

# VALA feedback to the National English Curriculum Framework paper

## FEEDBACK QUESTIONS

To provide us with feedback on this paper, please respond to the questions below. Your replies are a rich source of information and are of great value to us.			
Name: Committee of Management			
Organisation (if applicable): Victorian Applied Learning Association (VALA)			
Postal address: Box 938, Springvale South VIC 3172			
Please nominate your area/areas of interest <b>Although feedback is provided specifically on the English curriculum, many of the comments made are applicable to the other curriculum areas. Time and resources have prevented VALA, a relatively small organisation, from commenting on the other curriculum areas.</b>			
English ✓	mathematics	science	history
Please choose:			
Academic	Business or industry professional	Education professional <input type="radio"/> Chief executive officer <input type="radio"/> Curriculum director <input type="radio"/> Curriculum manager <input type="radio"/> Departmental/sector representative <input type="radio"/> Principal <input checked="" type="radio"/> <b>Professional organisation representative</b> <input type="radio"/> School administrator <input type="radio"/> Teacher <input type="radio"/> Teacher's aide	
Community member	Journalist		
Parent	Student		
Union representative	Youth leader		

## Victorian Applied Learning Association (VALA)

The Victorian Applied Learning Association (VALA) is a professional organisation with over 300 members. It was established in response to the rapid growth in Victorian applied learning programs across all sectors of education, particularly post-compulsory education. It brings together educators from all sectors of education and from all content areas.

Its goals are to:

- promote the value and place of applied learning in all sectors of education, across all levels and content areas
- promote and support the professional learning of applied learning educators
- promote and conduct research into applied learning and teaching

- promote and conduct curriculum and resource development projects which are consistent with and support applied learning and teaching.

## **What is applied learning?**

“Firstly, applied learning is an approach, which emphasises the relevance of what is being learnt to the ‘real world’, outside ‘the classroom’, and makes that connection as immediate and transparent as possible. This focus on a ‘real life’ application will often require a shift from a traditional focus on discrete curriculum areas, as students focus on learning and applying the skills and knowledge they need to solve a problem, implement a project or participate in the work force.

Secondly, and a result of this, applied learning will involve students and their teachers in partnerships and connections with organisations and individuals outside school. These partnerships provide the necessary out of school context for students to demonstrate the relevance of what they have learnt.

Thirdly, and of equal importance, applied learning is concerned with nurturing and working with a student in a holistic manner, which takes into account their personal strengths, interests, goals and previous experiences. Working with the whole person involves valuing skills and knowledge that may not normally be the focus of more traditional school curricula. It also means taking into account differences in preferred learning styles, and ways of learning.

Finally, applied learning also acknowledges that part of the transition from school to work is being treated as an adult, and that moving students out of the classroom to learn also means helping them to make a shift to become more independent and responsible for their own learning. This means that applied learning needs to be student centred and applied learning goals and outcomes should be negotiated with students, as well as other stakeholders.” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority July 2006).

Another important aspect of applied learning is the relationship between ‘hands on’ or practical work and theoretical understanding. Applied learning places equal importance on theory and application, with the link between them being 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” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority July 2006).

## Introduction

1. Please comment on the Introduction.

VALA supports the statements made in the introduction. However, it would be appropriate to recognise in the Introduction that while Australia is multi-cultural and linguistically diverse and that this diversity strengthens Australia, English is the national language and that it is important that all Australians are proficient in English to enable full and active participation in Australian society.

## Aims

2. To what extent do you agree with the aims of the national English curriculum proposed in this paper?

Strongly Agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

3. Please comment on the aims of the national English curriculum.

It is important that the curriculum design provides opportunity for students to use language and literacy skills in authentic contexts. The results from the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (2007) indicate that 15-19 year olds do not perform as well on real life literacy tasks as those who are slightly older and have had more experience with real life tasks and texts.

## Elements

4. The paper proposes framing the national English curriculum around three Elements (see section 'Structure of the curriculum: The Elements' for a full explanation):

*Element 1: Language: Knowledge about the English language:* an evolving body of knowledge about the English language

*Element 2: Literature: Informed appreciation of literature:* an enjoyment in and increasingly informed appreciation of the English language

*Element 3: Literacy: Growing repertoires of English usage:* ability to understand and produce the English language

To what extent do you agree with these elements?

