



Guide to Proposed Reform of Victorian Curriculum

Introduction

Our schools must prepare students for a world in which work, society, community and personal relationships are subject to increasingly complex pressures. It is a world in which work, ideas and the economy are constantly changing, in which technology plays a major part, and which is increasingly influenced by international events.

In November 2003, the Minister for Education and Training, Lynne Kosky MP, launched a 'Blueprint for Government Schools' which announced a range of specific plans to improve Victoria's schools. As part of this reform the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) is developing a new framework of 'essential learning' for all Victorian government and non-government schools. This will be a new approach to what students study (the curriculum), the standards they must meet and how they are assessed.

The new approach is designed to improve on the great work already being done in our schools and provide all students with the range of skills, knowledge and values to succeed in the workplaces and the society of the future.

It will re-emphasise that literacy and numeracy are central to students' education at all levels. The new framework will focus on the key understandings that students need from the main disciplines of knowledge; that is, language, mathematics, science, the arts and humanities. Specifically, there will be an increased focus on students' personal and social development and the development of their ability to adapt existing skills and knowledge to meet the challenges presented by new situations.

Throughout 2004, the VCAA will be working with the education community to develop the new approach. This guide outlines the main elements of the Curriculum Reform Consultation Paper which describes the new approach, asks a number of questions and seeks responses from the education and broader community. The full Consultation Paper is available on the VCAA website at www.vcaa.vic.edu.au

You are invited to contribute directly to the development of the new curriculum framework by providing feedback by Friday 25 June 2004.

VICTORIAN CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY

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The challenges

Students have specific learning needs and make progress at different rates. However, they will all face similar challenges in the workplace and society of the future. It is important that what is taught in schools prepares all students to meet these challenges and equips them to be:

- responsible individuals who are able to relate to family, friends and colleagues
- informed citizens, who understand and can contribute to the community in which they live and the wider world around them.

The new approach is intended to develop a curriculum which:

- meets the changing learning needs of students as they progress from Prep to Year 10
- enables students to develop the skills and attributes expected of people in a modern society
- encourages students to think their way through issues and problems
- promotes innovation and variety in teaching, according to the needs of students and the communities in which they live
- identifies clear standards to be achieved by all students
- promotes a range of assessment procedures
- supports schools and teachers in providing students with the skills, values and attributes to ensure they can continue learning throughout life and become active citizens and effective employees.

Building on existing best practice

The structure of the new curriculum framework is based on both national and international research and learning from what is currently in place in our schools. The VCAA has conducted a series of meetings with teachers and principals in Victoria. These have identified a desire for:

- greater control for schools over the content of the curriculum
- the ability for schools to use innovative and flexible teaching styles to achieve the best learning outcomes for students
- an increased focus on key knowledge and skills
- more focus on depth of understanding, rather than breadth of content
- provision of skills, values and attributes that promote life-long learning
- an assessment and reporting system that clearly links student progress to the curriculum framework and compares that progress with national benchmarks.





An Overview of the New Approach

Victoria already has, in the current Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF) II, a detailed statement of the course of student learning, organised around eight Key Learning Areas (KLAs). This provides schools with a sound basis on which to build a curriculum which addresses the needs of their students as they develop through their school years.

However, the CSF is less helpful in describing the values on which our schools are founded, the purposes they serve for students entering the society as young adults, and the core skills and knowledge which enable students to participate effectively in that society.

The new framework will be designed to be flexible, allowing each school to add appropriate content and use the framework as a basis to develop their own approach to meet the specific needs, characteristics and abilities of their students.

It will be designed to assist schools and teachers in deciding what to teach and will provide standards against which to assess their students' achievements and report those achievements to parents.

The new approach is specifically designed to support a style of teaching that encourages deep understanding of subjects and how they relate to each other, rather than learning about a broad range of subjects. This approach will teach students how to adapt what they learn about how the world works, in order to meet new challenges.



