

**LINK 10: Draft Paper on Victorian Government Documents
Reflecting the Public Purposes of Education**

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When the current Victorian Government took office in 1999, it inherited a schooling system that had already been through considerable structural change under the previous Liberal-National Party Government. A major initiative known as *Schools of the Future* devolved a range of decision-making to local government schools, who now exercised functions previously handled at system level. They appointed their own staff and competed more intensively for staff as well as students. Schools, whose enrolments went below a certain level, were closed or amalgamated.

The previous government had introduced some state-wide curriculum structures as well as state-wide testing of students in the primary years through the *Learning Assessment Project (LAP)*. This project was retained by the new Labor government, and further refined and developed to become the *Achievement Improvement Monitor (AIM)*. Eventually AIM was extended into the secondary years 7 and 9, and would become the model for NAPLAN testing.

The new government inherited a public system that had been under attack for some time. There had been a massive program of school closures and reduction in teacher numbers. Class sizes had increased under the previous government and the physical state of many public schools were described by commentators as far below what an advanced economy should provide. This only added to the poor image of government schools and teachers' feelings of being devalued. School sites were sold to developers and the lack of school space in some parts of Melbourne (especially the inner South-east) is today a critical issue as new schools for an expanding population are being proposed for the roof-tops of apartment blocks and old factories.

At the end of 1999, morale of teachers in government schools had never been lower and the initial focus of the new government was focused on its own system. But very quickly the policy perspective expanded to include a governance role that included all schools in the state. This is very clear in the policy documents reviewed in this paper.

Government schools now have lower class sizes, have benefited from an extensive building program; and new forms of accountability and review have been introduced. For example, the flagships (or strategies) of major government planning have mandated external evaluations built into these programs. Extensive professional development for teachers and leaders at all levels is now a major driver of change. Innovative pedagogy has been a continuous and central element of policy, with new forms of professional and community feedback driving change at every level throughout the schools. Classrooms are no longer 'secret gardens' as professional transparency has 'de-privatised' teaching to a large degree. At the same time accountability has been balanced by professional support in a wide range of programs, driving change locally and state-wide. The Victorian school system is very different from the one that existed ten years ago and the following policy documents reflect the thinking behind this transformation.

Public Education – the Next Generation (PENG)

An early document that addressed this complexity was *Public Education – the Next Generation* (PENG). It is not so much an exercise in specific policymaking but a background paper that explores general principles and values. PENG is more philosophical than concerned with particular programs. The documents that followed through the decade picked up many of the needs identified in PENG and developed policies to redress these.

A central issue for PENG was the need to redirect policy from a highly competitive system that had ‘courageously’ devolved many decision-making functions to individual schools. In this process many schools thrived but some struggled. As with any policy, implementation brings unintended effects. PENG recognised that one of the central challenges in devolution concerned social justice. It is fair to say that this document focused on general principles of social justice rather than the details of strategic intent. This was really unavoidable given that this paper was a record of consultation with a variety of community groups and was a report to government on client consultation rather than being a government-directed policy paper. Nevertheless, some of the themes indicated in a general way would later reappear in the more focused policy documents that followed.

Coming after a period of reform underpinned by a more competitive environment, the report asserts the centrality of certain values in both private and public life.

Public schooling is more than a framework of opportunity for self-development, important though this is. The public system is an outstanding example of the public virtues of community and altruism. It demonstrates that there is more to life than the pursuit of narrow self-interest, immediate gratification and material reward; and we receive back from the common good what we put in. (PENG, p.24)

Some may describe this as expressing a certain ‘ideological’ tone. But how ideology is categorised is, of course, largely in the eye of the beholder. Some will see these values as the ‘ideology of the left’; others may see a fairly traditional viewpoint that resonates with past Australian generations. In the end policy has to strike a balance between competition and collaboration. This is not the place to analyse this complex issue, except to point to its existence at the heart of much debate on educational organisation and teacher professionalism. Because education opens up life chances, which are not unlimited even in good times, competition is unavoidable. But as PENG points out, it is a function of government to mitigate the worst excesses of competition that affect some families.

PENG states that the ‘key goals of public schooling that have emerged from this conversation are:

- Preparation for active participation in society
- Fostering adaptability to change
- Readiness for further education and the workforce

- Development of individual abilities and interests as well as ability to work with others
- Enjoyment of schooling and a love of learning
(PENG, p.15)

These themes re-occur through the later government documents though in a more policy-orientated format, with focused plans, strategies, timelines and clear accountability processes to measure progress. The lack of these structures in PENG is not a criticism of this early document because that was not its purpose. That purpose was one of gathering opinions and values coming from community groups, many with strong links to government schools.

In general PENG argues that schools must address both individual and community needs:

‘Public schools are safe places and people who work in them are protective and caring. Public schooling fosters in every child strong personal and social ethics, a sense of identity and responsibility as members of a community, respect for the rights of others, and the capacity to think ahead and take charge of their lives’. (PENG, pp.22-23)

This reflects a central theme of this document in arguing for developing in children and young people both self-management and community identity. There is also a strong defence of government schools as institutions that express human values. At this distance we may be surprised at the insistence and the need for this defence. However, at the time of the report, people who worked in the public school system in Victoria had felt greatly devalued as the system suffered a huge loss of resources under the previous government, with the closure of hundreds of schools and the loss of one-fifth of the teaching workforce.

PENG recognised the positive potential of devolution, implemented by the previous government, in encouraging strong community involvement in schools. Community involvement was going to be a policy focus in later documents. However, it stated the risks involved in some forms of devolution or local independence:

‘There is strong opposition within the school community to policies that attempt to promote competition among schools rather than collaboration.’ (PENG, p.19)

It went on to explain:

Schooling is by its very nature an arena for various forms of competition. There are powerful arguments for government taking action to temper the worst effects of competition, in order to protect the interests of those children and young people whose families are least able secure those interests by their own efforts and to support the schools on which they depend. (PENG, p.19)

The report also wants to balance parental choice with central accountability for a reliable consistency in quality across the system:

‘More attention is needed to ensuring a better consistency of quality and a universal achievement culture, though without diminishing the value of diversity... It is also understood that parental choice among schools is not by itself a means of achieving high

quality schooling for all; and that when quality becomes unreliable, schooling becomes a source of social and educational division and threatens community cohesion and trust. There is a need for a greater sense of system, a more modern, flexible system, build on networks; and a greater sense of reciprocity between system and schools.’

