VCAL Trial Project 2002 Evaluation
Interim Report - July 2002

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Executive Summary

Preamble

The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) was introduced as a new qualification on a trial basis in 2002, with the Certificate delivered at twenty-two sites across Victoria. An important feature of the trial is an evaluation of the various aspects of the trial itself, including the experience and perceptions of students, teachers, and employers. This evaluation is currently being conducted by the Research Institute of Professional and Vocational Education and Training (RIPVET), a joint research facility between Deakin University and Gordon Institute of TAFE. The evaluation commenced in March 2002, with a final report to be presented in December 2002, and an interim report in July 2002.

The three general aims of the evaluation are:

i. to assess the delivery and impact of the VCAL trial on participating students and on the trial site providers;

ii. to identify, document and evaluate the range of VCAL learning programs offered across the trial sites. This will include the identification of successful strategies of delivery; best practice models or approaches; innovative funding and resource arrangements; and strategic partnerships; and

iii. to identify and recommend on those policy and operational issues critical to the successful Statewide implementation of the VCAL in 2003.

By necessity, this interim report focuses on i and iii above. For reason of the time involved in any introduction of the VCAL state-wide in 2003, a principal task of the interim report has been to recommend whether or not the VCAL should continue next year as a more widely available option for young people in their final two years of post compulsory education. The more extensive descriptions in detail of the array of educational practices and of the many innovative collaborations between local schools, community organisations, employers and others will be incorporated in the Final Report, as well as comprising a critical feature of professional development for intending VCAL schools. Issues specific to TAFE institutes as VCAL providers will also be covered in the Final Report.
A short history of VCAL’s development

VCAL has emanated from a deep concern over the increasing number of young people for whom the experience of post compulsory schooling has been felt to be no longer relevant or useful to their life. At the same time as the teenage labour market has effectively evaporated, an increasing number of young people have been choosing to leave school before having completed their upper secondary years.

In its commitment to address this problem, the Victorian Government commissioned The Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria (Kirby Review). In its final report of August 2000, the review found that amongst the range of motives at play, the two factors most frequently cited by students for their decision to leave school were the desire for work and the lack of interest in schoolwork. Yet the prospects for these students post their school departure are dramatically hampered by a lack of experience, the absence of any confirming record of achievement from their school years, and a lack of the right kind of training for the jobs they aspire to. The school experience for many of these students had left them with a sense of failure.

During the last decade or more, many school communities have also been acutely aware of, and deeply concerned over this trend. Many schools themselves have taken the initiative to develop programs designed both to capture the enthusiasm of the students in danger of early exit and to offer education and training with real and direct relevance to their vocational interests. Applied learning has been seen as offering the key to any new approach for these students. Some of these new possibilities were undertaken under existing programs such as VET in Schools, while others have by necessity required even more innovative and novel paths. Within this local setting, schools were able to take up on the many gestures of concern and support from parents, community organisations, local employers and others. Beyond any centrally commissioned program or intent, new practices began to emerge, with local solutions evolving for local problems. This represented an important public discovery of the Kirby Review and, amongst its findings, was a strong endorsement of this substantial effort and a proposal for a more coherent and statewide framework to be developed in support. The obvious success of these local practices has been taken as a significant signpost for broader renewal.

Critically then, VCAL has been built upon the very experiences of those local initiatives, both in the flexible and applied learning design of the qualification and in the selection of sites for the trial period. The development of VCAL as an accredited statewide senior school certificate and the trial itself could not have occurred without the enthusiasm, commitment, knowledge and experience of these pioneering schools.

Essential features of the VCAL trial

As a new qualification designed to sit alongside the VCE, VCAL provides an accredited program with an applied learning emphasis of approach. Studies are taken in four compulsory strands: literacy and numeracy; work related skills; industry specific skills;
and personal development. Depending on the level of the units selected in the four strands, one of three VCAL certificate outcomes is possible, at either foundation, intermediate or senior level.

