement for a VCAL unit is based on a decision that the student has demonstrated achievement of the learning outcomes specified for the unit. A range of assessment methods may be applied. These include:

- a portfolio of accumulated evidence

- teacher observation and/or checklists

- evidence accumulated through project or program participation

- awards from recognised programs

- self-assessment inventories

- oral or written reports

- evidence of information and communication technologies, including internet usage.

VCAL enrolments have grown from 5,127 students in 322 providers in 2003 to over 12, 000 students in 401 providers in 2006. The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) is expecting 14,000 students in over 420 providers in 2007.

The VCAA is currently in discussion with interstate and overseas providers regarding the delivery of VCAL. A school in New South Wales wishes to deliver the VCAL as a part of its senior secondary programs. The Institute of Applied Technology, United Arab Emirates is developing a Certificate in Applied Learning and wishes to use the VCAL structure and principles as the basis for its Certificate of Applied Learning.

International Baccalaureate (IB)

The International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma was accredited in early 2006 by the Victorian Qualifications Authority as a Victorian senior secondary certificate of education and has been approved by the former Minister for Education and Training for delivery in government schools.

Terms of Reference 3

How such academic standards compare between states and territories and with those of other countries.

Victoria's academic standards rate highly compared with other states and territories. According to the 2005 Literacy and Numeracy Benchmarks, Victoria was at or above the national average in reading, writing and numeracy. At an international level, Australian students rate above the international average in science and mathematics.

Comparisons of Academic Standards – Compulsory Years

Benchmarking of VELS against national and international standards

In developing the Victorian Essential Learning Standards, benchmarking against national and international standards was a prime consideration. A review of curriculum from 14 national and international jurisdictions was undertaken prior to determining the structure.

In the development phase for each domain, a key strategy to ensure comparability of standards with other Australian and international jurisdictions involved research of standards and use of critical friends from several Australian states and other countries.

The VELS were first published in March 2005. Throughout 2005 the VCAA undertook a number of projects to validate the standards. These included an independent comparability study of the standards and learning focus statements in five domains using five other national and international curriculum documents for each domain. At the same time the VCAA participated in the development of the National Statements of Learning and undertook further analysis of the results of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and The International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and used these studies to inform the validation of standards. Changes to the standards resulting from the validation were minimal with relocation of standards occurring in one or two cases to ensure comparability.

Australian Student Achievement – International Comparisons

Australia regularly participates in two international assessment programs – the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) which assesses students in Years 4 and 8 in mathematics and science and is quadrennial and the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) which assesses 15 year-old students in Reading, Mathematics and Science and is triennial.

In the TIMSS study of 2002/03, Australian students' performance was significantly higher than the international average in science for Year 4 students and in mathematics for Year 4 and Year 8 students. In the PISA study, the results for Australia's 15 year olds were above the OECD average in mathematical, reading, and scientific literacy.

TIMSS

In the 2002/03 TIMSS, Mathematics test:

- The performance of Year 4 Australian students was similar to the international average. However, thirteen countries significantly outscored Australia in Mathematics. Singapore and Hong Kong SAR scored significantly higher than any other country. Japan , Chinese Taipei, Belgium, Netherlands, Latvia, Lithuania, Russian Federation, England, Hungary, USA and Cyprus outperformed Australia Australia's achievement was similar to that of the Republic of Moldova, Italy, New Zealand, and Scotland.

- Year 8 Australian students' performance was significantly higher than the international average. However, nine countries – Singapore, Korea, Hong Kong SAR, Chinese Taipei, Japan, Belgium, Netherlands, Estonia and Hungary - significantly outscored Australia in Mathematics. Australia's performance was similar to that of the United States, England, New Zealand and Malaysia.

In the 2002/03 TIMSS, Science test:

- The performance of Year 4 Australian students was significantly higher than the international average. Singapore scored significantly higher than any other country, and a further six countries – Chinese Taipei, Japan, Hong Kong SAR, England, USA and Latvia outperformed Australia. Australia's performance was similar to that of Hungary, the Russian Federation, Netherlands, New Zealand, Belgium, Italy and Lithuania.

- The performance of Year 8 Australian students was significantly higher than the international average. Eight countries – Singapore, Chinese Taipei, Korea, Hong Kong SAR, Estonia, Japan, England, and Hungary outperformed Australia. Australia's performance was similar to that of the Netherlands, USA, Sweden, Slovenia, New Zealand, and Lithuania.

In summary Singapore, Hong Kong, Chinese Taipei, Japan, and England outperformed Australia in most cases.

PISA

In PISA Australia's 15 year old students perform very well compared to their peers in other countries. In 2003, the last PISA study for which results are available, the results were as follows:

- Australia's result was above the OECD average in mathematical, reading, and scientific literacy. In 2003, four countries – Hong Kong-China, Finland, Korea and the Netherlands outperformed Australia in mathematical literacy.

- Only one country – Finland - outperformed Australia overall in reading literacy in 2003.

- In 2003, three countries – Finland, Japan and Korea achieved better results in scientific literacy than Australia.

Victorian Student Achievement - State Comparisons

Both PISA and TIMSS results can be disaggregated by state and territory. Victoria is generally compared to Queensland and NSW due to the similarity in the demographics of these states. Victoria's performance relative to these states was as follows:

TIMSS:

In Mathematics at Years 4 and 8, Victoria's performance was similar to Queensland and NSW. In Science, at Year 4 there was no statistical difference between the performances of all states and territories. At Year 8 NSW performed better than Victoria.

