We are just past the end of the planning and financial year 2002–03. This is traditionally, in organisations like the VQA, a time to look back at what has been achieved in the year just past, and to look forward to the plans for the next year. This edition of VQA Update has that flavour.

Looking back

We have had three main preoccupations over the last year. The first has been quality assurance. For the VQA, that means the responsibility in Victoria for the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) Standards for State and Territory Registering/Course Accrediting Bodies. Courses accredited by the VQA are recognised nationally.

Our second preoccupation has been senior secondary school retention rates. Here, the new Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) has been successfully implemented, following the very positive feedback from the 2002 pilots. Previous editions of VQA Update have focused on VCAL, so this one doesn’t go into further details, other than to mention that over 5200 young Victorians will be aiming at achieving the VCAL this year.

Ensuring the Quality of Victorian Qualifications

The VQA is the official accrediting body for all post-compulsory courses delivered in Victoria, excluding higher education qualifications. The VQA’s role in ensuring the quality of Victorian qualifications includes:

- Accrediting vocational education and training (VET) and further education (FE) courses. The VQA accredits courses in line with the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) Standards for State and Territory Registering/Course Accrediting Bodies. Courses accredited by the VQA are recognised nationally.
- Accrediting courses designed to be undertaken in Years 11 and 12, including the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL).
- Endorsing the qualifications structure of nationally endorsed Training Packages.
- Developing policies, criteria and standards for:
  - the accreditation of courses
  - the recognition of post-compulsory qualifications.

Strengthening quality assurance for accredited courses

The AQTF came into effect on 1 July 2002. It includes new Standards for course accrediting bodies to apply when accrediting courses. To make sure that the VQA is able to meet the new Standards, and to ensure the quality of courses accredited in Victoria, we have redeveloped our current policies and procedure for course accreditation.

These new procedures are designed to help training organisations develop courses that will meet the new AQTF Standards. The procedures now include:

- Formalised procedures for declaring an intention to accredit a course. Organisations intending to develop a course for accreditation are now required to fill out an Intention to Accredit form. This form gives organisations the opportunity to explain the need for the course and to detail any initial research and development work they may already have completed.
- New guidelines for Steering Committees. Organisations developing courses for accreditation must appoint a Steering Committee to oversee the development of the course and to ensure that it meets the needs of industry, enterprises and/or the community. The VQA has developed new guidelines for the operation and membership of Steering Committees.
- New guidelines for Assessment Panels. Once development of a course is complete, an Assessment Panel assesses it against the AQTF Standards and recommends to the VQA whether the course should be accredited. The VQA has developed new guidelines for Assessment Panels and streamlined the membership of the Panels, which now comprise a minimum of three members. Two of the Panel members must be registered Accreditations Advisers, who are experienced in course accreditation and the Standards of the AQTF. (Note: Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) can manage the Assessment Panel themselves or ask the VQA to do so on their behalf.)
- Professional development workshops. The VQA is running professional development workshops throughout 2003. There are two series of workshops: one for course developers and one for people interested in becoming registered Accreditation Advisers.

More information on the new procedures, or to attend a professional development workshop, contact:

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Victorian Qualifications Authority
41a St Andrews Place
East Melbourne, VIC 3002
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Published by the Communications Division of the Department of Education & Training
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The Credit Matrix — Let Us Know What You Think

Consultation on the Credit Matrix — a new approach to the way we describe and record achievement in post compulsory qualifications — is underway. You can obtain copies of the consultation paper, the consultation pro forma and details of consultation workshops from the VQA website http://www.vqa.vic.gov.au or by telephoning 03 9637 2600. Please take the time to complete the consultation pro forma and return it to us by the closing date, 30 September 2003. We look forward to hearing your views.
Look Back, Look Forward →

The third preoccupation has been to improve the options for students moving from one qualification to another. This has led us to the development of the Credit Matrix proposals as a way of clarifying the architecture of the Victorian qualifications system and of giving students greater empowerment when they are negotiating entry to a new qualification and hope to receive some recognition for previous achievements. There is a brief mention of the Credit Matrix in this edition – please do join in on the consultation which is now in full swing. Full details are on the VQA website.

