



Years 9 and 10 programs – Frequently asked questions

In the early phases of implementation of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards, some schools requested clarification of requirements for Years 9 and 10 program development. The purpose of this advice is to provide specific responses to a number of frequently asked questions and background to outline the principles which inform these responses and decisions about Years 9 and 10 course requirements.

While the Frequently Asked Question section of this advice reflects school enquiries about Years 9 and 10 requirements, it should be considered in the context of the background and the program options provided below.

Background

The Level 6 (Years 9 and 10) standards (available at <http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au>) enable schools to construct programs which include: each of the disciplines; a strong focus on developing the full range of interdisciplinary and physical, personal and social knowledge, skills and behaviours; and the capacity for students to pursue pathway-related studies which meet their needs and connect with programs the school provides in Years 11 and 12.

The standards are built around three developmental stages of learning that young people experience in the compulsory years of school, the third of which involves Years 9 and 10 students. In this stage, students are in their final years of compulsory schooling and are consolidating their foundational learning. At the same time, they also begin to focus more clearly on areas of particular interest related to both their future schooling and intended pathways beyond school.

A statement about characteristics of learners in this stage and their particular needs is available at <http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/> in the 'Stages of Learning' section. The following advice for schools on developing teaching and learning programs for students in Years 9 and 10 is designed to be read in conjunction with that statement.

Years 9 and 10 programs

School teaching and learning programs in Years 9 and 10 reflect the awareness that students are approaching the post-compulsory years when they will begin to follow individual pathways into senior secondary studies, further education, life and work in the wider community.

The Standards recognise that students in Years 9 and 10 have particular requirements. They provide schools with a planning framework to develop diverse and comprehensive programs for students in these years. The three strands describe essential elements of education for the twenty-first century and ensure that by the end of Year 10, all students have had the opportunity to develop:

- physical, personal and social qualities that enable them to take initiative, to exercise autonomy, to make responsible decisions and to manage elements of their learning
- understanding of the world in which they live through a strong foundation in the discipline-based domains
- interdisciplinary skills that enable them to apply their knowledge confidently and creatively in the contexts of work and further learning.

To address these essential elements of learning fully, schools offer programs for Years 9 and 10 students that encompass all domains of the Standards. In implementing the Standards, however, the challenge for schools is to offer programs for the student cohort that encompass the full range of standards while tailoring programs for individual students to meet their interests and requirements. In meeting individual students' requirements, schools also need to maintain sufficient breadth of learning to maximise students' options in their continuing education.

In addition, and particular to Years 9 and 10, schools ensure that students gain a deeper understanding of areas related to those pathways they will follow in the next phase of their learning.

Frequently asked questions and responses

What are the requirements for students in Years 9 and 10?

In Years 9 and 10 it is essential that students:

- have available learning programs that include subjects developed from a breadth of curriculum options across the three strands: Physical, Personal and Social; Interdisciplinary; and the five major discipline areas (the Arts; English and Languages Other Than English; the Humanities; Mathematics; Science)
- participate in learning programs that address individual learning needs and intended pathways into Years 11 and 12, future education and work

- attain the levels of literacy and numeracy needed to underpin further learning and which are crucial for success in any pathway
- achieve Level 6 standards in those domains that support their intended pathways and future subject choices
- fulfil requirements of policies and guidelines set by relevant sector authorities (the Department of Education and Training or Catholic Education Commission of Victoria), for example mandatory physical education in government schools.

Must schools offer all domains?

Yes. In developing student learning programs and organisational options schools are expected to ensure that their Years 9 and 10 student cohort has access to programs which address the full range of the Standards, comprising subjects which incorporate standards from the three learning strands and all the domains.

Must each Years 9 or 10 student's program include learning from all domains?

No. Students need to attain Level 6 standards in those domains that support their intended pathways and future subject choices. Most students will want to keep all options open, and for them study in all or most domains will continue to be appropriate. Others may have a clear pathway in mind, and the beginning of specialisation might be best for them, as long as they are not cutting off options. For a minority of students who may require specific targeted support in the foundational areas of literacy and numeracy to sustain them in the post-compulsory years, it is vital that the provision of appropriate, targeted support takes precedence over pursuing the full list of domains.

With appropriate guidance, students can construct personal programs from a breadth of curriculum options that best meet their individual learning needs and pathway-related interests. However, students who achieve Level 6 standards in all domains by the time they reach the post-compulsory years, will have received the best possible preparation for success in Years 11 and 12, further education and work.

Can schools continue to offer electives in Years 9 and 10?

Yes. Many schools currently run elective programs in a range of subjects over Years 9 and 10. Schools can use the Standards to maintain or extend their elective programs. In devising or auditing elective programs, schools should ensure that students achieve balance in their elected subjects and participate in

programs that encompass knowledge, skills and behaviours from a broad range of the domains across the three strands over Years 9 and 10.

Can students undertake VCE and Vocational Education and Training (VET) units in Year 10?

Yes. In developing student learning programs and organisational options which enable students to best meet their particular learning needs and pathway-related interests, schools may take into account that students can achieve Level 6 standards in some domains through participation in accredited units of study from the VCE and VET in Year 10. To be fully effective and valuable, these programs should dovetail with programs the school or school cluster provides in Years 11 and 12.

What considerations need to be made by schools before enrolling Year 10 students in VCE studies?

While there are no prescribed prerequisites for Units 1 and 2 VCE studies, it is expected that individual Year 10 students have achieved the recommended prior learning for specific Year 11 and Year 12 VCE studies. Prior learning recommendations are made, for example, in relation to VCE Languages Other Than English (LOTE) and the Arts in the VCE study designs. Schools should also consider areas where sequential learning through Years 9 and 10 provides a foundation for particular VCE studies. It would be unlikely, for example, that a student who had not achieved Level 6 standards in Mathematics would be adequately prepared for VCE Mathematics Methods. Similar considerations apply to particular VCE Science studies.

Exceptions may be made where schools determine that students have experienced appropriate prior learning through participation in extracurricular activities. In relation to LOTE, it may be evident that some students have language backgrounds that provide a foundation for a particular VCE LOTE study. Schools need to determine that Year 10 students intending to attempt VCE subjects have the appropriate foundation to achieve success in their chosen subject.

Can all Years 9 and 10 student learning programs be assessed against the Standards?

Yes. Many schools provide access to programs within and beyond the school which broaden and deepen the offering, and which enable students to specialise and explore specific pathways. These include school productions, camps, sport programs, vocational education and training options, structured workplace learning, city and/or country-based programs and community-based projects. The Standards can be used when assessing student learning in these contexts.