Strongly Agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

5. Please comment.

VALA appreciates the importance of a national English curriculum covering the 3 named elements and stresses the importance of skill and knowledge development taking place or linked to contexts that are meaningful to learners, and, where appropriate, are related to authentic contexts. The

linking to authentic contexts is particularly important in relation to Elements 1 and 3.

It is also important that, in practice, the Elements are not considered or delivered in isolation from each other. The curriculum should, where possible, encourage the integration of the Elements and provide examples of how this integration can occur.

### **Futures orientation**

6. To what extent do you agree that this section adequately describes the futures orientation to be taken by a national English curriculum?

Strongly Agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

7. Please comment.

VALA would like to affirm the comments made in this section, particularly those related to the diversity of learners and of pathways. This diversity needs to be acknowledged and catered for in the English curriculum, with those choosing to take a vocational pathway being valued as much as those who choose an academic path. There is also a need for the curriculum to be flexible enough to allow job roles not yet imagined to be catered for.

### **Terms used in this paper**

8. This section of the paper defines terms used in the paper. Please comment on the clarity of these definitions. List other terms used in the paper that should be defined.

It is beyond VALA's scope to comment on this aspect of the paper.

### **Considerations**

#### **Beginnings and 'basics'**

9. To what extent do you agree with the comments in this section?

Strongly Agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

10. Please comment

VALA would like to affirm the importance of 'basics' but also acknowledges that 'basics' is not an end in itself and agrees that learners must be given ample opportunities to apply their skills in authentic contexts and to authentic texts.

#### **The teaching of grammar in English**

11. To what extent do you agree with the comments in this section?

Strongly Agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

12. Please comment

As with 'basics', grammar is not an end in itself and learners need to have opportunities to apply their skills and knowledge in authentic contexts and to authentic texts.

### **The texts of English**

13. To what extent do you agree with the comments in this section?

Strongly Agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

14. Please comment

VALA recognises the importance of including a range of texts in the English curriculum to ensure learners gain proficiency in 'reading' and 'using' a broad range of texts to assist them to effectively understand and use the broad range of texts they will encounter out of school.

### **Understanding, analysing, appreciating and constructing**

15. To what extent do you agree with the comments in this section?

Strongly Agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

16. Please comment

VALA acknowledges the importance of developing capacity in these areas. Skills in these areas are applicable across subject and out of school (authentic) contexts and will assist learners as they meet new and different texts and tasks outside of education contexts.

### **The place of literature and Australian literature**

17. To what extent do you agree with the comments in this section?

Strongly Agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

18. Please comment

While acknowledging the place of literature, including Australian literature, in a national English curriculum, VALA would like to see a broad range of literature traditions included in the curriculum, to reflect the diversity of the Australian population, the geographic and political position of Australia in the world and the diverse interests of young people in education. The choice of literature will need to be broad enough to engage young people who do not generally engage in reading literature. Choices of literature also need to take account of

the different literacy skills of students at all education levels. Literacy levels below those of the year level shouldn't preclude students from engaging with literature.

### **Pedagogy and disciplinarity**

19. To what extent do you agree with the comments in this section?

Strongly Agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

20. Please comment

While strongly supporting the statements made in this section, it is vital to ensure that teachers have the skills and knowledge to effectively use a range of pedagogical approaches which take account the students, their learning needs, styles and interests as well as the subject content. Professional development to ensure existing teachers are able to call on a repertoire of approaches will need to be provided and pre-service training of teachers will also need to ensure new teachers are able to use a broad range of pedagogical approaches.

Once again, VALA would like to stress the importance of linking to authentic contexts, where appropriate.

### **General capabilities across the curriculum**

21. To what extent do you agree with the comments in this section?

Strongly Agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

22. Please comment

VALA strongly supports the need to develop English language and literacy skills and knowledge across disciplines. Outside of education contexts, English language and literacy skills are required in a range of contexts and to undertake a range of tasks. Developing English language and literacy capabilities across a range of education contexts will support the development of a broad range of literacy and language capabilities that can be applied out of school.