Looking forward

We expect the same three preoccupations to feature strongly in the activities we undertake in 2003–04, in support of the Government’s education and training goals and targets. There’s a special feature on our forward plan, as agreed by the VQA Board following the detailed discussions which began almost a year ago at its strategic meeting in Ballarat.

In quality assurance, the 2003–04 plan features implementation of improvements to accreditation and registration in vocational education and training. For retention rates, we will further develop the VCAL to broaden its scope to more students. For pathways, we will develop the Credit Matrix if the present consultation supports it in principle.

We hope to go further, as readers will see in this edition, to set up a regular analysis of the data on student outcomes and pathways as a means of informing future policy development on qualifications in Victoria. We also want to produce a long-term vision paper called Qualifying Victoria for the Future to begin the process of discussing our stakeholders’ views of the future of qualifications in this State. We will take forward specific qualifications projects, review the qualifications environment in Victoria and beyond, and improve our own internal processes to ensure that they meet stakeholder needs.

So, at this look back, look forward time, our Board and staff offer our thanks to staff in schools, TAFEs and other providers across Victoria, to numerous other education, training and industry stakeholders and to colleagues in the Department of Education & Training and its statutory authorities. Your advice, feedback and effort has ensured that qualifications developments could be driven forward in 2002–03 in support of the Government’s goals and targets. We look forward to working with you again in 2003–04.

Welcome to the fourth edition of the VQA Update.

The VQA has two main roles. Our first is to develop the qualifications system in Victoria to make sure that it meets the needs of the State and all its citizens.

Developments such as the VCAL and the Credit Matrix are at the heart of this role, since they offer new options and build bridges for students.

Our second, and equally important, role is to develop and maintain standards for courses, qualifications and providers. This role ensures that Victorian qualifications have high value in whichever market place students use their qualifications. In the vocational education and training sector, including TAFE, the VQA’s responsibility is to ensure the implementation and maintenance of the national quality assurance system, the Australian Quality Training Framework. We work closely on this with colleagues in the Department of Education & Training and in our partner statutory bodies.

A focus of this edition of VQA Update is quality assurance. Our aim is to provide you with feedback on quality assurance activity so that lessons can be learned from it and so that Victoria’s education and training can be made even better.

Finally, apologies to readers of VQA Update that I was too quick off the mark about the new VQA website in the last edition. As the result of our sustained efforts to get the website design and build in terms of compliance with government standards is taking longer than expected. Hopefully the new VQA website will be up and running shortly. Be sure to look at http://www.vqa.vic.gov.au and give us your feedback to make sure that our new website meets your needs.

Dr Dennis Gunning
Director, VQA

Please send feedback and suggestions to David Symonds: symonds.david.gj@edumail.vic.gov.au

1993 – 2005

The VQA’s strategic and business plan aims to continue the vision of “making qualifications work for Victorians” by:

- safeguarding and raising the standard of Victorian qualifications
- ensuring qualifications work for Victoria’s economic future
- providing qualification options which help all Victorians achieve their career and personal ambitions.

We have already made a good start towards achieving this vision. The new strategic plan builds on and pushes forward projects to completion. It initiates new projects and consolidates the progress already made. It does this all within the context of the Governor’s goals and targets for the Victorian education service, the aims of Growing Victoria Together and the three recently published Ministerial Statements.

Reform activities will focus on:

- completing and continuing projects including the development and implementation of a range of Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) qualifications, the consultation on and development of the Credit Matrix and the ten-year vision paper and the development of new qualifications in design
- initiating projects on the recognition of informal learning, on the qualifications needs of the Koorie community and on qualification options for transition pathways
- consolidating a comprehensive system of monitoring patterns of participation and outcomes of qualifications
- consolidating a comprehensive system of monitoring both international and interstate developments in qualifications
- analysing the trends and data in terms of the future Victorian qualifications policy outcomes.

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Lifelong learning

Make near-universal participation in post-school education and training the norm in our society – not just for the young, but for all in the community.

Each VQA project or activity is linked to specific Government goals and targets, and/or more general improvement through reform of the qualifications system, quality assurance of courses and providers, and improvements to the VQA infrastructure.