For this trial period in 2002, a total of 473 students are currently enrolled in VCAL in twenty-two sites across Victoria. The trial sites are made up of 15 State secondary schools, five Catholic secondary schools and two TAFE institutes; eleven sites are in the metropolitan area of Melbourne (including the two TAFE institutes), with a further eleven schools being located in regional Victoria. In regard to gender, 69% of VCAL students are boys, with 31% girls. Discerned patterns of subject selection along gender lines are reported in the full report. The age of students ranges from 15 years to 22 years, with the mean age at 17 years. (16 year olds comprising 43% of the total student group, with 17 year olds 38%). The division of enrolments across the three certificate levels is 52% students enrolled at Foundation level, 44% at Intermediate, and 4% at Senior. Data collected has been insufficient to provide any accurate picture at this stage on ethnic background or disability, although it is expected that the final report in December will contain some analysis on these aspects.

A detailed commentary on program selection can be found in the full interim report, but an important general observation can be made. Amongst the diverse array of VCAL learning programs being offered across the 22 sites, 115 of the units consist of VCE and VCE/VET units, with only another 26 VET/FE units outside this. This strongly suggests that the full possibilities available under VCAL are yet to be explored, with schools understandably reliant on their familiarity and experience of past offerings in the VCE and VCE/VET area, and restricted by the trial nature of this first year. Interestingly, the students themselves are already showing great adventure and a broad interest in their own selection of units.

**Key recommendation for 2003**

Based on the various research findings to date, it is recommended that the VCAL continue to be developed, expanded and secured within the Victorian system of education and training for young people seeking an accredited course of study other than those currently available through the structure of the VCE.

While it is clear from the Interim Report of the Evaluation of the VCAL Trial 2002 that there are issues to be addressed in the further expansion of VCAL within the existing local provider pilot sites and to the substantially increasing number of new providers in 2003 and 2004, the evaluation found consistent support for the initiative from the local stakeholders involved - parents, students, teachers, community-based service agencies, employers and representatives of the participating Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs). This support was also forthcoming from the statewide representatives of stakeholder organisations interviewed, although in some instances muted by concerns over the demands inherent in a full statewide ‘roll-out’ in 2003.
The recommendation to retain and extend VCAL is supported from various other sources including a review of contemporary research into the circumstances of post compulsory education provision in Victoria, the declining retention rates in VCE, and the social and economic costs of having up to 11,000 young people leave the education system each year (Kirby, 2000) without adequate pathways into further education, training or employment. It is the informed view of the evaluators that VCAL will provide Victorian secondary schools and TAFE Institutes with an accredited structure within which rigorous and relevant courses of study for young people can be developed and delivered.

**VCAL as a challenge to established practice**

The VCAL is an innovation and for this reason, it is difficult to accommodate easily within the existing institutional culture of secondary schools. For the VCAL to be sustained by schools as a significant departure from the dominant forms of teaching and learning since the 1950s, schools will need to undergo significant and substantial change. The trial schools have demonstrated that such change is possible. However it is imperative that this shift in institutional culture occur more widely as the VCAL becomes available statewide. Without it there is the very real danger that the VCAL will undergo dramatic and unintended changes of its own, moulded by prevailing professional educational forms of thinking and associated practices. It is critical that in the process of statewide adoption, the distinctiveness of VCAL as a learning program be understood and retained, and that the challenge to current institutional cultures be recognised and embraced.

The challenge for secondary schools is that of maintaining their VCAL learning programs as high quality educational options for a wide range of young people without becoming a remedial alternative to other established programs. Meeting this challenge will require teachers with substantial and broad professional knowledge relevant to the education of youth, creativity and responsiveness as hallmarks of their professional outlook, and capacities to engage youth in learning activities that transcend the conventional classroom environment. These teachers will need to be not only inclusive in their dealings with students, but also inclusive in their professional networks and relationships with other educators and trainers, community service personnel and employers beyond the typical boundaries of the schoolteacher profession. Great encouragement for this prospect has been found in the enthusiasm and commitment of the many VCAL teachers already engaged in this way.

