

Reporting on Literacy and Numeracy attainment in Victorian senior secondary qualifications - submission

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ABOUT VACC

The Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce (VACC) is Victoria's peak automotive industry association, representing the interests of more than 5,200 members in over 20 retail automotive sectors that employ over 50,000 Victorians.

VACC members range from new and used vehicle dealers (passenger, truck, commercial, motorcycles, recreational and farm machinery), vehicle repairers (mechanical, electrical, and body repair specialists), vehicle servicing (service stations, vehicle washing, rental, windscreens), parts and component wholesale/retailing and aftermarket manufacture (i.e. specialist vehicle, parts or component modification and/or manufacture), and automotive dismantlers and recyclers.

In addition to VACC, its sister organisations – the Motor Trade Associations, represent the automotive industry for their respective states.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Victorian Automotive Chamber of Commerce (VACC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Victorian Government's Literacy and Numeracy consultation paper.

VACC, through its diverse and extensive business membership base, engages strongly with Australia's vocational education and training system (VET). Employers in the automotive industry employ apprentices as a means of equipping their own businesses with appropriately skilled labour and, in turn, ensuring a broader industry skills pool is generated for the benefit of all employers to draw upon over time. This notion of building capability across an industry, and through individual employer training contributions, has been an underpinning feature of apprenticeship training in the automotive industry in Australia.

For over 100 years, apprentice employment has been the primary means through which individuals have entered the industry, and this remains the most preferred and trusted pathway through which the industry develops its future skills base, and through which new apprentices learn their trade.

The engagement in VET, by employers in the industry, is generally through local schools, TAFE institutes, private training providers and via group apprenticeship schemes. Group apprenticeship schemes have a strong presence in the automotive industry and many employers prefer this method of employment and training.

VACC is integral to this VET/industry engagement, including through the VACC Group Apprenticeship Scheme. This scheme is one of the oldest group apprenticeship schemes in Australia and one of the largest employers of automotive apprentices in the country, employing 450 automotive apprentices and trainees.

An integral part of the scheme is the work VACC undertakes in the secondary school system and specifically in the engagement of young people who are considering their career options. VACC is an avid supporter of encouraging and supporting students to complete their secondary schooling. This is demonstrated by its school based trainee program and its large school engagement program, consisting of career expos/events, direct support to schools delivering automotive subjects through teacher training, assessment resources and millions of dollars' worth of donations in componentry, vehicles and tools. VACC also participates in committees and support networks such as school-based task force meetings and the Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLEN).

Evidence gathered by VACC over the last 4 years indicates that on average, only 60 per cent of students seeking to engage in an automotive career can demonstrate adequate language, literacy and numeracy skills (LL&N) to support a successful completion of their apprenticeship. Many applicants have difficulties with basic spelling, comprehension and often are unable to display legible writing, and this is of deep concern. It is also not uncommon for a VCAL student to display higher LL&N abilities compared to a student who has completed VCE.

VACC believes that it would be advantageous for the student, industry and wider community of students who have completed their senior secondary school studies, to have obtained a more in-depth ability in LL&N.

VACC therefore advocates the need for the introduction of a standardised assessment and measurement platform as a key priority. This platform should incorporate a minimum standard as well as a scale reference for easy recognition by employers. Such an initiative would impart greater quality and transparency in the assessment of student capability and knowledge. This would benefit both employers and students through the closer alignment of student outcomes with industry expectations.

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

1. Assessment and measurement of literacy and numeracy attainment

- a. Should explicit assessment and measurement of either/both literacy and numeracy attainment levels be introduced in the VCE and VCAL, in addition to that which can currently be implied or derived?
- b. If such explicit assessment and measurement were to be introduced, which aspects of literacy (e.g. reading, writing, speaking, listening) and/or numeracy (e.g. calculations, communicating concepts) should be measured and reported on?
- c. Should literacy and numeracy attainment be assessed and measured by:
 - i. a new bespoke externally assessed standardised test mandatory for either/both VCE and VCAL students?
 - ii. an expanded version of the current GAT undertaken by either/both VCE and VCAL students?
 - iii. assessment within new mandatory subjects in the VCE focussed on functional literacy and numeracy?
 - iv. other means, including a combination of the above?
- d. Should students have multiple opportunities to demonstrate literacy and/or numeracy attainment, or should literacy and/or numeracy attainment be measured at a single, common point-in-time?

2. Reporting of literacy and numeracy attainment

- a. Should literacy and/or numeracy attainment be reported in terms of:
 - i. a minimum standard being met or not met
 - ii. a level on a scale
 - iii. a score on a scale
 - iv. other
- b. Should such literacy and/or numeracy attainment be benchmarked and reported against the ACSF or alternative scale?
- c. What, if any, special consideration and/or exemptions, if any, should apply to any explicit assessment and reporting of literacy and/or numeracy attainment levels as part of VCE and VCAL?
- d. If such explicit reporting were to be introduced, what do you think are the anticipated potential benefits and uses of this information? What are the risks associated with the generation and provision of this information?

3. Requirement of literacy and numeracy attainment

- a. If such explicit reporting were introduced, should the attainment of a minimum literacy and/or numeracy standard be a requirement of qualification, or should the standards of attainment demonstrated be reported as part of the certification?

VACC RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

1. Assessment and measurement of literacy and numeracy attainment

VACC supports the implementation of explicit assessment and measurement of both literacy and numeracy attainment levels in the VCE and VCAL. These should be introduced as a mandatory requirement and at a minimum cover the following:

- comprehension
- reading
- spelling
- mathematical calculations utilising formulas.

VACC member businesses have expressed a preference for the explicit measurement and assessment of LL&N, as this would enable employers to better evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of individual students. This would enable employers to better tailor employment towards students, in accordance with both employer and student expectations.

Such measures would also have the added benefit of reducing the high attrition levels present within the automotive industry. Industry statistics show that almost half of students studying automotive subjects and qualifications withdraw entirely from these, as a result of a critical mismatch between individual LL&N skills and abilities and employer expectations.

VACC believes that the introduction of LL&N assessment and measurement need not be necessarily undertaken by an external body to achieve the required outcomes, but should be introduced as a mandatory requirement. Students over the course of their studies should also be given the opportunity to demonstrate their LL&N progress.

2. Reporting of literacy and numeracy attainment

VACC favours the mandatory reporting of literacy and numeracy attainment, along with the inclusion of a scored reference point, measurable against the ACSF.

The benefits associated with the introduction of mandatory reporting would include:

- a more accurate indication of a student's LL&N ability
- an identifiable reference point for employers
- as an indicator for areas for improvement within the education process.

The risks associated with this provision of this information could be that low-identified scores may become barriers to employment and impose a financial burden to individuals who require improvement of their LL&N skills, post-secondary school.

3. Requirement of literacy and numeracy attainment

It is VACC's recommendation that the minimum literacy and numeracy attainment should be a standard requirement within any qualification. This would impart the necessary rigour within qualifications and reduce the large disparity observed by employers in student LL&N skills and abilities, and particularly within students graduating with identical qualifications.