



## Response to the Victorian Curriculum Reform 2004 Consultation Paper

June 2004

### Background

Following recent discussions on June 10 with John Firth of VCAA the Victorian TAFE Association (VTA) would like to contribute to the current consultations in relation to the preparatory work to develop a new framework of essential learning for all Victorian schools in both government and non-government sectors.

The VTA would like to make specific comment in relation to pages 8 and 9 of the consultation paper which refer to Generic Skills, Values and Attributes.

The membership of the VTA includes all of Victoria's TAFE institutes and four multi-sector universities. Members provide Vocational Education and Training to thousands of young people in post-compulsory education through VCE, VCAL and VET-in-Schools programs. These partnerships occur with government and non-government secondary schools and private RTOs. It is on the basis of these relationships that we feel confident in being able to add to the current curriculum discussions.

### Discussion

We concur that if students are to make informed choices based on a comprehensive curriculum experience in P – 10 the curriculum should include a focus on the application of learning in a range of community and work based settings. Indeed, the TAFE sector has been able to facilitate this through simulating workplace settings and assisting in the placement of post-compulsory aged students in industry and community settings. The Learning Characteristics and Curriculum Development section on pages 10 and 11 sets the scene for choices in the senior years emphasising the importance of applied learning in a variety of contexts.

Unfortunately, the descriptors on pages 10 and 11 fail to clarify the definition of *applied learning* leaving it open to the interpretation of the reader, their previous experiences and knowledge. We are concerned that readers of the framework may have an understanding that *applied learning* refers to simply 'hands on' or practical learning experiences. In communicating the reform package it is important for all readers to have a shared understanding of the proposed framework so that all comments are made from the same base information. We are supportive of the definition/description of applied learning offered by the VQA:

*"...current understandings of applied learning place equal importance on both theory and application, where the link between them is provided by the context. Thus the theoretical understandings and knowledge*

*required to complete a task will be drawn out from the context, which also provides the opportunity to use and apply what has been learnt.” (VQA, VCAL Information Sheet)*

We are further concerned that the explicit incorporation of applied learning principles into the four broad areas of the Generic Skills, Values and Attributes section have been overlooked in the descriptors provided. These descriptors in our view appear to be limited towards academic contexts. Given the background and experiences of many teachers in the school sector may be academic rather than applied, it is important for the text to provide examples that may challenge current practices.

The VTA recommends bringing applied learning to the consciousness of the reader by explicit references. For example, It is important that the cognitive skills involved in diagnosing and solving a problem with an electrical circuit are recognised as of equal value to the analysis of a literary work. Similarly, creative thinking may rest equally with the choice of a piece of timber for furniture construction as with predicting earthquakes.

The VTA is pleased to note in our discussion with John that the descriptions of visual and graphic representation and mathematical representation are to be expanded and look forward to the inclusion of concepts that relate to a wider interpretation of the terms. 3.

## **Conclusion**

If the inclusion of Generic Skills, Values and Attributes improves the transition for students into post compulsory schooling, then the absence of an applied learning focus in those statements may translate into disadvantage for students who learn through application as well as those who intend pursuing an applied learning stream.

We recommend that the communication process and professional development strategy that support the implementation of the revised Curriculum Framework include a strong, rigorous and expert focus on applied learning. The VTA would be willing to assist with this matter.

## **Recommendations**

1. We recommend editing the introduction to the Communication Skills as follows: "Communication skills require the development of a broad range of literacy and numeracy skills, complemented by speaking and listening, visual and ICT skills, and non verbal and physical forms of communication, *in both applied and non-applied/theoretical learning contexts.*"
2. In the second, third and fourth columns, the range of the opening statement to include 'Students should *in school, community and workplace settings, .....*'. This amendment will improve the ability of the teachers and other readers to recognise and value the diversity of contexts for learning.
3. The **social competencies** section of 'social and cultural skills, values and attributes' would also benefit from the addition of works such as *...in community and work based settings.*