Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

Statement on forward directions for vocational learning in schools

A major priority for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is the government's *Growing Victoria Together* target of 90 per cent of young Victorians completing Year 12 or equivalent by 2010. In setting this goal, the government signalled that achievement of an initial qualification at senior secondary level or its equivalent is critically important for all young people.

Numerous studies have shown the positive impact of senior secondary qualifications on individual earnings and productive workforce participation. Data from the *On Track* survey shows that school leavers completing Year 12 or its equivalent are more likely than non-completers to enter further education or training and much less likely to be unemployed or not in the labour force. Results from *On Track* demonstrate that students who undertake vocational education and training (VET) studies in Year 12 have strong transition outcomes.

**Improving student engagement & achievement**

In 2003, the Department launched the *Blueprint for Government Schools*. This strategic framework supports achievement of the Year 12 completion target by encouraging student engagement and achievement in all school years.

In particular, implementation of the *School Accountability and Improvement Framework* in 2005 has provided a streamlined improvement and accountability framework that supports improved learning outcomes, student engagement and well-being, and student pathways and transitions. The framework engenders school level changes that respond to local need and support achievement of the Government goals and targets for education and training.

**Expanding provision**

The expansion of the options available to young people in the senior secondary years has been a key approach to improving Year 12 completion rates. The approach has included:

- ongoing reform of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) to allow the inclusion of a very broad range of VET in Schools options and the capacity for these to contribute to a student’s university entrance score;
- the introduction of the applied senior secondary certificate, the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL); and
- supporting young people wanting to pursue a trade with an improved number of pre-apprenticeship programs.

VET in Schools programs comprise nationally recognised VET certificates undertaken by students as part of their VCE or the VCAL. The VET units count towards both the completion of the VCE or VCAL and towards the attainment of a VET qualification. 38,237 students were enrolled in VET in Schools programs in 2006, of which 24,252 students were at Government schools.

The VCAL was introduced as a second senior secondary certificate in 2003, to provide an applied learning program of studies for students seeking destinations in apprenticeships, traineeships, further vocational training or employment. In 2006, there were 12,326 student enrolments in VCAL. VET in Schools is a compulsory component of the Intermediate and Senior levels of VCAL and also a popular option for many students undertaking the VCE. VCAL and VET in Schools programs are now provided in most government schools.
Review of VET in Schools
In early 2007, the Department commissioned a review of the delivery of VET in Schools to address a number of ongoing issues. These issues include: low levels of VET in Schools delivery in skill priority areas, fee levels, concerns with the quality of training, uneven delivery across regions and the prevalence of school based apprenticeships and traineeships in low priority industry areas.

The review concluded that to ensure that VET in Schools provision aligns with broader government directions and growing expectations into the future it requires:

- A forward looking set of policy objectives;
- A sustainable resourcing model;
- Better balanced provision, particularly in areas of skills shortages and priorities;
- Improved cooperation between schools and with registered training organisations (RTOs); and
- Measures to improve the quality of student outcomes.

Extensive consultation with government schools and key stakeholders was undertaken as part of the review. The consultations confirmed that VET in Schools has a range of purposes, including student engagement, preparation of students for general and specific labour market transitions and meeting the skills needs of industry. The VCAL has also been used extensively by schools and their partner providers in the VET and community sectors for the same purposes.

The review proposals generated considerable interest and debate which have informed the actions outlined in this statement.

Objectives of Vocational Learning
All school programs aim to improve student learning, enhance student engagement and wellbeing and support successful transitions and pathways. As a means of achieving this, the Department has a commitment to expanding opportunities and pathways for senior secondary students. This includes offering a vocationally-oriented post compulsory curriculum that builds on strategic partnerships between schools, training providers and industry and is responsive to individual learning needs.

VET in Schools programs serve the broader purposes that all VCE and VCAL programs share, such as student engagement, participation and retention. In addition, VET in Schools also delivers applied learning as part of a senior secondary certificate:

- to enable young people to develop skills, knowledge and attributes which are required in the contemporary workplace to assist their career awareness and general transition from school into the labour market, and
- to enable young people to develop the required skills, knowledge and attributes for specific industries to assist their transition into the labour market and higher level VET pathways.