However, teachers from other-than-English content areas will need to be supported to develop their knowledge of English language and literacy in relation to their content areas as well as the teaching of these skills and knowledge.

### **Structure across the curriculum**

#### **Element 1**

23. This section describes Element 1: *Language: Knowledge about English*. To what extent do you agree with the description of this Element?

Strongly Agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

24. Please comment

VALA would like to reiterate the importance of relating the skills and knowledge developed in this Element to real life contexts and texts. The English curriculum should provide ample opportunity for students to apply their skills and knowledge in authentic contexts and tasks.

**Element 2**

25. This section describes Element 2: *Literature: Informed appreciation of literature*. To what extent do you agree with the description of this Element?

Strongly Agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

26. Please comment

VALA recognises the importance of engaging students in a broad range of literary texts to entertain, engage, challenge, develop imagination, reflect, etc. However, as stated previously, the choice of literature will need to be broad enough to engage young people who do not generally engage in reading literature. It will also need to take account of the different literacy skills of students to ensure literacy levels do not preclude students from engaging with literature.

**Element 3**

27. This section describes Element 3: *Literacy: Evolving repertoires of English usage*. To what extent do you agree with the description of this Element?

Strongly Agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

28. Please comment

VALA strongly supports this Element and the description provided. Skills and knowledge, developed as part of this element, will equip students for out of school contexts and tasks. For many students, this element will provide the 'purposeful and practical' content to motivate them to develop their English language and literacy skills.

**Stages of schooling**

29. To what extent do you agree with the proposed descriptions of the Elements for Stage 1 of schooling?

Strongly Agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

30. Please comment

It is beyond VALA's scope to comment on this aspect of the paper.

31. To what extent do you agree with the proposed descriptions of the Elements for Stage 2 of schooling?

Strongly Agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

32. Please comment

It is beyond VALA's scope to comment on this aspect of the paper.

33. To what extent do you agree with the proposed descriptions of the Elements for Stage 3 of schooling?

Strongly Agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

34. Please comment

It is beyond VALA's scope to comment on this aspect of the paper.

35. To what extent do you agree with the proposed descriptions of the Elements for Stage 4 of schooling?

Strongly Agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

36. Please comment

It is beyond VALA's scope to comment on this aspect of the paper.

37. What English courses should be included in the national English curriculum for the senior secondary years of schooling? Please comment.

The range of English courses included should take account of the broad range of learners undertaking senior secondary schooling as well as diverse pathways students may take post-school.

### **Pedagogy and assessment**

38. To what extent do you agree with the comments on pedagogy?

Strongly Agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

39. Please comment

VALA supports the comments on pedagogy particularly those related to the importance of using a range of approaches to teaching language and literacy, of making connections across curriculum areas, of engaging students in extended interactive learning and recognising the range of registers and genres students engage in. However, it is essential that teachers are provided with a range of supports, including in- and pre-service training, to ensure their capability and skill in these areas.

40. To what extent do you agree with the comments on assessment?

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

#### 41. Please comment

Comments on assessment are limited and do not make note of the importance of formative assessment, using a range of assessment methods and task types or using assessment tasks that are valid and reliable.

VALA would like to see the comments on assessment broadened to include these aspects of assessment.

VALA would also like to see comment made about the place and importance of assessing across the curriculum and including recognition of skills developed and used out of school. VALA refers the National Curriculum Board to the *Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning Curriculum Planning Guide: Literacy and Numeracy Skills Strand - Literacy Skills Units* statements on assessment (<http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vcaa/vcal/providers/resources/curricplanguidels-literacyskills.pdf>). An extract from the document is included in Attachment 1.

#### 42. Do you have any other comments to make on the paper?

VALA would like to reiterate the importance of ensuring the curriculum readily allows for the use of a range of pedagogical approaches, clear connections to authentic contexts and tasks and the flexibility to engage the diversity of the student group.

While the concepts and ideas expressed in the paper are to be supported, the success of the curriculum will be in the detail and in how it is implemented. Teachers, current and future, will need support and professional development to implement the curriculum in the spirit expressed in this paper. The importance of supporting teachers must be taken into account at all stages during the development and implementation of a national curriculum.