Infrastructure activities will focus on:

- completing projects including the redevelopment of the VQA’s website and the development of internal quality procedures compatible with public service best practice
- initiating a system of collecting systematic feedback on the VQA’s performance from its stakeholders.

Quality assurance activities will focus on:

- completing and continuing projects aimed at clarifying the VQA’s strategic and business plan
- ensuring qualifications work for Victoria’s economic future
- providing qualification options which help all Victorians achieve their career and personal ambitions
- initiating projects on the recognition of informal learning
- on the qualifications needs of the Koorie community
- on qualification options for transition pathways
- concluding a comprehensive system of monitoring patterns of participation and outcomes of qualifications
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The Credit Matrix – Let Us Know What You Think

We have had three main preoccupations over the last year. The first has been quality assurance. For the VQA, that means the responsibility in Victoria for the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) for vocational education and training – and the accreditation of other post compulsory qualifications, such as those of secondary schools and further education. For the AQTF, we work in partnership with colleagues in the Office of Training and Tertiary Education (OTTE); some quality assurance functions have been delegated to OTTE to carry out on our behalf. This edition of VQA Update provides feedback on aspects of the quality assurance role, with two case studies reporting the outcome of strategic audits, and gives information on our new guidelines for accreditation of new courses and qualifications.

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Professional development workshops. The VQA is running professional development workshops throughout 2003. There are two series of workshops: one for course developers and one for people interested in becoming registered Accreditation Advisers.

The VQA has developed publications explaining the new procedures for developing and assessing courses. The publications will be sent to all RTOs, while details of the changes will also be available on the redeveloped VQA website.

For more information on the new procedures, or to attend a professional development workshop, contact:

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The Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) came into effect on 1 July 2002 and is the quality assurance system covering all vocational education and training qualifications in Australia. The AQTF provides the framework for the approval of providers to run and award these qualifications. The VQA is the body responsible for implementing the AQTF in Victoria. The VQA has delegated responsibility for registering and monitoring the performance of RTOs to the Quality Assurance and Review Division (QARD) of the Office of Training and Tertiary Education (OTTE). In the same way RTOs are regularly audited, the VQA and its delegate QARD are audited annually for compliance with the AQTF Standards for State and Territory Registering/Course Accrediting Bodies by the National Training Quality Council. Both the VQA and QARD were compliant in an audit carried out in January 2003.

Delivering Quality Assurance – Strategic Industry Audits

Strategic Industry Audits (SIAs) are one form of audit used in Victoria and are featured as case studies in this edition of VQA Update. SIAs focus on the quality of training delivery and assessment systems at an industry or sector level and include interviews with students, trainees, apprentices and training staff. Like all audits, SIAs are designed to ensure Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) demonstrate compliance with the AQTF Standards for Registered Training Organisations.*

The Standards provide a benchmark for a nationally consistent, high quality vocational education and training system. The twelve Standards set benchmarks in the areas of:

- Systems for quality training and assessment (Standard 1)
- Compliance with Commonwealth, State/Territory legislation and regulatory requirements (Standard 2)
- Effective financial management procedures (Standard 3)
- Effective administrative and records management procedures (Standard 4)
- Recognition of qualifications issued by other RTOs (Standard 5)
- Access and equity and client service (Standard 6)
- The competence of RTO staff (Standard 7)
- RTO assessments (Standard 8)
- Learning and assessment strategies (Standard 9)
- Issuing AQF qualifications and Statements of Attainment (Standard 10)
- Use of national and State/Territory logos (Standard 11)
- Ethical marketing and advertising (Standard 12).

SIAs are undertaken in specific industry or training sectors areas:

- with recent strong growth in training
- with importance to the Victorian economy
- with a short history of participation in recognised training
- where concerns have been raised about the quality of training.

SIAs generally review training delivered at Certificate II or Certificate III level, including the delivery of apprenticeships and traineeships. They are designed to enable comparisons to be drawn across industry and training sectors.

During the first half of 2003, 200 RTOs underwent SIAs in areas including:

- education services for overseas students
- schools as Registered Training Organisations (RTOs)
- Certificate IV in Health (Nursing).