Based around a set of shared values, the new framework will be made up of three separate, but related parts:

- 1 core knowledge, ideas and skills drawn from broad disciplines – such as language, mathematics, science, the arts and humanities
- 2 other essential skills that apply across the curriculum – such as communication and thinking skills
- 3 personal and social skills – such as organisational and citizenship skills and physical development.

The exact content of the knowledge, ideas and skills is currently being considered and developed. While this paper provides some examples, we are keen to hear your thoughts and welcome contributions in this area.

Table 1 (page 4) presents an overview of the new curriculum framework and shows how the detailed content of the existing CSF and KLAs will contribute to it.

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A Framework for Curriculum and Assessment

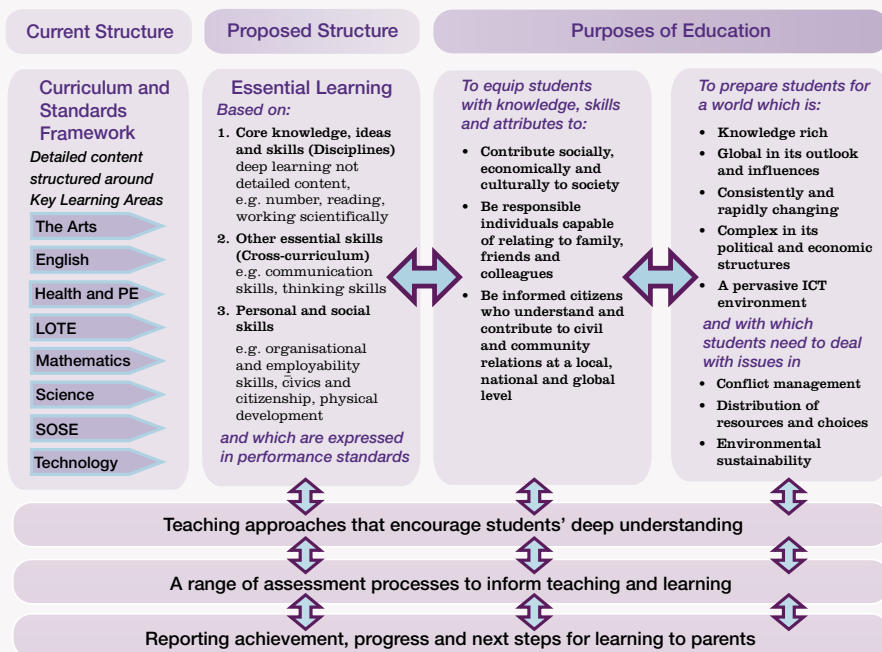


Table 1: A Framework for Curriculum and Assessment

Values

The framework will be based on a set of clear values. The Victorian Government is working with other states to identify a set of values shared by all Australian schools. Based on research to date, ten values have been identified:

- Tolerance and understanding
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Social justice
- Excellence
- Care
- Inclusion and trust
- Honesty
- Freedom
- Being ethical.

1 Core Knowledge, Ideas and Skills (Disciplines)

At its heart, education is about teaching students how to think and how to understand the world in which they live. To do this, we start by teaching them to read, write and calculate and then introduce the major disciplines: science, which teaches them about the physical, social and biological worlds (and which uses mathematics), art and nature, which explain the natural and manmade worlds, and history and literature, which document choices humans have made in the past and their consequences



and help students consider how to react when faced with similar choices.*

Each of the major disciplines provides students with different ways of looking at the world. By studying and understanding each discipline in depth, students develop the ability to draw on a wide range of ideas and skills from different disciplines in order to solve new problems and shape their knowledge of the world.

The new approach to curriculum will identify the core knowledge, ideas and skills associated with each discipline and these will become the focus of student learning and the basis of the curriculum standards. For example, with the discipline of English, the core ideas are likely to be 'language' and 'text' and the core skills 'reading', 'writing', 'speaking' and 'listening'.