Broadly in support of continued devolution, PENG argued that local accountability should be balanced with greater accountability at system level. Systemic accountability was worked out in more detail in the later policy-orientated documents in which the government made particular pledges and laid out how progress at system level was to be publicly measured.

PENG identified the huge re-engagement that the government needed to make in resourcing a greatly run-down public school system, in which class sizes had actually risen in the previous years. It argues in terms of social and economic changes and the changing workplaces that young people would enter. Investment in education was critical because of the plight of many young people in a time of change:

Too many young people reach the end of compulsory schooling with inadequate standards of literacy. Too many young people leave school prematurely without the skills they need for work, further education and training, and home life. (p.20)

Specific mention was also made of the education system according ‘indigenous people their rightful place.’

This reengagement is about social justice in which public schools have a central role. PENG argues that public schools, because they take all comers, are the ultimate guarantee of universal social justice:

Public schooling guarantees that all students with special needs will have their, sometimes expensive, requirements catered for...and in such a manner as to protect those students from exclusion and marginalisation. (PENG, p.22)

In many respects this report feels it has to restate the value of public schools at a time when those schools felt they had been under prolonged attack. As a result there is little mention of non-government schools and little space was left for the role of government in the governance of all schools in Victoria. This will emerge in later reports.

Finally, it should be said that PENG emphasised the central role of quality teaching in school improvement. Later policy initiatives picked up this message and in the intervening years teacher development has been brought to a new level in Victoria.

The Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways (Kirby Report)

In the same year (2000) there appeared *The Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways*. Generally known as the *Kirby Report*, it is a seminal document, not only for ‘vocational’ education but for education in general. All education has whole-of-life outcomes. All education offers – or fails to offer – opportunities for living fulfilled lives and this cannot be divorced from work. It is fair to say that this is what creates the greatest driver of competition.

The Kirby Report was important in emphasising the urgency of educational reform both for Victoria and the nation as a whole. This urgency is further underlined at the personal level as the life chances of many young people are identified as being in some peril. This urgency is taken up in several later documents in the statement that ‘Education is the No 1 priority’ (Blueprint 1, Minister’s Foreword). This same statement is repeated in the Ministerial Statement of Expectations for the VRQA (2006), and again in the Minister’s Foreword in Blueprint 2 (Sept 2008).

The Kirby Report expands the policy framework in several ways. It is specific in describing goals in terms of serving the needs of students, workplaces and the broader community. In other words, general program goals match clearly identified **patterns** of need. This, in turn, requires a systemic approach to provision that is flexible and responsive to different communities, groups of students, providers, local government, employers, and any other stakeholders. Early in the report these goals or ‘elements of reform’ are spelled out (pp.5-6) in the kind of detail that will identify where accountability will rest. The following is a typical example of one of these elements:

- Administrative structures that allow local diversity, require and support greater accountability for outcomes, are strongly informed by research, make strong connections with the rest of government, industry and social and economic objectives, and that provide foresight and leadership. (Kirby Report, p.6)

However, the report reminds all stakeholders that this cannot be a simple passing over of responsibility to the frontline workers. Accountability is both local and systemic.

The primary responsibility for meeting this goal will rest upon teachers, lecturers and other professionals. In the absence of other measures, however, such a responsibility is an unfair and excessive burden. Governments and the broader community need to take a realistic attitude towards sharing the responsibility for the future of young people. (Kirby Report, p.6)

Schooling policy transcends immediate school communities and is placed in a wider framework that encompasses national development, not just economic, but the social and political fabric of the community.

The review has taken the view that there are strong links between the economic future of the State and the country, the cohesion and values of the community, and the educational outcomes for young people. This extends to a view that it is important that the benefits of economic development and of education and training should be extended to all young people, and that a failure to broaden and strengthen the education and training outcomes for young people will weaken our economic future as well as weaken a social fabric that is based on social justice.

(Kirby, p.8)

In broad terms the Kirby Report can be described as emphasising:

1. The critical connection between work and learning, not just in acquiring specific work skills, but skills for lifelong learning that support personal and work-related development
2. The deeper and broader social and economic change becomes, the more comprehensive must be the education and training system
3. Some young people and families are particularly vulnerable in a time of change and social justice demands targeted support be provided for families and communities
4. Work is of fundamental importance in building social cohesion and, at the individual level, work creates a sense of inclusion

This report takes great care to be fair in its reporting of what was the state of operations in education and training system at that time. Description of some weaknesses is balanced by identifying the strengths of the system. The recommendations for a coherent and responsive education and training system are carefully laid out in some detail. The following is a summary of areas that need improvement:

1. Support for Government's move towards consolidation rather than fragmentation of post-compulsory phase
2. This approach should provide
 - (a) more coherent policy
 - (b) greater collaboration and integration between providers different sectoral agencies
 - (c) better linkages between education, industry, govt agencies and the community
 - (d) a more seamless system for young people
3. Better accountability needed at all levels to strengthen the monitoring of outcomes for improvement
4. Focus should be on needs of young people not institutions, which should be accountable for programs in terms of access, quality and outcomes
5. Therefore greater collaboration between TAFE and other providers and govt and non-govt providers
6. More extensive whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach

7. Research shows young people face difficulties in past two decades not faced by other generations
 8. These difficulties, concentrated in particular groups and regions, require broad commitment from government, industry and community
- (Kirby Report, pp.8-9)

Young people in upper secondary school are a particular focus. Upper secondary can be regarded as three-year phase, with the VCE having limits in its relevance for the entire cohort. Some students are described as needing different learning contexts and sequences, or different provider contexts. Responses require improved preparation for upper secondary, greater flexibility in VCE and program provision.

Kirby reported that persistence of early school leaving requires that schools should increase their capacity to accommodate a wider percentage of the cohort; and in the short term role of VET and Adult and Community Education (ACE) should be clarified as providers for the school-age cohort. Schools should be allowed to deliver other programs accredited by the VQA and non-school providers should be allowed to deliver the VCE in collaboration with neighbourhood schools.

