As incoming Chair of the VCAA, I am absolutely delighted to be able to shine a light on some of the organisation’s many achievements during the reporting period.

I think it is fair to say that the areas of curriculum design and assessment have recently taken centre stage in education across Australia. The development and implementation of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests (and the associated creation of the My School website) are two excellent cases in point. The important first moves towards the establishment of national curriculum in the disciplines of English, Mathematics, Science and History are also well underway.

The state of Victoria – and the VCAA itself – are centrally involved in all of these initiatives. Not only does the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the VCAA, John Firth, sit on the board of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), but the VCAA’s developing focus on the general capabilities of literacy, numeracy, ICT, thinking skills, creativity, self-management, teamwork, intercultural understanding, ethical behaviour and social competence, which has been pioneered in this state, will undoubtedly have an influence on the national debate about such areas of learning as ethics, ICT enablement, creative practice and thinking skills.

The groundbreaking work completed in Victoria during 2009 in the field of Indigenous Languages (Aboriginal Languages, cultures and reclamation in Victorian schools: standards P–10 and protocols) and with respect to the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) are key examples of Victoria leading the nation in curriculum research and design. Australia needs such outstanding initiatives in order for the cooperative federalist model of curriculum innovation to thrive. I have no doubt that it will.

Beyond this, it is fascinating to observe how wide-ranging the work of the VCAA has become. From hosting premier student performances and exhibitions in the VCAA Season of Excellence – culminating with the Top Acts celebration at Hamer Hall each May – to overseeing the largest and most diverse group of international languages being taught anywhere in the country, the Authority makes a significant contribution to Victoria’s reputation as the education capital of Australia.

At the same time, the VCAA undertook, and completed, some major reviews over the past 12 months, including the review of Extension Studies, which led to the recommendation and approval that such offerings remain but should be transformed into a Higher Education Studies within the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) program. The third annual VCAA Examination Feedback Survey in 2009 revealed a very high level of satisfaction on the part of the 971 respondents around the state – the majority of whom were teachers each with more than 10 years’ experience. Both of these outcomes indicate a strong culture in the VCAA of listening carefully to educational partners and of applying their suggestions for improvements.
Interestingly, that same formula has worked extremely well in the area of the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) studies. The year 2009 saw a record number of students in VCAL offerings, with 17,699 enrolments and 430 providers. The former represented a 13 per cent increase on the 2008 level while the latter rose by 1.6 per cent. What is remarkable is the striking and steady growth in VCAL programs since their inception five years ago; clearly a major need has been identified and continues to grow.

Transitions continued apace in 2009 with the construction of two new Victorian Selective Entry schools in metropolitan Melbourne (the Nossal High School in Berwick and the Suzanne Corey School in Melton). The same year saw the creation of the specialist 10–12 John Monash Science School, located at Monash University, Clayton campus. In all of these cases, the role of the Department, so ably led by Secretary Professor Peter Dawkins, has been pivotal and the Department's collaboration with, and support for, the VCAA has been equally impressive.

There could not be a more interesting time to be chairing the VCAA. I would like to thank the Minister and the Secretary, and the Authority's Chief Executive Officer and all of its staff and leadership team for making the experience such a stimulating and rewarding one.

Professor Adam Shoemaker
Chair