The existing KLAs will be used to develop the content of the core knowledge, ideas and skills. For example, the concept of 'design' will draw upon the Technology KLA (for example, the design process of moving from a brief to the production of an item that meets that brief) and the Arts KLA (using drawing skills).

Literacy and numeracy will continue to be central to students' education.

By concentrating on a set of core knowledge, ideas and skills drawn from the disciplines, the new framework will give schools greater freedom to develop lessons that best meet the needs of their students, while still providing a set of common standards against which students can be assessed.

2 Essential Skills (Cross-curriculum)

Regardless of the disciplines taught to them, all students need to develop a set of generic skills that apply across the curriculum to prepare them to survive and thrive in today's rapidly changing society. The exact nature of the skills that will form part of the new framework is a matter for further discussion, but we suggest that they could include:

- **communication skills** (e.g. reading, writing, speaking, listening, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) skills, drawing, performance)
- **thinking skills** (e.g. inquiring, reasoning, problem solving, evaluation).

3 Personal and Social Skills

The development of personal and social skills is core business for education. This involves development of values and personal attributes that assist students to participate and function effectively in society. These include:

- **social, cultural and personal skills** (e.g. taking responsibility for one's own behaviour and actions to others, distinguishing between right and wrong, exercising tolerance, physical development)
- **organisational and employability skills** (e.g. working with others and in teams, developing independence and improving personal performance).

*Based on an introduction to a paper by Howard Gardner for the Royal Symposium on Education for the Future, Amsterdam, 2001

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Curriculum Development

It is important for parents to be able to follow the development of their child's education, particularly because the way that students learn changes as they grow older. Maintaining the existing CSF level structure, the VCAA will develop broad statements about what students should know at specific stages of their development: Prep, Years 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10.

The new framework will recognise that students of different ages learn in different ways. The structure and content of the curriculum will evolve up to Year 10 to help students maintain interest in their studies.

Early years

From Prep to Year 4, the curriculum will concentrate on developing the basic skills in literacy and numeracy that will underpin all future learning. It will also draw on the foundations of the knowledge, ideas and skills from the disciplines and other cross-curriculum and personal and social skills appropriate to each age group.

Middle years

As students progress, their literacy and numeracy needs become more sophisticated. Important knowledge, ideas and skills from the disciplines are introduced at this stage. There will be an increased teaching focus on thinking skills within and across disciplines and a clear set of curriculum standards from which schools can develop their own initiatives.

Years 9 and 10

This period is an important phase in the development of young people. It is a time of both opportunity and insecurity, when students are learning how to think for



themselves and are deciding how to progress with their studies. Too many students at this age are not being challenged, stimulated or motivated by school and the current framework seems too large and too focused on preparing for post-compulsory learning. While this is important, it is also necessary to consider the needs of 14- to 16-year-old students and encourage them to take greater responsibility for themselves and their own learning.

At this level, the structure of the new framework will promote innovative and diverse teaching styles that meet the needs of a wide range of students. It will encourage schools to use teaching styles that link students' life experiences with the core knowledge and ideas from the disciplines and cross-curriculum skills, values and attributes. For example, taking lessons out



of the classroom and into the community or designing real solutions to briefs from prospective clients that are local companies. The aim is to show students why they learn what they do and how it relates to the real world.

Measuring Student Achievement

The VCAA will develop performance standards to measure student achievement, along with assessment processes and reporting advice, to help schools improve how they communicate student achievements to parents and the broader community in a meaningful way.

Performance standards

A fresh set of performance standards will form the backbone of the new approach. These will focus on assessing depth and clarity of thinking. The standards will be set at a challenging level and be age appropriate, in terms of range and scope as well as level of achievement – recognising the changing learning needs of students. This means that the number and complexity of standards will change from Years Prep to 10.

Assessment

Helping teachers to provide fair, consistent and accurate assessments of their students' achievements is a vital part of effective teaching. A key part of the new framework will be descriptions of a range of assessment processes to measure student achievements in relation to the performance standards.

