

INDEPENDENT MONITOR FOR THE DELIVERY OF THE 2025 VICTORIAN CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION (VCE) EXAMINATIONS

Summary Report: Executive Summary

March 2026

Foreword

At the request of the Minister for Education, and in response to issues arising from the 2024 Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) exams, I was appointed as the Independent Monitor to provide additional and specific assurance and oversight of the preparation and delivery of the 2025 exams.

I am pleased to provide assurance that the 2025 exams were delivered effectively and in accordance with legislative obligations and published guidelines.

This achievement was not without challenge. The process is complex, largely manual, time constrained, and risks are inherent in each stage.

The successful outcome in 2025 was only achieved through heightened and focused oversight and executive management, and through the dedication and hard work of the extended network of the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) staff, sessional employees, schools and long-standing contract suppliers, many of whom work longer than official hours to ensure exams are delivered effectively and that all students are provided the opportunity to perform at their best.

Disappointingly, in many cases, long hours and hard work are needed to compensate for undocumented processes and limited investment in systems to support the effort of the workforce.

Much was done in 2025 to tackle these gaps. More will be needed in 2026 and beyond to repeat and sustain the successful outcome in 2025.

This Summary Report details the work the VCAA did to mitigate risks in the end-to-end process. It also identifies areas where further work is required to support future delivery and relieve the pressures on staff.

It is the culmination of 13 months working alongside the Department of Education (DE) and VCAA management and staff to interrogate complex systems and processes designed to develop and deliver the VCE exams. I am grateful for their open engagement with myself and my team and the insights they provided. Their continuing willingness to innovate, lead and collaborate will be even more important as the 2026 exam process begins amid broader changes resulting from the Blacher Review, in addition to suggestions from my interim reports. I look forward to working with the Department and the VCAA again in 2026 to help safeguard the integrity of the VCE exams.

Margaret Crawford PSM

Independent Monitor

Executive summary

Overview of the work of the Independent Monitor

The role of the Independent Monitor

In response to issues arising from the 2024 VCE examinations, the Minister for Education asked the Secretary of DE to establish an Independent Monitor to provide assurance over the VCAA's end-to-end preparation and delivery of the 2025 VCE exams.

The purpose of the Independent Monitor was to provide independent advice as well as additional specific assurance and oversight regarding the VCAA's end-to-end process of preparing, producing and managing the 2025 VCE examinations, including compliance with legislative obligations and published guidelines.

The Independent Monitor was provided support by a specialist team from a third-party organisation with governance, change management, audit and project management expertise.

The scope of this assurance review encompassed each stage of the 2025 VCE exam preparation and delivery process, outlined below:

- 1 – Establishment and induction of exam panels
- 2 – Exam writing
- 3 – Production of exams and supplementary material
- 4 – Checking of exams and supplementary material
- 5A – Printing and distribution of exams and supplementary material
- 5B – Conduct and management of exam process

Purpose of this report

This report provides an overall assessment of the 2025 VCE exams and consolidates the findings and improvements that were identified in the Independent Monitor's six interim reports prepared over the course of the 2025 VCE exam period.

The 2025 VCE exam preparation and delivery process was managed effectively with the VCAA achieving its aim to deliver error-free exams for students.

The considerable effort and focused oversight from management, staff, and other contributors from within and external to the VCAA collectively contributed to this positive outcome.

This outcome was not without challenge. The exam preparation and delivery process is complex, largely manual and time constrained, with risks inherent in each stage. Some inaccuracies or transcription errors are almost unavoidable, but the VCAA is committed to identifying and correcting these wherever possible and ensuring that no student is disadvantaged by any inadvertent error.

While the conduct of the 2025 VCE exams was broadly effective, further improvements and investment are needed to make the process in future years sustainable as well as efficient. The delivery of the VCE exams is overly reliant on the knowledge and efforts of experienced people to produce and deliver high-quality exams and assessments. Repeatable and ongoing success requires robust processes and fit-for-purpose systems to minimise key-person dependency and ensure efficiency and sustainable delivery.

In 2026, the VCAA will see significant organisational transformation in response to previous reviews. This must be managed along with the pressures of live exam delivery. It will be more important than ever to safeguard the integrity of the VCE exams and uphold public trust while the VCAA implements wide-ranging reforms and transitions to new leadership.

Context of the VCE exam preparation and delivery process

About VCE in 2025

The VCE exams are the culmination of 12 years of school for more than 65,000 students across Victoria each year.

In 2025, 167 exams were offered, including written, oral and performance assessments. And pleasingly, against a backdrop of errors, reviews and leadership changes throughout 2022-2024, the 2025 VCE exam series was managed effectively by the VCAA.

The process to develop, deliver and assess exams is complex, largely manual and time constrained.

It begins anew each year and spans some 18 months with an immovable deadline in December when students are issued their results.

In addition to VCAA staff who direct and manage the process, a large sessional workforce is engaged to write exams, to supervise their conduct at 583 locations in Victoria and a small number interstate and internationally, to process the millions of responses to questions asked and then to mark each response and record results.

Very little of this process is automated. Instead, the many interconnected steps and handover points amongst teams, contract employees and third-party providers are largely manual, managed by the many individuals involved in the process, but heavily reliant on the long-term experience and knowledge of a few.