VALA would welcome taking part in further discussions on the national curriculum, not just for English but also for the other curriculum areas.

**Attachment 1:** Extract from *Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning Curriculum Planning Guide: Literacy and Numeracy Skills Strand - Literacy Skills Units*, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2008, pp 5-7.

### ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING

The award of satisfactory achievement for a unit is based on a decision that the student has demonstrated achievement of the learning outcomes specified for the unit. The curriculum components in a VCAL learning program must be assessed in accordance with the requirements and guidelines outlined in the curriculum documents for the units and/or units of competency/modules delivered in the learning program:

- All assessment of VCE units must be in accordance with VCAA guidelines.
- All VCAL units must be assessed in accordance with the assessment and quality requirements of the VCAA.
- All assessment of VET and FE units of competency/modules must be in accordance with the VET accredited curriculum or Training Package qualification or accredited FE curriculum document and according to the standards of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF).

Students should be observed to demonstrate competence on more than one occasion and wherever possible in different contexts to make sure that the assessment is as consistent, fair and equitable as possible.

A range of assessment methods and task types may be used. These include:

- teacher observation and/or checklists
- self-assessment inventories
- physical demonstration of understanding of written or oral text
- a portfolio of accumulated evidence
- evidence accumulated through project or program participation
- awards from recognised programs
- oral or written reports and presentations
- oral explanation of text
- written text
- discussion
- debates
- role-plays
- folios of tasks or investigations
- performing practical tasks
- evidence of information and communications technology, including Internet usage
- reflective work journals
- student logbooks.

Teachers must develop learning programs that provide opportunities for students to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes. A holistic approach to the development of skills through project-based activities that integrate the learning outcomes will ensure that students are able to identify and apply these skills within authentic social and working environments.

The VCAL provider coordinates the assessment and collection of results for all curriculum components within the VCAL learning program. The satisfactory completion of curriculum components must be in accordance with the assessment guidelines for the accredited curriculum.

For VCAL units, students will receive an S (Satisfactory) or N (Not yet complete) result for each unit. For VCE reporting, refer to the current VCE and VCAL Administrative Handbook.

Information about assessment processes and procedures for VCAL units can be found in the *VCAL Unit Assessment Planning Guide* which is available from the VCAA website at: [www.vcaa.vic.edu.au](http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au)

To be credited with the Reading and Writing unit at Foundation level, students must demonstrate competence in all learning outcomes.

To be credited with the Reading and Writing unit at Intermediate level, students must also demonstrate competence in all learning outcomes.

To be credited with the Reading and Writing unit at Senior level, students must demonstrate competence in seven of the eight learning outcomes.

To be credited with an Oral Communication unit at any level, students must demonstrate competence in all the learning outcomes.

Information is provided in each unit as to whether all elements need to be met in one task or activity.

### Assessment principles for VCAL learning programs

Assessment within the VCAL should be based on the following principles:

- Assessment tasks/activities should be grounded in a relevant context and not be culturally biased.
- Students should have the opportunity to demonstrate achievement at their own pace.
- Students should be assessed across as wide a range of tasks/activities as possible, in order to increase reliability and validity of assessment. One-off assessment tasks/activities do not provide a reliable and valid measure of competence.
- Instructions for assessment tasks/activities should be clear and explicit. Students must know what is expected and the criteria by which satisfactory completion will be established.
- Time allowed to complete a task should be reasonable and specified and should allow for preparation and reflection as appropriate to the activity. Where the assessment task is linked to a project or activity the assessment tasks/activities may take place over a number of weeks.
- Assessment tasks/activities should be open-ended and flexible to meet the specific needs of students.
- Assessment should include access to ICT where appropriate to the context of the activity or task.
- Assessment must be valid in terms of context and methods. Assessment must be reliable in showing consistent results over a number of occasions. Assessment must not unduly disadvantage any student and must provide flexibility in the range of methodologies that cater to the needs of individual students.