PISA:

NSW performed better than Victoria in Science literacy but in Reading and Mathematical literacy the performance of the three states was similar.

National Literacy and Numeracy Benchmarks

Victoria's students performed as follows in the 2005 National Literacy and Numeracy Benchmarks:

Percentage of Victorian achieving or exceeding the benchmarks in 2005

	Reading	Writing	Numeracy
Year 3	91.7 % (+1.9 %)	97.5 % (+0.1 %)	95.5 % (+0.6 %)
Year 5	88.7 % (+1.8 %)	97.4 % (+0.1 %)	95.4 % (+0.7 %)
Year 7	95.1 % (+0.5 %)	94.7 % (+0.5 %)	86.9 % (+0.6 %)

Victoria was at or above the national average in every domain and at every year level, and outperformed all other states and territories in Writing at Year 3, 5 and 7, Reading at Year 7 and Numeracy at year 3 and 5.

Academic Standards in Senior Secondary Years of Schooling

Common Intentions across Jurisdictions

Through studying documents and products of all state and territory authorities responsible for the development of senior school curricula researches for the Commonwealth Government report *Year 12 Curriculum Content and Achievement Standards*, identified a number of broad intentions that the authorities share. These include:

- excellence in procedures and products;
- diversity in curriculum offerings;
- flexibility in arrangements;
- equity of access to participation, engagement and achievement; and
- validity and reliability in assessment.

In an attempt to attend to all these (and other) challenges simultaneously, state and territory authorities have developed a range of innovative approaches and solutions, some of which may be among international best practices.

In all parts of Australia students are provided with a huge variety of subjects and subject options from which they are able to choose. These subjects are designed for students with different abilities, interests and post-school aspirations.

Existing procedures related to senior certification provide schools with very high levels of flexibility. Most jurisdictions have the capacity for rapid and varied delivery of curriculum offerings.

These features of senior certificates—diverse subject offerings and flexibility in arrangements—are designed to ensure that all students have meaningful and attractive options open to them in the final years of school, including students who are most at risk of disengaging from education or training.

Despite differences in the balance of external and internal assessments and different emphases on various assessment modes and techniques, all jurisdictions attempt to make valid assessments of student achievement in the final years of secondary school and to provide reliable student results.

The Victorian Certificate of Education

The Principles, Guidelines and Procedures for the Review of VCE Studies (published in the March VCAA Bulletin, No 186 and available on the VCAA website) provide an outline of the principles and processes for revision and development of VCE studies. This document includes general statements that pertain to all VCE studies and identifies the rationale, principles and standards in curriculum and assessment that underpin the VCE. The review and development of all VCE studies involves consultation with key stakeholders, independent review in accordance with quality assurance processes endorsed by the Board of the VCAA.

Terms of Reference

Review panels are guided by Terms of Reference endorsed by the VCAA. The Terms of Reference are published on the VCAA website and are available to all key stakeholders. All VCE Review Panels are required to consider:

- the appropriateness of the assessment program; relative weightings and nature of school assessment
- the appropriateness of the outcomes and their relationship to School-assessed Coursework
- the use of technology in the study and the opportunity to extend the use of technology appropriate to the study
- the relationship between the study and other VCE VET studies
- the relevance of the content in terms of recent developments in the field of study
- the distinctive characteristics of the VCE study
- the relationship between the study and like curriculum available nationally and internationally
- comparable interstate and international curriculum and assessments
- enrolments and enrolment trends by unit, year level, gender and geography
- reports from State Reviewer/s and Chairpersons of Examination Panels
- data from the Authority's assessment program including
    - audit of coursework
    - frequency rates for examination questions
    - distribution of grades for examination assessment
    - scaled Study Scores and destination data from VTAC
    - statistical moderation of coursework.

Study specific issues may also be included for consideration. The Terms of Reference also identify key interest groups which must be consulted on the proposal.

A 'critical friend', based outside Victoria, is nominated to provide a national or international perspective and provides feedback at various stages of a study's development.

Consultation

Consultation is an important part of the curriculum review and development process. The VCAA seeks to actively engage as many groups that have an interest in the study as possible in the process of consultation. A draft study design will be made available for consultation on the website and to all persons who express interest, and those who are identified in the Terms of Reference.

Independent review

The draft proposal from the Review Panel will be independently reviewed by a teacher and an academic selected by the VCAA on the basis respectively of their exemplary teaching

practice and their depth of knowledge of the study area. The reviewer's reports will be provided to the Board of the VCAA. Reviewers will be reporting on the fidelity of the draft to the Authority's *Curriculum and Assessment Principles for VCE Studies and Guidelines for the Development, Review and Approval of VCE Studies.*

Future Directions for Senior School Certification Across Australia

Following the July 2006 meeting of the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) a working party was established, chaired by Victoria, to examine the feasibility of:
- a common scale for reporting all senior secondary subject results; and
- a quality assurance mechanism which would ensure consistency of results of senior secondary certificates across Australia.

The focus of this project is to investigate the feasibility of achieving greater commonality and consistency across Australia in the reporting of Senior Secondary results. The project involves examining student work across four subjects – English, Mathematics, Chemistry and French and also examining possible approaches to Drama.

The project is progressing well and a report is due to be delivered to Ministers out-of-session in July 2007.