The VCAL has the potential to become a powerful influence for change to the form of institutionalised secondary education that became established during the previous century. The institutional boundaries once so rigorously set at the school gate have progressively been moving to embrace a wider and more complex world of community and work. For many, VCAL will represent the next step in that progression. Those schools able to commit themselves to meeting the challenge VCAL poses - in changing themselves rather than diminishing the full potential of VCAL - will become models of a revitalised secondary schooling attuned to the demands of youth education in the twenty first century.
Critical development needs

The evaluation to date has identified a number of critical development needs which, if statewide adoption of VCAL is to be successful, will need to be addressed in the coming period, by both local providers and the Department of Education and Training (DE&T). These needs are:

The need for a new conceptualisation of quality curriculum that resists the domination of the generalised/abstracted knowledge-based curriculum experiences of the mainstream secondary school education, and establishes instead applied learning of vocationally-oriented knowledge as a sustainable and valued pathway for students;

The need for the development of teaching approaches for secondary school students that are informed by the principles of adult education and, as a result, are a clear departure from the teacher-centred, expository, classroom-based pedagogies that are still very much the norm in secondary schools today;

The need for schools to enter into new partnerships and collaborative arrangements with other schools in their regions and with local community service agencies, employers, and TAFE and ACE providers in order to address more comprehensively the educational, training and employment needs of young people enrolled in applied learning and vocational education courses;

The need for an expanded conception of the role of the teacher, as part of diverse range of efforts necessary to address the above three points;

The need to develop schools as more broadly based, inclusive and flexible learning and social environments for young people; and

The need to overturn negative stakeholder perceptions about vocationally-oriented applied learning in comparison to vocationally-oriented academic learning, and to general and abstracted education.

The following recommendations of this interim report are designed to contribute to finding constructive solutions to these development needs.

The seventeen recommendations arising from the evaluation of the VCAL Trial Project 2002 to this stage are listed below.

**VCAL as a complementary accredited qualification**

**Recommendation 1:**

It is recommended that VCAL continue to be developed, expanded and secured within the Victorian system of education and training for young people seeking an accredited course of study other than those currently available through the structure of the VCE.

**Widespread Community Acceptance of VCAL**

The issue of status is the primary potential impediment to VCAL’s acceptance by students, parents and local employers. This issue must be addressed through a range of strategies. Each of the recommendations listed addresses this status issue, either directly or indirectly. The implementation of these recommendations will contribute to the development of VCAL as a high quality accredited course of study. At the very outset, there is considerable support already for the VCAL initiative in schools, most especially from those parents who have a deep appreciation of the diminishing returns post compulsory education has been able to afford their children under the exclusively academic options.

The advantages of a VCAL course of study need to be unequivocally promoted to families and employers. Critical to the level of assurance necessary in this promotion is the explicit endorsement of the Minister of Education and Training. The VCAL promotion must emphasise the following:

- VCAL contributes to the development of the whole person through study, work and community engagement;
- VCAL is the beginning of a process of lifelong learning and credentialing for young people as employees (and employers) of increasing competency and capacity;
- VCAL widens the horizons of students beyond the school boundaries, and provides experiences while still at school that authenticate for them new pathways options into further study and work; and
- VCAL is a structured pathway for young people into part-time work while still at school.
**Recommendation 2:**

It is recommended that a series of promotion campaigns be undertaken, and that endorsement of VCAL by the Minister of Education and Training be a feature of these campaigns. The promotion needs to highlight the advantages to students of completing Years 11 and 12 through a VCAL learning program, and the advantages to employers of accepting VCAL students and graduates into their workforce. These promotion programs would address the diversity of stakeholder needs, and include local information and awareness campaigns involving relevant regional networks.