In general, the Kirby Report argues for a clearer government policy direction across a variety of secondary school types currently in Victoria. Kirby strengthened the expansion of the policy framework by looking to all educational institutions as falling within a stronger governance structure. While government has a direct program management responsibility for the government school sector, it has a policy responsibility for all schools and the wider education and training system.

Blueprint 1 (2003)

The Victorian Government issued a reform agenda, comprised of individual but connected initiatives to achieve successful learning outcomes for all students and young people. *Blueprint 1* is organised under a number of ‘flagships’, which are the implementation strategies of its reform agenda. The flagships are not stand alone initiatives but are designed to be interactive under three broad ‘strategies’ in providing the platforms for achieving success for all. The reform agenda is strongly research driven in a number of ways:

- Considerable input was provided by the educational research community
- Wide consultation was conducted with a range of stakeholders
- A wide stream of mandated data from schools was available to the Department
- Evaluation of initiatives was commissioned at several stages of the implementation cycle

At this point it may be useful to list the flagships as they appear in *Blueprint 1*.

Recognising and Responding to Diverse Student Needs

Flagship Strategy 1: Student Learning

Flagship Strategy 2: Developing a New Resource Allocation Model

Building the Skills of the Education Workforce to Enhance the Teaching–Learning Relationship

Flagship Strategy 3: Building Leadership Capacity

Flagship Strategy 4: Creating and Supporting a Performance and Development Culture

Flagship Strategy 5: Teacher Professional Development

Continuously Improving Schools

Flagship Strategy 6: School Improvement

Flagship Strategy 7: Leading Schools Fund

Space does not allow a description of each flagship. (That can be done by consulting the document, available on the Government website.) However, a couple of flagships, representing a particularly innovative government response, are worth some brief attention.

The Performance and Development Culture (PDC) was introduced soon after the publication of *Blueprint 1* as a quality assurance process for delivering feedback on all levels of performance, from the principal’s office to the classroom. Feedback on teaching teams and connected leadership across the school led to a better understanding of student learning and teacher practice. Over a three year period beginning in 2005, all schools were expected to apply for quality assurance as having a Professional and Developmental Culture in its policies and practices.

The accreditation criteria included:

- Multiple sources of feedback for teachers, including feedback from parents and students on the quality of the teaching–learning relationship
- Customised plans to meet individual teacher development needs
- Ensuring that professional feedback informed individual teacher development plans
- Quality professional development to address those needs
- Induction and mentoring for beginning teachers.

The accreditation process was largely internal, providing a very rich source of professional reflection. At a later point it was externally verified by teams of expert educational practitioners. The preparation for this involved staff at every level in the school, again providing opportunities for whole-school professional development.

Accountability also went beyond the school to the regional offices:

Accreditation for a performance and development culture will be a key performance objective for all principals. The proportion of schools in their region that have achieved accreditation will be a key performance measure for Regional Directors and Senior Education Officers. (*Blueprint 1*, p.20, word version)

Educational jurisdictions place a strong emphasis on accountability – in line with this wider shift in societal change. However, the Department was also aware of the tensions that can arise between excessive and intrusive accountability regimes and the requirements of professional innovation. This is acknowledged in the introduction to the school improvement strategy.

Accountability arrangements must also be sufficiently flexible to allow innovation in schools. The objective of striving for excellence for all students also requires greater levels of cooperation and planning between schools and the sharing of specialisation, expertise and facilities. Innovation is usually initiated at a school or local community level. The Government’s role is to support and promote best practice and facilitate sharing across the system within a transparent, flexible and accountable framework. (*Blueprint 1*, P.22, Word version)

While devolution of school management continued, it was more nuanced under the reform agenda of *Blueprint 1*. Schools continued to have responsibility for ensuring that student data would drive teaching and learning, and for informing initiatives in professional development. Schools would be individually responsible for much of their planning and setting of priorities. But they were now expected to collaborate with other schools in disseminating and supporting good practice. In addition, struggling schools were not left to their own devices. Under *Flagship 7 – Leading Schools Fund*, funding was made available for strategic partnerships and

collaboration between schools so that schools can learn from each other and strengthen the public school system.

Under *Flagship 5: Teacher Professional Development*, \$5 million was invested dollars each year from 2004 to enable 460 teachers to take Teacher Professional Leave (TPL). TPL has been one of the most successful professional development initiatives ever undertaken in Victoria – or perhaps anywhere. In evaluations, teachers reported it was ‘the best thing they ever did in teaching’. Many said they were re-energised and renewed. It was also a strategy to disseminate best practice as teachers visited classrooms in other schools and brought back new professional understandings to their own colleagues. One of the key drivers of TPL’s success was that the leave was granted to teams, not individuals. In teams they visited other sites, and in teams they conducted professional dialogue with colleagues in their own schools. These teams became powerful change agents; when colleagues were sometimes resistant – even hostile – the team persevered in situations where an individual could often be overwhelmed.

In the Foreword, the Minister, Lynne Kosky provides an overview of Blueprint 1, from which the following key policy positions can be listed:

1. Education is the Government’s number one priority.
2. Government has invested additional resources in reducing class sizes, addressing key issues in early, middle years and senior years and pathways from schooling
3. Measure performance and then address need, especially students at risk
4. Concentrate on groups of students with low skill levels
5. Education is needed to improve skills for a highly skilled, innovative workforce
6. Education is a key to personal development and life opportunities
7. Government is responsible for the wellbeing of the large majority in state schools
8. Government is responsible for all young people, irrespective of location or background – therefore the quality government schools is essential for the pledge to all Victorians
9. Blueprint 1 is based on extensive research and robust consultation
10. The learning needs of all students are not the same, especially in a complex world
11. Maintaining the quality of teachers and principals is vital to educational outcomes
12. Self management is to continue but increased systemic cooperation is necessary for innovative teaching
13. Excellence is achieved through partnerships between the Government, the Department, schools, teachers, principals, other workers, parents and other community members
14. ‘This Government is a government for all Victorians.’

Improved Educational Outcomes – a Better Reporting and Accountability System for Schools (Oct 2002)

This paper is a natural follow-up to the Victorian Government's pledges on various improvements it would make to the lives of individuals and families. Part of the general pledge towards improvement was that it would be accountable, as part of a democratic framework. In this paper the Government states that 'Parents/carers have a right to know exactly how their child's progress and learning performance compares with Victorian and national standards.' Therefore a paper on reporting and accountability was a natural policy initiative.

