

**VICTORIAN CURRICULUM REFORM 2004 CONSULTATION PAPER**  
**RESPONSE OF THE VICTORIAN INDEPENDENT EDUCATION**  
**UNION**

**1.0 Preamble**

- 1.1 The Victorian Independent Education Union is pleased to have the opportunity to respond on behalf of its members to the VCAA consultation paper on Curriculum Reform.
- 1.2 The VIEU response primarily focuses on the key concepts proposed in the discussion document.

While the example "Performance Standard" in Table Two on page seven of the document is useful in beginning to conceptualise how curriculum might be organised under a new approach, the document does not give sufficient cohesive detail for a response to be made to it in relation to an actual framework.

The development of the draft framework by the VCAA will require significant work to align the concepts contained in the discussion document with a manageable, cohesive and commonly understood outline for curriculum planning, pedagogy, and assessment.

**2.0 Timeline Concern**

The VIEU believes that it is essential that there is a further process of broad consultation on a draft framework prior to its finalisation and implementation.

VIEU views with concern the timeline for the release of the final draft in Term 4 2004 as outlined in the discussion document. In particular it notes that there is no proposed consultation to follow the specific development of the content of the framework and standards between April and September and the release of the "final" draft in term 4. The VIEU believes that there should be an extensive process of consultation in term 4 on the draft framework.

In addition, the VIEU firmly believes that the VCAA should not proceed with a full implementation of the framework in 2005. Given that schools have had an opportunity to respond to concepts only in the consultation document, a framework produced at this stage must be subject to further development and refinement as it tested out in practice.

The VIEU believes that the VCAA should proceed in a phased approach, initially with a number of schools formally involved in **a pilot**. A pilot would allow a smaller cohort of schools to work with the framework in an evolving sense and this would have the significant

benefit of later full implementation of a more valid and manageable framework. It would also enable the authority to more effectively develop materials to support the framework in conjunction with those pilot schools.

### **3.0 Support for A Framework of Essential Learning**

3.1 The VIEU supports in general the approach to teaching and learning that the document fosters and in particular supports the notion of a curriculum expressed in the document which :

- *is learner centred, personalising the education experience for young children and meeting their needs as they progress from Prep to Year 10*
- *is knowledge based and has specification of core content*
- *enables students to develop skills and attributes expected of people in a modern knowledge society and to participate productively in the economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century*
- *encourages innovation through mastery of deep knowledge and pedagogy based on students thinking their way through issues and problems*
- *promotes a diversity of teaching and pedagogical practice and supports a variety of mechanisms to impart knowledge*
- *enables all students to undertake and succeed in the learning necessary to make a successful transition to post-compulsory education and training*
- *identifies clear standards to be achieved by all students in essential areas*
- *promotes a range of assessment procedures which are clearly linked to content, enable achievement of standards to be demonstrated and point the way forward to further productive learning*
- *supports both system-wide improvement and development, and local school flexibility to adopt innovative approaches which meet student and community needs*
- *supports schools and teachers to produce learners with the skills, values and attributes that ensure lifelong learning, active citizenship, a productive social and economic effectiveness in the world of work.*

*(Page 2 VCAA Consultation Paper)*

**3.2 However, the VIEU support for the framework is contingent on a number of essential factors. The VIEU believes that the framework must :**

- provide a clear and well understood rationale – why the approach is needed and how the framework will work to integrate all of the key elements

- be useful, clear and manageable for teachers – is explicit about what teachers are expected to do and provides them with the tools to do this effectively
- show clear alignment between key concepts, standards, specific curriculum planning, pedagogical strategies and assessment processes
- not increase teacher workload
- be supported by professional development opportunities for all teachers. This should include dissemination of support materials which demonstrate for teachers how standards, curriculum content, assessment strategies and pedagogical approaches can be aligned.

#### **4.0 Comment on specific elements in the document**

##### **4.1 The general framework**

It is proposed that the general framework will be based on making explicit core discipline concepts and generic skills and will be underpinned by an explicit statement of broadly agreed values.

In VIEU's consultation with members there was general support for the approach as a useful curriculum organising tool. Primary teachers, in particular, felt that the CSF had not assisted approaches to integrate the curriculum and that the proposed framework would enhance this.

The focus on key knowledge and skills which would foster depth of understanding was applauded.

##### **4.2 Relationship to the CSF**

An area of concern, however, is the lack of clarity about how the new framework will link with the CSF. The VIEU notes that an addition VCAA document entitled *Frequently Asked Questions* is posted on the VCAA website and states that the new framework will replace the CSF. It also states, however, that the CSF will become the core reference to support the new framework and that it will continue to provide teachers and schools with scope and sequence of knowledge, skills and content described in the key learning areas from which teachers can draw when planning programs.

The VIEU is concerned here that there needs to be a seamless integration of the two frameworks in order to avoid confusion and overload of curriculum documents.

##### **4.3 Greater clarity of terminology and concepts needed.**

One of the significant problems in analysing and, responding to the

framework, as outlined in the discussion document, is that one has to rely on the example in Table 2, page 7 to understand how the conceptual elements could fit together as a cohesive curriculum tool.