**Advice and support to students and parents**

**Articulation to Further Study and Employment**

The full range of variable pathways available to VCAL students requires further explication. While a proportion of VCAL students will look to retain VCE as an optional pathway, this option should not dominate the other potential pathways for VCAL students nor the choice of VCAL subjects / learning programs being offered by local providers. VCAL needs to be actively promoted as an accredited course primarily for students whose immediate intention is to progress along a pathway either into TAFE or employment immediately after graduating from school. Students need to be advised that their choice of VCAL will direct them into further study pathways under the Australian Qualifications Framework at Certificate levels I, II, III and IV offered by the VET sector and, from there if they wish, onto higher levels of study either within TAFE or universities. Prospective VCAL students need to understand that there are many positive post Year 12 pathways other than higher education.

**Recommendation 3:**

It is recommended that the integrity and distinctive potential of pathways available through VCAL be given full recognition within the school setting. All VCAL information needs to describe clearly the student pathway options post-VCAL, with the full range of study and employment opportunities outlined.

**Pathways planning**

There is a responsibility on schools to provide students with clear advice and support in planning their study programs in VCAL to match their further study and employment preferences. The development of these individual pathways plans is a continuing process through which the students’ study choices are able to be revisited, reassessed and revised periodically, preferably through an advocacy approach. At present it cannot be assumed that the planning pathways resources available under the Managing Individual Pathways (MIPs) and other initiatives are in all cases an integral feature of VCAL program planning and development. It is critical that this becomes so.
**Recommendation 4:**

It is recommended that current pathways planning assistance become an integral and mandatory feature of the VCAL, using an advocacy model with well qualified adults to advise and inform the basis of students’ learning programs.

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**VCAL qualification design**

**Accreditation of VCAL Levels**

The VCAL qualification design has already undergone modifications in response to the process of implementation during the VCAL Trial Project. The design as it is now incorporated in the July accreditation submission documents states that the VCAL award level is based on five credit points at the award level of which one credit point must include a literacy unit and one credit point must be for a VCAL Personal Development Skills unit. While the importance of developing effective literacy skills for participation in the broader context of family, community and lifelong learning is acknowledged, the equity of making literacy one of the primary signifiers of the VCAL award level is questioned. The evaluation noted that the VCAL literacy strand within the trial pilot, has been largely based upon VCE English units (including foundation English) and that there are concerns about the capacity of existing senior secondary curriculum to adequately cater for the needs of young people with underdeveloped literacy skills. There are concerns that students progressing through their VCAL program to higher levels of vocational learning than their accredited level of literacy should not be disadvantaged by being awarded a lower level, literacy determined, VCAL certificate.

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**Recommendation 5:**

It is recommended that the potential be explored for the primary signifiers of a students’ graduating VCAL level to become the level of achievement in the two VCAL strands, Work Related Skills and Personal Development, both of which incorporate significant elements of work place and applied literacy.

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**Foundation VCAL**

The experience of the trial sites has found substantial numbers of students enrolled in Foundation VCAL, thereby enabling schools to cater for those students with specific learning needs and previously inadequate engagement with the mainstream curriculum. This is an undoubted strength of the program, although there are also some attendant dangers. By this approach VCAL could be misperceived by stakeholders, including employers, as an accredited certificate only for low school achievers. In the securing of the credibility and acceptance of VCAL as a general program, the preparedness and maturity of its graduates for further study and employment must be established. It will be the quality of its graduates in this regard by which the long-term success of the VCAL will be judged by the community at large. Therefore students accepted into VCAL
programs need to present with the prerequisite levels of maturity and capacity necessary for realistic engagement with the applied learning components of VCAL, particularly the direct vocational components. There is the potential for the Foundation VCAL Level to become ‘over-extended’ in terms of the expectations placed on it by schools seeking to accommodate within VCAL the full diversity of the student population disaffected by the existing alternatives. Two options are available in response. First, support could be given to schools in the establishment of preparatory courses for VCAL, for example a VCAL Access Course, and thus maintain the strength of the vocational learning aspect of the accredited Foundation VCAL Level. Alternatively, the Foundation VCAL Level could be re-designed to become a highly flexible program with the prime purpose of maintaining school contact with young people in Year 11 most likely to be early leavers while preparing them for accredited applied learning programs at the VCAL Intermediate and Senior Levels.