Assessment tools will be provided to help teachers work with the performance standards and assess students more accurately and determine whether they are performing at the expected or desired level of achievement, or above or below it.

These assessment tools will complement the existing statewide assessments of the Achievement Improvement Monitor (AIM) and will focus on processes designed to be used by teachers in the classroom. The intention is that the assessment tools will be used to monitor students' achievements and progress over time. Individual students will be compared with each other, against statewide achievement levels and national benchmarks.

These assessment tools will also help to measure students' ability to transfer existing knowledge and apply it to new problems; that is, to demonstrate deep understanding.

Assessment principles

Student assessment will form a part of everyday teaching and how a student is performing will be measured in a number of ways: from their written work or behaviour in the classroom, to undertaking formally set tests or assignments. All types of assessment should enable the teacher, student and parents to examine how the student is learning and identify strengths and weaknesses. Using all this information, teachers will be able to plan for improving students' learning and reporting this to parents.

Assessments should describe students' learning and achievements fairly and accurately and should provide direction for future learning.

If performance standards are created for generic skills, it is important that appropriate assessment processes are also developed in order to measure achievement of these skills.

Parent reporting guidelines

Feedback from parents and teachers tells us that parents can find reports hard to understand, not always telling them what they want to know. Many schools have developed new approaches to reporting to give better information to parents.

Under the new approach to curriculum and assessment, parents will also benefit from clearer, improved methods of reporting. Reports will show what students have achieved against agreed standards, how they have progressed and how they can improve in relation to their peers.

Schools and school authorities will take the main responsibility for developing reporting guidelines. The VCAA will provide advice and support to government and non-government school administrators on how to link reporting to the new performance standards.

Support materials

The VCAA will not tell schools how to teach – instead, schools will be expected to use the new approach as a framework and adapt it in innovative ways to meet the learning requirements of their students.

To enhance understanding and implementation of the new approach, the VCAA will develop a range of support materials for schools, including sample courses, units and lessons. These will be designed to illustrate how the new approach works and suggest ways for schools to teach the new curriculum and include cross-curriculum skills, values and attributes.

Once the new framework has been fully developed, the VCAA will publish a guide that explains the relationship between the existing CSF and key aspects of the new approach. Existing CSF support material will link into this guide and will continue to be important and useful. The VCAA will help schools work with all support material.

Consultation questions

The VCAA is inviting feedback on the ideas within this paper and has developed a questionnaire which allows schools, parents and other members of the community to respond to specific questions. It includes questions about the major strengths and challenges of the proposal and how reports to parents can be made clearer and more meaningful.

Consultation timeline

Term 2, April to June 2004	Consultation period. Responses to consultation paper via online questionnaire
Friday 25 June 2004	Final day for responses to online questionnaire
Terms 2 and 3, April to September 2004	Writing of content of framework/standards and development of support materials
Term 4 2004	Publication of complete draft of framework

The questionnaire is available online at www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/prep10/CRP/index.htm or by phone (03) 9244 6391.

Parents and members of the community are encouraged to respond to the consultation questions and engage in any discussions about the proposed approach to curriculum reform made available by their local schools.

Summary of the proposed changes

- This reform of the curriculum will identify what is ‘essential learning’ for students in order to equip them with the knowledge, skills, values and attributes to thrive in the society and workplaces of the future.
- Building on the existing CSF, the new approach will explicitly recognise the importance of values and the ability of students to apply what they have learnt to new situations, through deep understanding.
- The new approach is based around a set of shared values and made up of three separate, but related parts: core knowledge, ideas and skills from the disciplines, cross-curriculum skills and personal and social skills. Literacy and numeracy will remain central to students’ education.
- The new approach provides schools with a curriculum framework and a related set of clear performance standards. Schools will be expected to add their own content to this framework and develop innovative teaching styles that meet the diverse needs of their students and allow them to reach the required standards.
- The exact content of the core discipline concepts and generic skills is currently being considered and developed and the VCAA welcomes your contributions to the development of the new approach.