While it usefully separates out “core discipline concepts” from “skills”, there are too many of the other key elements of the framework left out of the example for teachers to be able to analyse it as a workable “framework”. For instance, the example does not make clear what the “performance standards” are, that is, the levels of performance/sophistication etc at which the student performs the core skills or explains the core concepts. This is essential in order for there to be a cohesive link to assessment and ongoing learning.

It is also not clear whether the “generic skills” and their performance standards are intended to sit beside the “core discipline concepts” and the “core discipline skills “ as a separate set of skills, or be integrated seamlessly into them.

While the VCAA response document invites comment on what would be the “ core discipline concepts and skills”, “values and generic skills”, the discussion document itself is not clear on the definition of some key terms. Subsequently, as has been evident in both VIEU’s member consultations and in participation in VCAA consultation forums, there is a lack of common understanding amongst teachers of the some of the framework’s key concepts such as “discipline”, “content” and “performance standard”. The clarity of these terms is particularly important because they are integral to the framework’s organisation of both knowledge and learning in a broader sense. The draft framework will need to establish greater clarity of understanding of these key elements.

#### **4.4 Transferability**

A significant issue that has been raised by VIEU members is the need for the framework to be particularly explicit about the transferability of key concepts and skills across disciplines and from one performance level to the next. Teachers want to see in the framework a clear building on the key concepts and skills from one level to the next within a discipline, and across disciplines. The more explicit this is, the clearer and more cohesive is the link to both assessment and further learning. This is also essential if schools are to develop integrated approaches to curriculum that allow for flexibility and at the same time meet expectations in terms of required content and skills.

#### **4.5 Generic Skills , Values and Attributes**

The VIEU is supportive of a framework that makes explicit the skills and commonly agreed values that we want young people to develop. The discussion paper presents a comprehensive list of generic skills, values and attributes, and it is valuable for the broader education

community to discuss these.

VIEU is supportive of a statement of commonly agreed values and attributes which would preface and underpin the framework. The expectation expressed in the document is that schools will be expected to incorporate an agreed set of skills and values across the curriculum.

While VIEU is supportive of this incorporation, it believes that the framework should be based on an integrated approach and not a model where these attributes and generic skills are presented as separate sets of performance standards and assessed separately from the core discipline concepts and skills. This separation appears to be the intent of the VCAA discussion document in that it proposes that “schools will be expected to develop methods for assessing them [generic skills and attributes]”.

The VIEU notes and agrees with the comments made on integrating “meta –cognitive” skills made in the VCAA commissioned March 2003 *Report Curriculum Victoria : Foundations for the Future – Summary report of the analysis of national and international curriculum and standards documents*. This report states “that it has been suggested that :

- (1) *the teaching of meta-cognitive skills must be explicit and incorporated into the subject matter that students are learning*
- (2) *these strategies tend to be subject specific rather than generic .....*

#### **4.6 Assessment and Reporting**

As stated previously in this response, the VIEU believes that it is imperative that the framework makes explicit the concept of building on the key concepts and skills from one level to the next, both within a discipline and across disciplines. The framing of Performance Standards also needs to explicitly show the developmental links between each level. The more explicit this is, the clearer and more cohesive is the link to both assessment and further learning, and the more meaningful the reporting on student achievement.

Teachers are concerned that the implementation of a new curriculum framework must give significant focus to the development of support materials around assessment. This needs to include both the development of clear performance descriptors/indicators to assist with consistency across schools and between teachers in assessing performance standards, and the development of a significant body of work samples. In addition support material are needed which identify the range of assessment instruments and approaches which are consistent with the curriculum objectives and are likely both to identify

opportunities for improved learning for students and to assist teachers to tailor their programs to individual student learning needs.

#### **4.7 Support for Implementation**

The implementation of a framework of essential learning must be underpinned by a clearly articulated program of support for teachers.

The state government has set a range of ambitious targets and goals in relation to the education of all children and young people in Victoria and the implementation of a new framework is part of this agenda. If the government is serious about the achievement of its agenda, it must properly resource the implementation of the new framework. This needs to include not only the material outlined above in the assessment and reporting section of this response, but an ongoing program of professional development opportunities for as many teachers as possible from all schools to meet with their colleagues to share and learn together.

The VIEU endorses the range of curriculum and assessment support recommended in the VCAA commissioned report *Curriculum Victoria : Foundations for the Future (March 2003)*.

The report outlines important areas that frameworks should cover, that is :

- *provide advice and exemplary materials to assist teachers to plan and deliver courses of study, units of work and individual lessons to encourage the use of the most productive teaching strategies currently known*
- *provide examples of the type of work students should do in order to ensure they acquire the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding. (page 13)*

The above report also highlights the major issue of the alignment between content, pedagogy and assessment. It states that more needs to be done in this area and that curriculum authorities need to take the lead by providing high quality support in the form of course outlines, lesson plans, assessment tasks and professional development.

*Authorised by T Keenan  
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