**Recommendation 6:**

It is recommended that the purpose and role of the Foundation level VCAL be clarified within the accredited award structure of VCAL, and that the two options for addressing this issue be considered.

**Student welfare and learning**

The educational history and complication of the lives of some VCAL students has presented other distinct educational challenges. In a number of cases, these are students whose nature and extent of personal needs have not always been immediately compatible with the rigours and demands intrinsic to any learning program. While VCAL looks to address this problem in the longer term it has, unsurprisingly, been unable to provide an immediate solution. It has not been uncommon to find VCAL teachers commenting on an apparent paradox. Able to establish a level of trusting and supportive relationships with those students disaffected by conventional teaching approaches, these teachers nevertheless have encountered real difficulties in maintaining students’ trust once the formal demands of the VCAL learning program have been encountered. Clearly there are two significant needs for students existing within the delivery of VCAL; namely, the welfare needs and the learning needs of those students who have become disaffected with conventional schooling. At least initially, these two needs can be experienced in stark contrast. It is critical that both are attended to but that neither is compromised. This is by no means a problem unique to VCAL but perhaps one more acutely experienced because of the difficult educational history of some VCAL students and the distinctive features of the VCAL program itself. The Personal Development units within the VCAL framework are also recognised as an important beginning to addressing this issue. But further recognition and support needs to be given to the development of a distinctive pedagogy, one where the teaching role must be re-asserted but in a manner able to sustain student engagement.

**Recommendation 7:**
It is recommended that the issue of integrating student welfare with student progression in their VCAL studies be addressed. Various options to be explored include the provision of appropriate welfare support services and professional development programs for VCAL teachers.

**The extension of VCAL**

**Extension to Year 10**

There is a need in secondary schools to establish in the lower and middle secondary school years applied learning opportunities for students who are already tracking out of those subjects dominated by a ‘general’ academic approach to teaching and learning.

However, there are issues that must be carefully considered in relation to VCAL. For selected students in Year 10 the option of studying a limited number of VCAL units at Foundation or Intermediate Level may be appropriate, as is currently the case for selected Year 10 students studying VCE Units 1 and 2. This would support the development of VCAL as a quality course of study. For other Year 10 students an applied learning program could be made available as a preparation for VCAL in Year 11. These Year 10 students could undertake access to VCAL studies over the Year 10 period and articulate into Foundation or Intermediate Levels of VCAL in Year 11.

In addition to these VCAL extension arrangements, it is advisable for further consideration to be given to the availability of further applied learning subjects and pathways for students in Years 7, 8 and 9. Different reforms are currently occurring within the middle years, and VCAL will now allow for many new initiatives to be developed with a clear applied learning pathway available to students through their entire secondary education.

**Recommendation 8:**

It is recommended that VCAL units be made available to Year 10 students on the same basis as VCE units are currently made available to Year 10 students, and that the applied learning pathways now created by VCAL be more fully integrated with new applied learning initiatives emerging from the lower and middle years.

**Culturally and industry specific VCAL learning programs**

VCAL has the potential to be customised to more directly accommodate the needs of specific cultural groups (Indigenous Australians, ESL migrants, for example) and more focused industry specific applied learning programs (media, arts, sport and recreation, for example). There are accredited courses already available for inclusion in these potential VCAL learning programs, and a range of providers, community organisations and employers interested in becoming involved.
**Recommendation 9:**

It is recommended that further pilot VCAL learning programs be established in 2003, in the two general areas of culturally specific and industry specific programs.

**VCAL delivery to rural and isolated students**

VCAL offers a great deal of potential to students in more isolated Victorian communities. However, for this potential to be realised, the rural schools will need to be supported through access to a wider range of facilities and resources. For example, consideration needs to be given to access to training programs available through regional learning networks and through TAFE VC. Travel and accommodation may need to be provided to support inter-community work placement visits and access to other appropriate facilities not readily available from within the students’ home communities.

