

# CONSULTATION PAPER

## REVIEW INTO VOCATIONAL AND APPLIED LEARNING PATHWAYS IN SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLING

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### INTRODUCTION TO THE REVIEW

In November 2019, the Victorian Government announced the Review into Vocational and Applied Learning Pathways in Senior Secondary Schooling. The Review will make recommendations to reform vocational and applied learning in senior secondary schooling to improve access to and transitions for students between school, post-secondary education and work.

The Terms of Reference are available at: [engage.vic.gov.au/vcalreview](https://engage.vic.gov.au/vcalreview).

Over November – December 2019, the Review consulted with key stakeholders to raise awareness of the Review and better understand the key challenges from a range of perspectives. This initial feedback has been used to frame the consultation questions that will be used in the next phase of consultations, including those outlined in this Consultation Paper.

This Consultation Paper provides stakeholders with a summary of what the Review understands from consultations and research to date and outlines the key questions that the Review seeks feedback on. The questions outlined in this paper are a guide and are not exhaustive.

The next phase of consultations, including responses to the Consultation Paper, will inform the findings and recommendations in the Final Report. The Final Report is due in May 2020.

### HOW CAN YOU RESPOND TO THE CONSULTATION PAPER?

The Review invites your views by uploading a submission or completing an online survey on the Engage Victoria website ([engage.vic.gov.au/vcalreview](https://engage.vic.gov.au/vcalreview)). Feedback should be provided by **27 March 2020**.

We are particularly interested in feedback that is as specific as possible, either in commentary on current arrangements or proposed changes. Please explain briefly in your responses your professional or personal relationship to the subject of the Review, for example, *'I am a current VCAL teacher at a Government secondary school'* or *'I am a prospective parent of a VCAL/VET student'*.

The Review does not expect or require submissions to cover each of the questions set out below or in the Terms of Reference. We encourage interested parties to provide information in response to this Consultation Paper, or the Terms of Reference, as relevant to them.

The Review may also directly contact some participants to request specific information.

### VOCATIONAL AND APPLIED LEARNING IN VICTORIA

Victorian students need access to high-quality vocational and applied learning options that support them to successfully transition from school into post-secondary education and work. Employers, post-secondary education providers and families also need to value and trust the quality of vocational and applied learning delivered by schools and other providers.

Victoria has a well-established system of vocational and applied learning pathways through the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) and Vocational Education and Training (VET) delivered to school students, which can be undertaken as part of VCAL or the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). In addition, students can commence apprenticeships and traineeships while they are still at school.

Each year, a significant number of Victorian senior secondary students undertake vocational and applied learning. In 2018, almost 24,000 students undertook VCAL (VCAA, 2018). Nearly 40 per cent of senior secondary students undertake some form of vocational education during their schooling (CIRES, 2018).

## The concepts of vocational and applied learning

The concepts of ‘vocational learning’ and ‘applied learning’ are interrelated but discrete - vocational learning can be applied, and applied learning can be vocational.

Vocational learning is delivered within the broader school curriculum and helps secondary students explore the world of work, identify career options and pathways, and build career development skills. It includes VET, work-based learning, school based apprenticeships and traineeships (SBATs), careers education and other school-based learning designed to build preparedness for the workforce.

There is general consensus that applied learning is a pedagogical approach where students learn through doing in circumstances that emulate the real world, which may include both vocational and academic knowledge and skills. Although the term ‘applied learning’ suggests that academic learning and applied learning are mutually exclusive concepts, this is not the case. There is applied learning in academic VCE subjects like design or the performing arts, and academic learning in VCAL subjects such as the literacy and numeracy components.

## KEY QUESTIONS ON VOCATIONAL AND APPLIED LEARNING

### Objectives of applied learning

The Review understands that vocational and applied learning is currently serving multiple purposes in Victoria, including student retention, student engagement and reengagement, inclusion and post-school transitions for students. While these purposes may appear to be in tension, they should be seen as being on a continuum towards a successful post-school transition. For example, viewing reengagement through vocational and applied learning as an initial step towards enhanced learning and a successful post-school pathway.