As in so many documents, the theme of education as a universal priority is acknowledged. The Government recognises that

improved education and training outcomes are the key to increased prosperity and security for all Victorians. All students need to succeed and find the pathway that will lead them to employment and meaningful lives.

The first line of accountability lies with schools reporting to their communities. The rationale for this is given as follows:

Schools have an added responsibility to ensure that their educational programs and organisation are delivering educational outcomes for their students individually and collectively. They have a special obligation to their school communities to outline what is working and if anything needs to be changed just how and when that will be achieved.

The paper also identifies the government's own responsibility in terms of reporting:

Governments too have an ongoing duty to explain to the Victorian public what steps they are taking to lift student learning outcomes. This includes acknowledging outstanding achievements in schools, extending good teaching and learning practices across the school system and ensuring that underperformance is identified and rectified.

These responsibilities are described in more detail in the different 'initiatives' of this paper:

1. Extending student testing to Year 7 (later extended to year 9)
2. Reporting to parents against literacy and numeracy national benchmarks
3. Providing the public with a clearer picture of student performance in Years 11 and 12
4. Reporting on post-year 12 pathways (to be known as 'Destination' data)
5. Public recognition of schools that achieve quality programs and outstanding teaching
6. Developing principals and other school leaders to improve school accountability
7. Intervention strategies when school data suggests that assistance is needed to lift performance

Two strategies are worth additional comment. Strategy 4 was acknowledged as an outstanding addition to school data, both at the school level and by those from outside the schools, such as

the school reviewers. Schools took responsibility for tracking students after they left school and the results represent powerful feedback on what the school provided in real life chances.

The effect of this data on school performance can be illustrated by two examples. One inner city secondary school with half its students from the Horn of Africa consistently ensured that all its students were either in employment, training or further study. Another secondary school that catered for a large number of Koori students, brought some teenagers back to school and provided a crèche for their babies. Both examples illustrate the power of data to focus effort and harness latent values in teachers.

Initiative 7 is also worth special comment. When school performance data indicated the school needed assistance, that school had a specially negotiated review in which the departmental representatives from the Region participated. School reviews were now to be conducted at three different levels of detail. Thus, schools deemed outstanding had ‘light touch’ reviews.

The Three Year Report on EDUCATION AND TRAINING (2003)

The *Three Year Report on EDUCATION AND TRAINING (2003)* provides a good summary of the early phase of government policymaking. Once again, education is identified at the beginning of the report as the ‘number one priority’. Among other functions, the government reports on its achievements with some data on its various initiatives:

- Reducing class sizes in the early years of schooling
- Engaging students in the middle years of school
- Providing more and better post-compulsory education and training pathways
- Boosting our TAFE institutes and other training providers
- Increasing investment in our school buildings and facilities
- Helping those students who need it most with special programs to meet their various needs, and
- Ensuring that our curriculum is not one-size-fits-all – we have invested significant resources to ensure that the programs are innovative and designed to meet local needs

These are clearly educational aims. But the report then adds a statement that was going to be an increasing focus of its educational agenda:

The Government has also supported the important role played by education and training in building stronger communities.

This emphasis on helping to build more functional communities is part of the Department of Education and Training’ (DET) stronger connections with other government sectors, as well as partners at the local level. DET’s commitment to Adult Community Education is informed by its understanding of ‘the pivotal role that ACE plays in communities across the State in providing access to education and skills development for hundreds of thousands of Victorians each year.

Struggling students and schools had benefited from the social justice dimension of the reform agenda in the following programs:

- DET’s resourcing of programs for basic literacy and numeracy,
- The Restart program (providing 100 extra teachers to assist Year 7 students with literacy needs)
- The provision of Koori Educators and Home Liaison Officers
- Managed individual pathways through post-compulsory education and training to reflect student aspirations

This *Three Year Report* also describes the reform of Post-compulsory Education and Training to help young people who drop out and provide more reliable, positive and rewarding learning pathways to better working futures. An important part of this reform was the focus on community previously noted: in this regard the government describes its strategy as to

- Involve and resource communities by encouraging partnerships between governments, industry, education and training organisations, employers, community organisations, teachers and learners

There is also a broadening of education and training choices for students in Years 11 and 12.

- VET in Schools provides accredited training in a wide range of vocational areas...
- The VCAL is a senior secondary school qualification that sits alongside the VCE, but it is based on applied learning and is designed to give students employability skills to go on to further training in the workplace or at a TAFE. Literacy and numeracy studies are an essential part of the VCAL

Much of this is the implementation of the recommendations of the Kirby report.

Other student services targeted learning and pastoral needs with

- the addition of welfare coordinators benefiting over 200,000 students
- An increase of 40% in funding for special learning needs
- Providing over 128,000 secondary students with access to nursing care

An important commitment at this time was the *Innovation and Excellence in the Middle Years of Schooling*. It is reported that

Clusters of primary and secondary schools have been established to develop and share in innovative programs, with an average of \$200,000 provided in start-up funds for each cluster. A further \$80,000 will be provided each year so they can employ an educator to manage the program.

This reflects the same drive for sharing professional innovation previously noted in some of the 'flagship' strategies noted in Blueprint 1, such as the *Leading Schools Fund* and the associated program of Teacher Professional Leave.

Two final points from this report must be mentioned. The government spent \$882 million on building in schools and TAFE institutes. Much of this money was dependent on commitments from those institutions on the innovation and excellence that would occur in the new buildings.

The second important area is investing in teachers. The government had substantially

- Increased the number of teachers in government schools
- Improved their professionalism through the provision of professional development, made accountable through school improvement plans and individual teacher plans
- Focused on recruiting and retaining high quality teachers

Corporate Plan – 2003 > 06

This paper continues to maintain the policies already in place together with (a) an expansion of the educational policy framework and (b) focusing on the reach of its responsibilities. The expansion of the educational framework is the alignment of this document with the policy document issuing from the Premier's Department, *Growing Victoria Together*. The reach of its responsibilities is emphasised in the role the government has in administering an educational jurisdiction, as well managing a school system.