**Recommendation 10:**

It is recommended that in 2003 a range of inventive delivery strategies be established in support of the specific needs of students attending rural and isolated secondary schools.

**Successful partnerships and collaborative arrangements**

**Partnerships between providers**

Part of the shift in practice required by VCAL entails schools taking on a more collaborative relationship with other schools in their region, where previously a more competitive relationship may have existed. Fortunately in some regions, strong co-operative relationships are already in existence, such as around the management of VET in Schools delivery, and in some rural regions around the sharing of VCE units.

A further important factor in the building of strong partnerships is the time commitment which such undertakings demand. Key senior staff, who are often already carrying significant management and teaching loads, need to be heavily involved both in the negotiation of partnerships between schools and TAFE Institutes, and in the continuing across-institutional work generated by the cluster of providers. Travel can also be a problem in maintaining successful partnerships, particularly across clusters of schools where the localities are some distance apart.

A further indispensable feature of successful partnerships between VCAL providers is the effective facilitation and coordination of these partnerships beyond the level of one-to-one arrangements. This level of organisation across schools within a region requires more dedicated resources for facilitation and coordination than can be supplied typically through the partner organisations themselves. Where these clusters of schools have been particularly effective amongst VCAL pilot sites, regionally based personnel have been instrumental in the support of the cluster level activities.
Collaborative arrangements with community organisations and employers

The critical factors to success in the establishment of successful collaborative arrangements between local providers, community organisations and employers are much the same as those influencing partnerships between providers themselves. Further to this, there is the level of working knowledge by school-based staff of the requirements of community organisations and employers, and of the scope that may exist for mutual benefit within the structure of a VCAL learning program. Reliance on one-on-one sets of arrangements between a school or a TAFE Institute and community organisations and employers within a single locality will be a recipe for confusion and inefficient use of community-based resources in those regions where there are a number of VCAL providers. The statewide rollout of VCAL will require a more rigorously formulated and comprehensive approach.

In this context, a critical success factor at the local level is the establishment of a regionally based consortium of local providers together with representatives of local community organisations and employers. Where this critical success factor has been addressed during the VCAL Trial 2002, the LLEN of the region has often been a significant facilitating and coordinating agency along with key personnel from the DE&T Regional Office.

Recommendation 11:

It is recommended that the benefits and advantages found in the regional approach of VCAL consortia be supported and widely promoted as a key means for organising the delivery of VCAL in LLEN regions. Responsibility for coordination of these consortia should be compatible with local partnership and clustering arrangements that may include the regional LLEN provided with an appropriate level of resources.

Point of co-ordination for other funding for youth transition programs

Currently regions receive substantial levels of funding to support young people making the transition from full time school education to further study or work. These funds are made available under various programs either funded and/or administered by State and Federal Government departments. However, at the local regional level it is often the case that access to this funding is not well coordinated, and that funding is therefore not targeted to its client group with maximum effect. These funded programs are, in the main, highly relevant to the VCAL student group, and they need to be more effectively integrated into the overall implementation of VCAL at the local level.

Recommendation 12:
It is recommended that VCAL Consortia be promoted as the regional agencies for the coordination of regional funds from other government programs for the support of youth in transition from school to further education and training, and employment.

**Professional development**

**Comprehensive professional development**
If the distinctive nature of VCAL as a program - able to address the diverse and previously overlooked needs of applied learning oriented young people - is to be sustained, then professional development of all teachers, trainers, school administrators and central DE&T personnel involved with the VCAL initiative must become a top priority. An important outcome of this professional development must be a generally shared appreciation of the essential educational and vocational policies informing VCAL.

As with all new and innovative educational practice, the distinctive pedagogy underpinning VCAL will necessarily take several years to evolve but will build from school based reviews of current innovative practices. The ‘communities of practice’ approach is advocated, whereby a set of common practices over time is developed and nurtured through professional support and exchange. By its very nature the development of extensive expertise amongst teaching practitioners will need to be focused upon both at pre-service and in-service levels of teacher education over the longer term, and apply across a diverse array of engagements including exemplary curriculum development and pedagogy for applied learning.