During the second half of 2003 another 160 SIAs will be undertaken on organisations offering training in the areas of:

- security
- first aid
- information technology
- training delivery by schools
- training delivery to overseas students, and
- further education courses delivered by adult education providers.

* There are other mechanisms for monitoring compliance with the Standards in addition to SIAs. Training organisations must provide evidence of full compliance with the Standards when first applying for registration. They must also provide evidence of compliance with relevant Standards when adding to or updating the list of qualifications they deliver. In addition to assessing compliance of the Standards, SIAs assess compliance with contracts RTOs may have entered for Government funding.
A team of two auditors conduct the SIAs. The lead auditor is experienced in conducting compliance audits for Victorian RTOs. The support auditor is an industry expert selected from within the industry or market sector under audit.

The audit is normally conducted over two days at the end of which the RTO is issued with an audit report, requiring any areas of non-compliance to be rectified. They also receive a summary report identifying compliance and quality issues specific to the training area or sector, and provided with recommendations for improvements. A workshop is also held with RTOs following each set of industry audits to discuss the findings of the audit and provide examples of good practice in the delivery and assessment of the course. Feedback from workshops has been very positive.

For further information on the Strategic Industry Audit process please visit http://www.otte.vic.gov.au/registration/audit.htm

CASE STUDY 1:
Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training

In 2002 an SIA was conducted on RTOs delivering Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training. Prior to commencing the audits, a survey was sent to the 491 RTOs registered to provide the qualification. Approximately 75 per cent of RTOs responded to the survey, while 30 requested the qualification be deleted from their Scope of Registration.

Using the survey results, a sample of 16 RTOs was selected to participate and audited for compliance with the AQTF Standards. Particular emphasis was placed on the Standards relating to:
- assessment; learning and assessment strategies
- the assessment and training competencies of staff
- the issue of qualifications and Statements of Attainment.

The audits findings indicated that some providers were still struggling to meet the requirements of the Standards. For example, the majority of providers did not have adequate policies and procedures in place and there was limited use of client feedback to review policies and procedures.

Poor compliance was also found for procedures to assure the integrity, accuracy and currency of records and for version control. The accuracy of marketing information, and the need to separate marketing material for nationally recognised training with that for other training or assessment services, were identified as areas of high non-compliance.

Although most organisations provided students with information prior to enrolment, this information was frequently incomplete.

The audit also found limited examples of good practice in the delivery and assessment of the certificate. RTOs delivering and assessing the program over a short duration were frequently not meeting the requirements of the Training Package. A significant number of RTOs misinterpreted the requirements for the units of competency BSZ403A Review Assessment, BSZ405A Plan and Promote a Training Program and BSZ408A Review Training, therefore failing to ensure appropriate delivery and assessment strategies.

CASE STUDY 2:
Schools as Registered Training Organisations

The SIA of schools operating as RTOs commenced in March 2003. Approximately 45 schools will be audited annually against the Standards for Registered Training Organisations over the next three years.

During Term I, 2003, 15 schools across the Western, Northern and Southern Metropolitan Regions were audited. Audits commenced in a further 11 schools in the Eastern and Southern Metropolitan Regions in Term II. In Term III, 14 schools in the Barwon South Western, Gippsland and Loddon Campaspe Mallee Regions will be audited. The sample selected to undergo an SIA include a mix of Government, Catholic and Independent schools. The number and range of vocational programs delivered by schools varies widely across the sample.

The issues on non-compliance identified were common across the sample of schools.

The highest areas of non-compliance were in Standards relating to:
- procedures for recognising qualifications issued by other RTOs
- evidence of staff training and vocational competencies
- documentation of delivery and assessment strategies
- the correct use of national and State logos.

However, the auditors found many examples of best practice, while a number of schools had only minor issues of non-compliance and one school was found to be fully compliant.

A key element in the SIA of schools is the professional development program conducted in each Region following the audits. The program is designed to assist schools address any areas of non-compliance. The workshops are practical and are targeted at compliance in a school environment. Feedback on the three workshops conducted to date has been very positive.