The paper begins with a whole-of-government state from The Secretary's Foreword that the Department's vision is for 'a prosperous society through learning'. The paper also begins by quoting from *Growing Victoria Together*:

Government priorities: *Growing Victoria Together*

The Bracks Government's vision for Victoria is that by 2010 we will be a state where:

- Innovation leads to thriving industries generating high quality jobs
- Protecting the environment for future generations is built into every job we do
- We have caring, safe communities in which opportunities are fairly shared
- All Victorians have access to the highest quality health and education services all through their lives

- *Growing Victoria Together*

Growing Victoria Together recognises 'that education is the key to our children's future and our economic prosperity. Education opens the doors to high-quality jobs, to a full and creative life and a sense of common citizenship.

Valuing and investing in lifelong education and training is identified as a strategic issue in making the Government's vision a reality.

Corporate Plan 2003-6 (p.4)

The paper makes very clear that the background context for educational planning is within the 'social and economic factors, the specific policy parameters and directions' outlined in *Growing Victoria Together*.

Critical in this is the awareness of community perceptions:

'Community choice of education provider is increasingly selective, based on perceptions of quality and scholastic outcomes and, in relation to private provision, the capacity to pay.

Public education has a unique role in providing for the needs of all learners, regardless of economic or social circumstances, or geographic location.

In recognition of this the government has established goals and targets for education and training.’ (p.7)

This recognises that the exercise of parental choice has put pressure on all sectors. The pressure on government schools has a special quality that goes beyond a consumerist, market model: many families do not have any real choice and depend on government schools. These students have nowhere else to go. This underlines the urgency expressed in this document to lift performance in government schools, and ensure the resources and professionalism is there to achieve this. This report also reflects the sentiment expressed in the PENG and other reports of putting the interests of child at the centre of public schooling, supported as this is by Australia’s commitment to Article 3 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

The macro-policy of prosperity through learning is recognised in this report’s priorities:

- Improve participation and achievement in education and training
- Provide better links between schools, businesses and communities
- Expand opportunities for training and learning all through life

This report aligns the purposes of education and training with the broader social and economic policies espoused in *Growing Victoria Together*, which has economic growth and shared prosperity as a central plank.

Education and training is also viewed as assisting in social cohesion and therefore sustaining a democratic culture.

Education and training supports social wellbeing, cohesion and democracy. In the school years it supports the emotional and social development of children, as well as their intellectual development. Schools provide an important context within which social skills develop, shared values are reinforced, tolerance for differences develops and the capacity to productively harness diversity is enhanced. Throughout life, education and training provides knowledge and skills to create citizens and provide the basis for social and economic engagement. (p.8)

Social cohesion is also connected with the efforts to assist young people – as well as older unemployed people –to prepare for, and enter rewarding work.

The rising skill expectations of the labour market are creating a demand for higher levels of educational achievement. Employers expect workers to show increased levels of literacy, numeracy and employability skills, and specific vocational skills. Education and training can close the gap between the knowledge ‘rich’ and the knowledge ‘poor’. (p.8)

The report refers to demographic changes and the disparity in education and training outcomes in the general population. To address these issues, the report is arguing for a more flexible and responsive education and training system that is continually improved and updated. It also

argues that special attention needs to be given ‘to improve outcomes for Koori learners and other groups who have not traditionally achieved highly.’

Five Departmental strategies, ‘designed as an integrated set’ are identified to achieve its objectives.

- **Extend the capacity of the education and training professionals**

Extend the capacity of the education and training professionals to support learner engagement and achievement, including, through workforce development, building leadership capacity and attracting and retaining a high-quality and professional workforce.

- **Improve curriculum and qualifications**

Provide curriculum and qualifications to support all Victorians to be active life-long learners and to gain the knowledge and skills essential for participation in society and the economy. This includes reforms to ensure learners are central to the development of curriculum and that qualifications are quality assured and informed by the needs of industry.

- **Provide innovative and responsive learning environments**

Provide innovative and responsive learning environments to support current and evolving teaching and training practice. This includes the provision of stimulating physical environments and the delivery through effective information and communication technologies.

- **Increased accountability and system performance**

Strengthen accountability, governance, quality assurance and reporting arrangements across the education and training system to ensure a focus on outcomes and the adoption of collaborative and learner-centred approaches.

- **Achieve sustainable financing and resourcing**

Invest effectively in programs and initiatives to achieve Departmental objectives within budget. Provide leadership and leverage to increase the level and effectiveness of private investment in education and training.

These strategies continue the policy directions in the earlier documents. The strong, continuing themes are

- Accountability at all levels
- Professional development
- Life-long learning for long-term prosperity
- Innovative teaching and learning
- Flexible but connected curriculum.

The second change in emphasis mentioned at the start of this section was the focus on the role the government has in administering an educational jurisdiction. Two of its ‘key responsibilities’ focus on this aspect of educational governance:

‘Funding, regulating, liaising with non-government schools in Victoria’

‘Providing leadership to a diverse and multidimensional education and training system’

Both these key responsibilities look forward to other documents and initiatives.

GROWING VICTORIA TOGETHER: THE STORY SO FAR

- A Vision for Victoria to 2010 and Beyond (March 2005)

This document provides key background ‘areas’ for all education policy statements. (These areas are listed below.) Clearly some areas are more relevant to education than others. The two areas under a **thriving economic** are relevant in ways already discussed in earlier documents.

In this 2005 vision statement, the Victorian Government lists ten areas that will be further strengthened by 2010:

Thriving economy

1. More quality jobs and thriving, innovative industries across Victoria
2. Growing and linking all of Victoria

Quality health and education

3. High quality, accessible health and community services
4. High quality education and training for lifelong learning

Healthy environment

5. Protecting the environment for future generations
6. Efficient use of natural resources

Caring communities

7. Building friendly, confident and safe communities
8. A fairer society that reduces disadvantage and respects diversity

Vibrant democracy

9. Greater public participation and more accountable government
10. Sound financial management

Under the **quality health and education** areas we should remember the additional student services such as school nurses and welfare officers. Curriculum and teaching also come under these areas as they do under **healthy environment**. In this area the government has consciously ensured that many of its new buildings are environmentally friendly. In some schools these buildings became practical opportunities for the students’ study of the environment. **Caring communities** is an area that has multiple levels of connectedness with schools. Documents increasingly mention partnerships and stakeholders and clearly focus on communities as active participants rather than as passive recipients of services. This latter aspect of community

partnership is really echoed under the concept of ‘public participation’ as discussed in **vibrant democracies**.