When assessing students with particular needs the validity of assessment must be maintained. Flexibility in assessment methods should be used to ensure alternative methods are utilised to allow the demonstration of completion of learning outcomes without disadvantaging the student.

### Integrated assessment

Where possible, assessment in the VCAL should focus on integrated curriculum projects/activities. In developing an integrated or holistic approach to assessment, a number of outcomes (VCAL learning outcomes and/or VET or FE learning outcomes) from curriculum components in one or more strands can be grouped into logical, assessable activities that take into account project-based or thematic activities. However, assessment of VCE units must be in accordance with VCE study designs and cannot be integrated with other assessment.

It is preferable for assessment tasks/activities to integrate more than one learning outcome. This enables assessment to be more easily integrated into learning activities and reflects the integrated nature of literacy and numeracy. For example, a teacher observation of a class discussion about a text read by students could be used to assess both a Reading learning outcome and a learning outcome in the Oral Communication unit. Students could also write a response to the text and cover one of the Writing learning outcomes.

Where delivery and assessment of the Literacy Skills units is integrated with units from other strands and/or from courses and qualifications other than VCAL, the assessment tasks must meet the requirements of those units/courses/qualifications.

Examples of assessment tasks which relate to a specific learning outcome can be found in learning outcome details. Examples of integrated assessment tasks/activities can be found at the end of the Literacy Skills units. These examples are of tasks/activities that integrate and assess more than one learning outcome: sometimes within the Reading and Writing units, sometimes across the VCAL strands.

### Assessing students with disabilities

While flexibility in relation to assessment methods, assessment tools and context is encouraged to meet the specific needs of students, the validity and reliability of the assessment must not be compromised in any way.

Flexibility in assessment methods is important, particularly for students with disabilities. For example, if a person is unable to communicate by speaking, then an alternative means of communicating may be used to demonstrate unit outcomes normally demonstrated through the spoken word. Similarly, students who are hearing impaired may sign their response, those with a physical disability may use a voice synthesiser or communication board. In some instances the time taken to respond in alternative modes may be considerably longer than through speech and it may be unrealistic to expect such students to achieve the outcomes in the stated nominal hours. Students may therefore need an extended time to complete the learning outcomes in these cases.

### Quality assurance of assessment

The quality assurance (QA) of all curriculum components delivered in VCAL learning programs is ensured through existing assessment requirements.

The QA of VCAL units will ensure consistency in interpretation of learning outcomes and the relevant levels. A shared understanding of learning outcomes, elements and assessment processes and practices will be fostered through the QA process. Information about this process will be circulated to VCAL providers by the VCAA in Term 1 of the school year.

Satisfactory completion of the VCAL units must be based on evidence that demonstrates that the student has successfully completed the learning outcomes. The curriculum for the VCAL unit will include learning activities that develop the student's knowledge and skills, as well as instance/s of assessment. The assessment instance/s for the unit are separate from the learning activities. When developing an assessment task it must enable students to complete the learning outcome/s. The elements further describe the learning outcome/s and are a guide to the requirements for the appropriate VCAL level.

'S' or 'N' results for VCE units must be consistent with the requirements of the study designs.

Validation of assessments for VET and FE modules/units of competency will be the responsibility of the relevant Registered Training Organisation (RTO) and will be in accordance with the requirements of the Australian Quality Training Framework. These requirements will be set out in the accredited course document.

### RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL)

RPL is the acknowledgment of skills and knowledge obtained through any combination of formal or informal training, work experience or general life experience. RPL is a process to assess successful completion of learning outcomes through skills, knowledge and experience gained in other settings besides traditional school programs, for example, through part-time work or voluntary involvement in a community organisation. RPL can only be applied to the VCAL Work Related Skills and VCAL Personal Development Skills units. Decisions regarding RPL for VCAL Personal Development Skills and Work Related Skills units are the responsibility of the enrolling VCAL provider. Where students have been granted RPL, evidence that demonstrates successful completion of the entire unit learning outcomes must be completed and kept by the VCAL provider.

Information about RPL procedures and processes for VCAL Personal Development Skills and Work Related Skills units can be found in the *VCAL Unit Assessment Planning Guide* that is on the VCAA website: [www.vcaa.vic.edu.au](http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au)