In this context, mistakes, like transmission or printing errors, are almost inevitable. The controls instituted by the VCAA are designed to prevent and identify anomalies and wherever possible correct these to ensure students are not disadvantaged.

The inherent risks within the process

In addition to the factors listed above that heighten the risk of error, there are a number of operational risks inherent in the exam development and assessment process that the VCAA must manage and mitigate. These include:

- security of exam papers to prevent early release
- consistent quality and level of challenge of each exam
- fair and consistent assessment of each student
- ensuring errors are not introduced during the design, editing and printing process
- ensuring questions are original and derived from the curriculum
- sourcing sufficient resources with the required capability and free from any conflicts
- access to reliable third-party suppliers for materials, secure transport, scanning and processing technology

- managing slippage or delays that might impact the hard deadline
- managing key person risk given inconsistent documentation and systems to support the process
- managing Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) of employees and contractors given limited process automation and long working hours, and
- managing the production of alternative format exam papers and operational logistics of students requiring Special Examination Arrangements (SEAs).

VCAA's risk management approach for effective delivery of VCE 2025

The VCAA has managed the development, delivery and assessment of the VCE exams in Victoria since 1987. Accordingly, risk mitigation is built into largely repeatable processes and systems.

Foremost, the VCAA relies on the dedication, knowledge and experience of a very committed workforce. Staff and contract employees place the best interest of students at the forefront of all they do. The VCAA works with reliable contracted suppliers who are well-versed with their requirements, and engage with schools and academic institutions to support the process. While the process is mostly manual, some elements are enabled by aging technology that reconciles exam papers, distribution centres and student responses.

In view of the errors identified in previous years and responding to the findings and recommendations of reviews, the VCAA increased Board and Executive oversight and introduced additional measures in 2025 to ensure the development of high-quality exams delivered with no adverse impact to any student.

Key initiatives included:

- refreshing Board membership to strengthen governance skills and appointing the Secretary of DE as Chair
- establishing an executive-level taskforce that met weekly to track the progress of exams and resolve emerging issues
- appointing a senior executive to manage the end-to-end process of exam development and delivery
- enhanced documentation of the exam development process supported by checklists for staff to follow
- mandated use of the Asana project management tool to track and report progress against milestones
- engagement of business analysts to document the distribution and assessment processes, which are currently heavily reliant on the knowledge and experience of a small number of long-term employees

- additional resources to support Exam Development Managers (EDMs, who act as project managers for each exam during development) and to supplement the design, editing and printing processes
- face-to-face meetings between Panel members, EDMs, and Curriculum Managers (CMs) to review and agree exam content
- additional quality checks at numerous stages of the process
- training in project management for staff, and training from the University of Cambridge in writing examination questions
- scenario planning to prepare for unforeseen events, and
- daily meetings of stream leads and triage of inquiries during exam conduct.

Remaining challenges and improvements needed

The 2025 VCE exams outcome, while successful, placed considerable pressure on staff and was overly dependent on their hard work, knowledge and experience to deliver quality exams and assessments.

Changes were being made to the 2025 delivery process as it was underway. These were not always well communicated, leading to inconsistent implementation and some repeat work. This generated frustration for VCAA staff and the broader network of sessional employees.

Further improvements to systems and processes are needed to relieve the pressures on staff and to ensure the successful 2025 outcome is repeatable, sustainable and more efficient.

Recognising that the exam production process is continuous, with the following years' exams starting again before the last series is completed, reform and improvement needs to be staged and guided by a VCAA Board vision for the future conduct of exams.

That vision should include the role technology should play in each stage of the process, including exam formats. It should also consider opportunities to partner with external providers for some of the more menial tasks currently undertaken by staff and casual employees, particularly at the processing and assessment stage.

A clear workforce plan identifying the resources and capabilities required to deliver on this vision, along with a roadmap and budget estimates, would be an outcome of this process.

While the work to develop a future vision is underway, continuous improvement to the current process is also required. Priorities should include:

- Further documentation of the end-to-end exam development process and the critical path to ensure timely and quality delivery. The scope of this work should include all exam formats, not just written exams, and the links to other business units like the

Student Records and Results Unit (SRRU, a unit within the VCAA that manages the final step of the VCE process) and other external agencies like the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC).

- Support of, and investment in, the core processing systems used in the Assessment and Reporting Division (ARD, the business division that manages the delivery and assessment of VCE exams) to eliminate manual workarounds, automate scheduling and ensure that the assessment process is not delayed by system backlogs.
- Vigilance in regard to cyber security and implementation of a secure system for collaboration and sharing of exam materials.
- Clarify roles and accountabilities for all participants in the exam development, delivery and assessment process along with business rules for escalation and final signoff of exam content.
- Wherever possible, provide greater certainty to employees and contractors regarding the duration of their engagement, enabled by rolling contracts for sessional staff supported by formal performance assessments.
- Regularise employment conditions and remuneration to reflect the intensity and duration of the work, including during peak periods.
- Ensure all employees receive necessary training in their role and that guidance is up to date and accessible through an enforced knowledge management system, and
- Better promote casual employment opportunities to the sector.

Finally, given the extent of leadership changes and the importance of reform at the VCAA, the organisation will need to establish structured governance over program implementation and change management. The scale of this task should not be underestimated and left to busy executives on top of their already large portfolio responsibilities.