A Fairer Victoria –

Creating opportunity and addressing disadvantage (2005)

This government paper provides a record of specific areas of improvement and what had been achieved up to that time. But, interestingly, it also states in the introduction that,

‘despite substantial improvement, not all Victorians are getting a fair share of the State’s strong economic performance. Some groups of people and some places in Victoria are still experiencing disadvantage, hardship and barriers to accessing the opportunities they need to secure better futures for themselves and their families.’ (p.2)

The government admitted that lesson had been learned over the previous five years. The new framework recognised that

1. The needs of some groups will be met by better access to mainstream services
2. Other groups with more complex needs require more targeted, innovative responses
3. (A Fairer Victoria, p.4)

The Government then sets out the elements of its framework to address disadvantage:

- Ensuring that universal services provide equal opportunity for all
- Reducing barriers to opportunity
- Strengthening assistance to disadvantaged groups
- Providing targeted support to the highest risk areas
- Involving communities in decisions affecting their lives and making it easier to work with Government

(From A FAIRER VICTORIA, Page 5)

Some of these elements have particular application to education and training. Providing equal opportunity requires very careful targeting of services and in this accurate data is essential. Barriers to opportunity include unemployed among the low skilled and, again, targeted training for specific need is essential.

The report also sets out 14 strategies that are targeted at specific groups. Space does not allow a detailed description of each strategy, nor does the purpose of this paper require it. However, specific targets should be mentioned that relate to the public purposes of education. The importance of the early years ‘in ensuring positive future outcomes’ is identified as a specific policy initiative with provision of over \$100 million. Just under half that amount is designated for getting young people at risk back on track. Family violence is another focus with much of the designated effort outside the school. However, the government initiative on providing extra welfare coordinators and school nurses would have a part to play in monitoring family violence. The strategy of building new partnerships with Indigenous Victorians must also have schools as partners.

Another strategy is concerned with making services more affordable, some of which apply to school costs and greater internet access. In these and other matters, schools are, unavoidably partners in any comprehensive initiative of making services more affordable to families experiencing hardship and poverty.

The last three strategies deal with building stronger communities and ‘developing better ways of working together at a regional and local level’. This theme of building community has emerged in other documents but is given considerable prominence in **A Fairer Victoria**.

Building stronger communities is an aim in its own right in the funding (\$75m) to continue to strengthen the Neighbourhood Renewal program, involving Neighbourhood Houses and generally to ‘increase community self reliance’. In addition, self-reliant communities make for strong partners in implementing policy, including those of the education and training system.

Schools are encouraged to enter into partnerships with local government and community groups to enable the use of school facilities by local communities.

Sharing school and local infrastructure offers benefits to schools, students and the broader community. Schools gain access to facilities that they may not have been able to develop themselves and communities gain by having access to facilities that may be under-utilised and that have the potential to be a focal point for local activities. We will make it easier for schools to offer facilities for community use by simplifying administrative processes and removing unnecessary bureaucratic barriers. Detailed, user-friendly guidelines will be produced to encourage government schools to pursue all possible opportunities for sharing facilities with their local communities.

A FAIRER VICTORIA, P. 53

This not only supports stronger communities but builds the schools’ capacity to draw on community support. The government aims for strong communities that are ‘active, confident and resilient’ (p.49). Such strong communities have high levels of interaction and support, effective local leadership, are proud of their identity and experience less disadvantage. Building such communities is vital to tackling the problems associated with disadvantage. The Government has given communities a clear and strong focus, with the building of community identity seen as an important strategy in tackling disadvantage.

As already noted, the Government states that its understanding of the dynamics of communities has developed over the cycle of implementation. This continued learning from experience is repeated in a later update of *A Fairer Victoria* (April, 2008).

In some places different kinds of needs cluster together, reinforcing each other in a cycle that has proven difficult to break. We’re taking an approach in these areas that:

- brings the community, government, business and community organisations together to identify issues and chart a way forward (partnerships)

- improves the skills of local people and the information available to them (capacity building)
- gives a high priority to social, economic and civic participation (social inclusion)
- coordinates the efforts of State, local and Federal governments (joined-up government), and
- builds on local strengths and interests (strengths-based approach)

A Fairer Victoria (April, 2008)

Behind this government planning is the recognition of the need for communities to be internally interactive and externally active with the providers of provision. In a sense the ‘handle is on the inside of the door’: communities have to reach out to the provider of resources and services, which are not like inert commodities that can be ‘handed out’. There must be active participation in the successful use of services.

Education and Training Reform Act – 2006

Considerable rethinking about the overall function and purposes of education had taken place in the first six years of the present government. The alignment of structure and function was rethought in the light of what systemic processes and structures would best serve the purposes of education. Two papers appeared in 2006 which addressed a realignment of structures:

- The Education and Training Reform Act
- The Ministerial Statement of Expectations for the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority

The Education and Training Reform Act looked to education as having a critical function in teaching broad cultural values that supported a democratic constitution.

In the subsection 1.2.1 Principles underlying the enactment of this Act, this government document makes the following points:

Parliament has had regard to the following principles in enacting this Act –

- (a) all providers of education and training, both government and non-government, must ensure that their programs and teaching are delivered in a manner that supports and promote the principles and practices of Australian democracy, including commitment to
- (i) elected government;
 - (ii) the rule of law;
 - (iii) equal rights before the law;
 - (iv) freedom of religion;
 - (v) freedom of speech and association;
 - (vi) the values of openness and tolerance

An interesting point to note is that this relates not just to curriculum content but the requirement that programs ‘are deliver in a manner that supports...the principles and practices of Australian democracy’. The same section goes on to say that all Victorians, irrespective of the educational institutions they attend should have access to high quality education, which promotes enthusiasm for lifelong learning and allows parents to play a part in their children’s education (p.12).