**Recommendation 13:**

It is recommended that a working group be established to oversee a range of professional development programs and activities for teaching practitioners and others involved in the implementation of VCAL.

**New approaches to literacy and numeracy**
Pronounced lower levels of achievement in literacy and numeracy of students in the late secondary years present a substantial challenge to many schools. With this group of students, the limits of conventional and separate approaches to literacy and numeracy teaching are quickly encountered. There is much to be gained from established adult literacy practices, including integration of literacy development with relevant vocational and social goals for the students. The value of this approach has already been shown with VCAL students at the TAFE pilot sites. The opportunity exists, through VCAL, for schools to explore directly youth-oriented literacy and numeracy programs within an applied learning curriculum context informed by the extensive experience of adult educators in this field.
**Recommendation 14:**

It is recommended that the issue of teaching literacy and numeracy skills in secondary schools be addressed through explicit developmental programs based on an unequivocal assessment of students’ literacy and numeracy entering levels, and building towards achievable and relevant goals within a pathway-oriented instructional plan. Various options to be explored include the provision of appropriate youth-oriented literacy and numeracy support personnel and professional development programs for VCAL teachers.

**Resources**

**Funding arrangements**

The unique approach intrinsic to the VCAL has presented a number of difficulties to the established funding model for post compulsory education and training. The full potential of VCAL, offering a range of educational choices across sectors, is hampered by a sector based model and its accompanying stringencies. Amongst various associated issues is the perceived uncertainty over who is responsible for meeting costs of specific components of program delivery, most especially when schools have engaged external providers.

Initial work to review the model has already commenced within the Department, with a consultant report due in September this year.

**Recommendation 15:**

It is recommended that the current initial work to review the post compulsory funding model take into account the specific flexibility and resource requirements of VCAL.

**Other resource factors**

The alternative program status given to VCAL in some sites has resulted in the overall school budget being protected from an associated set of fundamental priority decisions. As with any educational program, the resource requirements of VCAL need to be discretely identified, and then considered in the context of the full range of options which a school is wishing to offer. Resource issues encompass not only funding but a diverse mix of organisational and administrative aspects of implementation, including class sizes, timetabling, travel, external provision (such as structured work placements, camps and excursions) staff time for cluster meetings and external negotiations, and professional development of staff. Even within current funding arrangements, the full possibilities for flexibility have not been fully realised in every local setting.

**Recommendation 16:**
It is recommended that the organisational and administrative factors critical to the successful implementation of high quality VCAL learning programs be identified, and that schools be encouraged to utilise more fully the flexibility of resources currently available under their School Global Budget (SGB).

**VCAL data collection arrangements**

Two key issues have been identified in regard to VCAL data collection. First, there is the need to ensure that the development of data collection protocols and procedures is fully compatible with the flexibility of the VCAL learning program structure. Secondly, there is the need for a capacity to be devised by which individual students can be easily tracked across all available data fields. Current protocols under the VASS system are considered to be unnecessarily restrictive for VCAL students. As schools become more aware of the possibilities for an expanded range of accredited courses, VCAL learning programs will become more variable. It can be expected that individual student interests will be accommodated under increasing levels of school flexibility, and as unit transfers from term to term become more common than is the case under the present VCE data collection arrangements. ‘Just in time’ enrolments throughout a student’s learning program may need to be accommodated. Protocols devised for VCE may not be altogether compatible with the distinct needs and requirements of VCAL.

**Recommendation 17:**

It is recommended that a distinctive set of protocols be devised and applied to VCAL students, compatible with more flexible requirements as providers respond at different times throughout the school year to the requirements of their students’ learning programs. Further, it is recommended that consideration be given to the development and use of a unique identifier across the various data fields into which VCAL students are currently entered.