#### **Question**

*What should the primary objectives of VCAL, VET delivered to school students and SBATs be?*

### Design

The Review understands that there is some concern that the current VCAL structure is too complex (for example, the relationship between different strands and levels) and that there is a lack of rigour in relation to assessment and curriculum content, particularly within the Literacy and Numeracy Skills Strand, and reporting of VCAL achievement.

#### **Questions**

*How could we make VCAL less complex to understand for students, families, teachers and schools?*

*What improvements could be made to improve the quality and rigour of curriculum and assessment in VCAL and VET delivered to school students?*

The Review has heard that there are a number of design issues relating to VCAL, including the overall Victorian senior secondary certificate framework and the relationship between VCAL and VCE. Feedback suggests that there is a desire for more flexibility and permeability between the VCE and VCAL.

#### **Questions**

*What are the relative benefits and risks of maintaining the dual-certificate framework (i.e. VCAL and VCE) or moving to a single-certificate framework (with both academic and vocational pathways)?*

*If there was a single-certificate framework, how could a strengthened vocational pathway be described and designed?*

The Review has heard that VCAL plays an important role in providing pathways for students with special needs or in special settings, and students reengaging with education. Initial feedback from stakeholders involved with these student cohorts is generally positive about VCAL and the opportunity it provides students to continue with secondary school education.

### **Question**

*How do we ensure that VCAL and VET delivered to school students continue to meet the needs of all students who want to study in an applied stream?*

### **Delivery**

The Review understands that there are range of challenges impacting the delivery of vocational and applied learning, including difficulty accessing VET in rural and regional areas, and the cost of delivery and associated administrative burden relating to VCAL and VET.

### **Questions**

*Infrastructure, funding and administrative burden are raised as the key barriers to delivering vocational and applied learning. What specific supports would help schools to address these barriers?*

*What could we do to support all secondary school students, including in rural and regional areas, to have access to high-quality applied options?*

During initial consultations, the Review heard that workforce challenges are also a barrier to delivering high-quality vocational and applied learning. These challenges include difficulty attracting and retaining high-quality vocational and applied learning teachers and trainers, capability gaps for existing applied learning teachers and limited opportunities for professional development.

### **Questions**

*What reforms would encourage high-quality teachers and trainers with the right skills and experience to deliver applied learning in secondary school?*

*What supports should we offer new and existing teachers and trainers to ensure they are qualified in best practice applied learning practices and feel prepared to deliver high-quality applied learning?*

### **Outcomes**

Feedback suggests that the lack of a clear objective and some design features of VCAL, VET delivered to school students, and SBATs are leading to differing views regarding what a 'successful' student outcome is. For example, is it a successful VCAL outcome if a student exits school early but successfully transitions into a full-time apprenticeship? Or is it a more desirable outcome for that student to complete their senior secondary certificate before transitioning into post-school education and training or work?

The current design of vocational and applied pathways also limits what outcome measures are available. In contrast to VCE, which focuses on achievement of study scores, much of the focus of VCAL student outcomes relates to completion rates. Some post-school destination data are also collected and monitored to help the system understand the outcomes for vocational and applied learners. However, post-school destination data are often not reported alongside completion rates.

The Review understands that further granularity of senior secondary student data could support schools and the system to measure success for vocational and applied learners and drive accountability for outcomes.

### **Questions**

*What is a successful outcome for VCAL students, VET delivered to school students and SBAT students?*

*What additional data should schools and the system collect/be provided with in relation to students undertaking vocational and applied learning?*

## **Reputation**

Feedback suggests that the separation of the VCE and VCAL has led to VCAL being seen as the inferior senior secondary certificate, or as some stakeholders have phrased it, 'not the VCE'.

The Review understands that for public confidence to improve, the design and delivery challenges outlined above need to be highlighted and addressed. It will not be enough to simply rebrand VCAL.

In consultations to date, the Review heard many examples of the benefits and career opportunities associated with vocational and applied learning. More could be done to improve public awareness and understanding of these benefits.

### **Questions**

*What reforms and actions would improve your perceptions, and public perceptions more generally, of vocational and applied learning pathways?*

*What could the system do to support students, families, employers and tertiary institutions to value and understand the benefits of vocational and applied learning pathways?*