Also parents have a right to choose an appropriate education for their children and access information about their child’s performance. Additionally, a school community have the right to access information about the performance of their school. (p.13)

These government ‘principles’ underpin several broad commitments in the conduct of all Victorian educational institutions. They should reflect:

- Social justice for all Victorians
- Transparency of performance and openness about professional operations
- Not just formal support for democracy but its enactment in school processes
- Respect for all citizens, their rights and their cultural diversity

In stating that parents have a right to choose an appropriate education for their child, this Act, given its commitment to social justice, cannot but commit to provide quality programs in the government's own schools. The Act ensures that for children and young people, under the age of 21 on 1st January in the year of study, attendance at government schools are free of expense for Schedule 1 (the instruction in the educational program), as well as attendance at courses at TAFE Institutes.

The Act also requires that 'Education must be secular and not promote any particular religious practice, denomination or sect. However, this does not prevent the inclusion of general religious education, which Government teachers can provide but not religious instruction.' (p.24)
However, under the Act, special arrangements are available for religious instruction to be conducted by persons accredited by churches or other religious groups approved by the Minister. (p.25)

In the document 'secular' is not being used in opposition to religion. Rather it offers a framework that encourages an inclusive social identity that transcends (or, is inclusive of) particular religious traditions. It is an attempt to define the common public space, much in the way that Charles Taylor argues.

Ministerial Statement of Expectations for the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (2006)

This ‘statement of expectations’ describes the structures and functions that would define the new VRQA. A new approach to regulatory reform is embedded in the new Authority set up under this Act. It is aimed at

- (a) Reforming the way the education and training system engages with industry and
- (b) Reforming the way school systems engage in mandated accountability processes

The Act is responding to guidelines adopted by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 1997, which provided principles for individual state regulatory frameworks. These principles are set out as follows in the Act:

- Minimal impact on industry
- Minimal impact on competition
- Predictability of outcomes
- Consistently with international standards and practice
- No restriction of international trade
- Flexibility in changing circumstances, and
- Transparency and procedural fairness

This “Ministerial Statement of Expectations’ regarding the new Authority is described as ‘a major innovation which has resulted, has been a shift from occasionally intrusive and counter-productive quality control mechanisms, to more effective quality assurance arrangements. In the latter the regulating authority satisfies itself that the processes adopted by service providers are consistent with, and likely to meet, required standards.’

A major change is that the new Authority is not responsible for actually conducting quality assurance; that is the responsibility of institutions or institutional systems that are licensed under the VRQA. The Authority published the criteria under which a school system or a training provider could apply for registration.

The Ministerial Statement also describes the VRQA as aligning with ‘contemporary’ thinking on ‘light touch’ regulatory structures. It is also seen as providing a ‘one stop shop’ for education and training providers and their owners/operators, ‘whether they are seeking registration as a school, training provider, higher education provider to overseas students – or any combination of these.’

‘The Authority will be responsible for ensuring providers *meet* minimum standards, not for how they do so. Ongoing quality assurance and provider improvement are the responsibilities of the owners/operators of education and training providers.’

Some of the previously discussed challenges in setting up a ‘seamless’ pathway for young people in the education and training system are being addressed in these new structures. The Authority is responsible for the registration and accreditation of all education and training providers and accreditation of all courses except those in universities. This allows flexibility in industry and the training providers, as well as the different programs in post-compulsory schooling.

This paper is careful to point out that the new Authority does not subsume policy responsibilities of the Department or the ‘prerogatives’ of those registered bodies with devolved authority, ‘whether publicly or privately owned’. However, in the registration of schools it is responsible for setting and monitoring standards in areas such

- Student learning outcomes
- Enrolment policies and minimum enrolment numbers
- Student welfare policies
- Breadth and depth of curriculum programs
- Governance and probity
- Review and evaluation processes

This is part of the government’s broad pledge that ‘all students can have access to a quality education, no matter what Victorian school they attend.’ This reflects that encompassing policy viewpoint that expanded from the early focus on improving its own system, which had been seriously eroded.

It is also not intended that the Authority in any way subsumes the policy responsibilities of the Department or the prerogatives of those responsible and accountable for the devolved education and training provision, whether publicly or privately owned.

Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development – (Sept 2008) **(This is generally known as ‘Blueprint 2’ and will be so referred to in this paper.)¹**

The two final documents to be analysed will be *Blueprint 2* and *Corporate Plan 2008-09 to 2010-11*. Taken together, these two documents drive the current Victorian education jurisdiction. The first document provides the policy framework and the second is the plan for enacting that policy.

Blueprint 2 came towards the end of a decade of the present government’s policy development and implementation. It represents a considerable expansion of its policy framework over that time. Its characteristic inclusive approach is expressed in addressing the question ‘What is new about Blueprint?’

The Blueprint is a new approach based on the outcomes we want for all children and young people from birth to adulthood, rather than on any distinction between early childhood services and schools.

It encompasses both education and early childhood services and government and non-government schools.

For the first time, we articulate shared goals for all Victoria’s children and young people, as a basis for collaboration between families, schools, early childhood services and the broader community. A shared understanding of our goals will provide the basis for intervention where they are not being achieved. (Blueprint, p.13)

The document’s very strong emphasis on the early years of education is most evident in the renamed ‘Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’ (DEECD). This emphasis on the early years was research-driven by educational research from many parts of the world, reinforcing the message that early childhood experience has an overwhelming influence on lifelong learning and development. Other phases of educational development continue to be addressed in *Blueprint 2*, such as the education and training system and the middle years, which has been a long standing focus in Victorian government policy and practice. These are addressed within ‘new developmental frameworks’ (p.23) that recognises three broad phases of human growth that have their own particular needs for both teaching and learning.

¹ Earlier in the same year a discussion paper was published, entitled *Blueprint for Early Childhood Development and School Reform: School Reform Discussion Paper (April 2008)*. In our discussion reference to this paper will be made under the title *Blueprint 2 Discussion Paper*.

These are listed and described as requiring ‘a lifecycle approach to children’s and young people’s development and learning from birth to adulthood’ (p.15):

- Early childhood development 0-8 years
- Middle Years development – 8-16 years
- Youth transitions – 16+

While Blueprint 2 continues its concern that individual students and individual schools achieve their potential, the framework for accountability is expanded to system-wide performance:

‘We must realise the benefits of a statewide system. In our pursuit of excellence, we must utilise the collective resources of the system to ensure all parts of the system take responsibility for sharing knowledge and skills to support all schools to improve.’ (Blueprint, 2008, p. 25)

This is about organisational learning – or what Blueprint 2 describes as ‘System Improvement’ (p.21) – under which a number of its ‘Actions’ are subsumed.