Both of these aims are also intrinsic to VCAL. To better meet them, the Department is currently undertaking a range of actions to strengthen the delivery of both VET in Schools and VCAL.

Key Actions

Regional Planning and Clustering
The Department recognises the effective provision planning for VET in Schools and VCAL that currently exists in many parts of the State. Building on existing planning and clustering
arrangements, the Department will implement a regional planning process to improve VET in Schools and VCAL planning and accountability arrangements at the regional level.

During 2008 all Regions will develop a Regional VET in Schools and VCAL plan. The VET in Schools and VCAL regional planning process will promote:

- increased delivery in skill priority areas;
- better alignment with regional labour market priorities;
- an improved balance of VET in Schools and VCAL provision across regions;
- more effective school clustering, strengthened partnerships between providers and broader collaboration between providers and industry;
- improvements in student pathways from school based VET and VCAL to TAFE/RTO destinations, particularly into higher level AQF programs;
- a strategic refocussing of student work placements; and
- increased uptake of integrated school based apprenticeships.

The regional VET in Schools and VCAL plans will be designed to maximise the positive outcomes for VET and VCAL students, including having enough flexibility to balance the choices and preferences of students with labour market demands.

The regional plans will be linked to school accountability processes and incorporate local needs and available facilities. They will guide and monitor the delivery of VET in Schools programs. The plans will play a similar role in VCAL provision. However, the engagement and re-engagement role of VCAL will be considered in conjunction with its role in providing transitions to destinations in industry.

Each region will receive funding and support in 2008 to employ a planning officer to assist with regional strategic planning for VET in Schools and VCAL and the facilitation of clustering arrangements.

As part of the regional planning process, the Department will engage in discussions with industry bodies to identify the barriers to the uptake of integrated school based apprenticeships and traineeships and to develop regional school based apprenticeship and traineeship provision models appropriate to specific industries and locations.

**VET in Schools Funding**

In response to feedback provided through the consultation process, the Department has invested an additional $200,000 to supplement the VET in Schools rurality loading for 2008, in recognition of the increased costs of delivery in rural areas. The 2008 VET in Schools funding model will remain otherwise unchanged.

As outlined in the current Student Resource Package (SRP) guidelines, all VCE and VCAL subjects (both VET in Schools and non-VET in Schools subjects) should be funded on an equitable basis from the SRP. The targeted VET in Schools funding is provided to government schools as additional funding designed to supplement the SRP funds used for VET in Schools.

The *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* ensures the provision of free instruction in the standard curriculum program. The standard curriculum program includes core learning and teaching activities associated with the Victorian Essential Learning Standards and senior secondary certificates (VCE and VCAL, including VET programs). Given this legislative imperative, no tuition fees should be charged for VET in Schools programs. However, schools may request payments from parents for student materials and services charges. Please refer to Circular S381-2007 for further information.
The Department is further considering the issues raised in the consultations in the development of a revised VET in Schools funding model for implementation from 2009.

**Capacity Building**
There will be a renewed focus on building the capacity of school staff to negotiate senior secondary curriculum delivery arrangements with external providers.

In late 2007 the Department provided school staff, including VET in Schools and VCAL coordinators and Principals, with guidelines to improve their capacity to negotiate senior secondary curriculum delivery and auspicing arrangements with RTOs and other external providers. The guidelines will specify the relevant roles and responsibilities that apply to school and external education and training providers in delivering post compulsory education. Sample contract templates will also be provided to assist schools to enter into contractual agreements with external providers. These will be accompanied by professional development in each region on the use of the tools.

**Conclusion**
Schools are a vital link between Government policy and service delivery, and they have had an integral role in the successful growth of VET in Schools and VCAL provision. The Department recognises the good work undertaken by schools to date that supports progress towards achievement of Government goals and targets for education and training.

The key actions outlined above support continued progress towards these aims. The actions will enhance vocational learning experiences for post compulsory students by strengthening strategic partnerships between schools, training providers and industry, and encouraging responsiveness to individual learning needs and local skill priorities.

Progress towards achievement of Year 12 or its equivalent is a Departmental priority. The Department will continue to support the enhancement of vocational programs in schools to achieve this target.