A key asset of the learning and development system is the system itself. With this large and talented workforce, physical infrastructure and relationships, there is a potential to achieve extraordinary results with the available resources. (p.21)

Educational performance now has a framework of excellence, not simply competition between individuals and schools. The criteria for such excellence are to be found outside the state even the country. Blueprint 2 makes this clear in one of its four its priorities (p.12):

Strengthen public confidence in a world class school education system, with a strong and vibrant government school sector at its core

The standards by which excellence is judged are now international and comparisons are in terms of international standards. Thus, the policy framework is not only inclusive; it is also expansive in the sense that Victoria is part of a globalised world and, therefore, must engage both socially and economically as part of that enlarged community. The education system must therefore support individuals, communities, institutions and businesses that want to grow their global activities, whether economic or social.

In next and final document to be analysed, the government puts education strongly within a global framework. ‘Globalisation has heightened international competition and has heightened the importance of skills, innovation and creativity.’² A negative interpretation might be that education is merely a servant of the economic machine. However, given the increasing emphasis on partnership found in the documents during this decade, the role of the education system and educators has been accorded increased status and respect.

² Interim Corporate Plan 2008-09 to 2010-11, p.5

Partnership continues to be a central value in the government's policymaking – both within the educational system and the wider Victorian community. Even when intervention is seen as necessary the policy is to endeavour to be one of partnership not domination. This is the message on shared goals:

For the first time, we articulate shared goals for all Victoria's children and young people, as a basis for collaboration between families, schools, early childhood services and the broader community. A shared understanding of our goals will provide the basis for intervention where they are not being achieved. (Blueprint, p.12)

Promoting a shared understanding is critical: importantly, it points to an aspect of the public purposes of education – not just the content but its shared nature, whatever the particular content or meaning of particular outcomes. The promotion of a shared understanding points to another dimension of 'common purposes'. This policy of developing a shared vision is aimed at all Victorians and is a massive community leadership task. (However, this task does not start from a values vacuum, a position supported by some theories of human nature.)

Partnerships are mentioned specifically with non-government schools (cross sectoral strategies), parents and communities, and businesses. The Victorian education and training system is described as including all Victorian schools and private providers. The government system is described as the 'core' of that system, given that the majority of families rely on government schools and choice for those families must be within that sector. While the government has to be more closely involved with the public sector, the 'excellence' that it promotes applies to all sectors and the teaching and learning that occurs 'statewide'. That wider accountability applies on the basis of citizenship, and therefore its stated 'pledge' is to 'all Victorians'. This accountability is exercised in large part through the VQRA, to which all providers must provide a transparent account of their quality assurance processes.

Excellence in teaching and learning is promoted through attracting the best people and developing current teaching staff through the continued support for a generous for professional development, in such successful strategies as Teacher Profession Leave. *Blueprint 2* also announced the 'Teach for Australia' initiative. In a most important 'Action'

A specific priority will be to disseminate an instructional model for teachers to support effective teaching practices in classrooms.

This will assist teachers and school leaders to refine and develop their knowledge around high-quality instruction and improve their capacity to translate it into practice. (p.36)

This strong focus on practice has been growing through the decade. In schools it is spoken of as the 'de-privatising' of teaching. Special positions of teacher 'coaches' are now in nearly all government schools; their appointment is spreading in the private sector. Team teaching is also an increasing phenomenon.

The guiding vision and mission of Blueprint 2 are as follows:

Vision

Every young Victorian thrives, learns and grows to enjoy a productive, rewarding and fulfilling life, while contributing to their local and global communities

Mission

Ensures a high quality and coherent birth-to-adulthood learning and development system to build the capability of every young Victorian (p.12)

Blueprint 2 has an expanded vision of learning that supports the whole person in his or her lifelong development. Because of this recognition of the critical role of learning, education is given a special mission in addressing the effects of disadvantage. The special needs of disadvantaged groups and geographical areas are given priority.

Corporate Plan 2008-09 to 2010-11

In many respects the *Interim Corporate Plan* spells out in simplified formats the programmatic steps for the Blueprint policy. It is also significant that the plan is ‘Interim’, which emphasises flexibility in the light of lessons learned in the on-going process of implementation, a principle stated in earlier government papers. The vision and mission from *Blueprint 2* (stated on the previous page of this paper) are repeated in the *Corporate Plan* (pp.10-11).

The broad policy drivers from *Blueprint 2* drive the *Corporate Plan*. The reform agenda is the same as stated in *Blueprint 2*, covering the following broad principles

- Engaging with a global world
- Increasing access to high quality early childhood services
- Supporting disadvantaged groups, including families, who may not be described as intrinsically disadvantaged but are under stress at key transition points in their journey through the system
- Better integration of the education and training system and other relevant government agencies in order to facilitate seamless transition for students and their families, as well as the transfer of human and cultural capital

An important early initiative will be to take a proactive role working with COAG to place the reform agenda in a national context. In particular, the Interim Plan looks to ‘unprecedented opportunities to work with COAG and MCEETYA to create a shared national vision and a collaborative national approach to improving outcomes for Australia’s children’.

The *Corporate Plan* attaches an appendix in the form of a framework for such a collaborative program, with ‘Aspirations’, ‘Outcomes’ and ‘Indicative Progress Measures’ for opportunities for all children in Australia. The outcomes for Australian children reflect the same thinking that had been developed for Victorian children. This aspiration reflects a widening of the moral impulse behind state-based thinking on social justice. Interestingly it is as close an exemplification of Immanuel Kant’s ‘universalisability’ of moral principles as one can get – unless one went global. However, the *Corporate Plan* goes as far as it can in terms of available jurisdictions (a term used in *Corporate Plan*) with which Victoria can link. The same educational services argued as the right of all Victorians is extended to all Australian citizens. In that appendix these educational rights are expressed in terms ‘social inclusion’ so that all Australian children and young people benefit from all those educational initiatives described as the right of all Victorian children in their development from birth to adulthood.

The global context is enunciated at the beginning with a text taken from a 2007 media release by the Premier. (The previous quote on globalisation above – p.28 – is from this same source.) If this global community had a federal structure then the push for better outcomes for Victorian children and young people could well have pushed towards full ‘universalisability’.