RESEARCH PRIORITY AREAS

2021-22

VICTORIA
State
Government

Education
and Training

CONTEXT

The Department of Education and Training (the Department) is committed to developing and promoting a high-quality, innovative and contemporary evidence base to inform decision-making and the design and implementation of effective programs and policies. Research, alongside evaluation and data analysis, is fundamental to building an effective evidence base, and for the continuous improvement of the education system.

Achieving the best learning and development outcomes for all Victorian learners remains at the heart of the Department's vision and the Education State agenda. The Education State reforms mean that we look to the future with an education system that is centred around evidence-informed teaching and learning; student inclusion and wellbeing; investment in early childhood services; vibrant school facilities; and successful transition to further education, training and employment.

The Department has an ambitious research agenda and consultations with the research community has informed the development of the Department's Research Priority Areas for 2021-22. These priorities are underpinned by the Department's vision of achieving excellence in educational outcomes for all children and young people. The intent of identifying Research Priority Areas is to:

▶ encourage researchers to investigate critical areas of relevance for the Department

▶ promote high-quality research and foster partnerships and collaboration with the research community

▶ support and encourage research applications relevant to the evidence needs of the Department and maximise benefits of research undertaken within Victorian schools and early childhood services

▶ target resources and investments towards research that is relevant and future- focused.

The Research Priority Areas contain seven themes and associated research questions. If you are interested in exploring the themes or questions further, please contact the Department at: **research@education.vic.gov.au**

Research Priority Areas:

Driving workforce excellence and sustainability

Engagement and partnerships with families and communities

Post-school transitions, pathways and further education and training

Supporting all students to achieve, engage and be happy, healthy, and resilient

Pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, and outcomes

Early childhood education investment and impacts

Sector structure and market design

Driving workforce excellence and sustainability

RATIONALE

The Victorian Government has set ambitious targets for improving education as part of its commitment to making Victoria the Education State. To meet these targets, **Victoria requires high quality teachers** in every classroom and setting. The Department is committed to **build workforce capability and support teacher and educator supply** that is essential to maintaining and improving the quality of early childhood education, school education and higher education.

Victoria's changing population is placing additional demands on our services and workforces, with planning and support required for staff particularly across different education settings and locations. In addition to this, with the emergence of new pedagogies, technological advances and skills required for specific teaching roles, Government schools continue to experience recruitment challenges, particularly in some regional locations.

The Department **values research which investigates areas for improvement and new actions** that address **workforce supply and demand, attraction and retention challenges across schools and early childhood education**, while also **maintaining teacher quality**.

Attracting and retaining high-quality education staff

▶ **How can we attract and retain high-quality staff across the early childhood and school education sectors?**

  ▶ What are national and international evidence-based strategies to retain the best teachers and principals in the system?

  ▶ What are national and international evidence-based strategies to attract and retain the best allied health, wellbeing and inclusion workforces?

  ▶ What are effective strategies for engaging with Victorian registered teachers that are not working full-time (or not working at all) and re-engage them back into the system?

  ▶ How can we increase the diversity of the education workforce to respond to the diverse needs and backgrounds of young people in schools and early childhood services?

  ▶ What are successful national and international supply side initiatives to attract and retain quality teachers?

  ▶ What are effective strategies to increase teacher supply in areas of demand such as secondary schools and in rural and regional areas?

  ▶ How can we develop a sophisticated workforce planning model to better understand workforce capability and capacity?

▶ **How can Victoria improve the public perception of the status of teaching as a profession to attract high-quality recruits?**

  ▶ What are national and international best-practice strategies for improving the graduate year for new teachers and transform the first years of their career?

New and specialist roles in education

▶ **How can we better support and grow the cohort of specialist teachers in Victoria?**

  ▸ How many teachers have specialist qualifications and are not working in specialist roles across Victoria? What are the reasons for not working in specialist roles?

  ▸ What is the impact of specialist teachers on student learning and achievement?

  ▸ Where and how many teachers with 'Inclusive Education' expertise are deployed across the system, and how can we make best use of their knowledge and expertise?

  ▸ What are the challenges and impacts with out of field teaching on student outcomes across Victoria and how can schools/principals be supported to understand and minimise the impact of out of field teaching?

Teacher quality and effectiveness

▶ **What are best practice strategies for supporting teachers and leaders to improve performance and have increased impact?**

▶ **What are effective best-practice teaching and learning approaches in Victorian classrooms and how can these be shared across the system to improve teacher effectiveness?**

▶ **How can we drive excellence across the teacher workforce?**

  ▸ What are the most effective approaches to improving the cultural capability of educators and leaders to improve student education and training outcomes?

  ▸ What motivates high-performing teachers, and how this can be used to inform policy frameworks and local decision-making to aid teacher retention?

  ▸ How can we strengthen the workforce capability and expertise across the system to better support students with disabilities?

▶ **How can school-level decision-makers best allocate resources to improve outcomes for their school communities?**

▶ **How can workforce standards be introduced and implemented consistently across the unregulated adult and community education sector workforce?**

▶ **How are Casual Relief Teachers (CRT) deployed across the system and what is the impact of these teachers on student learning?**

Professional development and leadership

▶ **What professional learning for teachers and principals is effective in delivering the greatest impact on student outcomes?**

  ▸ What are successful models of training and development in the early childhood sector, particularly for low SES families and communities?

  ▸ What are the developmental needs of school leaders in Victoria? What are the most effective professional development programs?

▶ What are best practice strategies in supporting regions and networks to develop school leaders?

▶ How can we drive excellence for certain cohorts of the teacher workforce, in particular, those in rural and regional areas, those hardest hit by COVID-19, bushfires, drought and industry transitions?

▶ What are the professional development and support needs of teachers and principals working in rural and regional areas, and how these are best met?

▶ What are the leadership capabilities necessary to create an effective environment to enhance student learning during challenging times such as the COVID-19 pandemic?

▶ What is the impact of the COVID-19 disruptions on teacher development and how can we best support them?

Engagement and partnerships with families and communities

RATIONALE

The Department considers **effective family and community engagement a key factor for positive education outcomes**. Family and community engagement can have a major impact on student learning, attendance and behaviour regardless of the social or cultural background of the family. Research has also shown that **effective schools have high levels of parental and community involvement**.

The Department acknowledges that each education setting represents a unique community, setting and context, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach. To sustain family and community engagement over the long term, further investigation of appropriate models, supports and resources is required, that **meets the needs of the learner and family and equips education staff with the requisite practice to engage with families and community in a holistic manner**. Further research is also required about what approaches are impactful, how and why approaches succeed or fail, and the mechanisms of impact.

The Department encourages research which provides evidence concerning complex relationships between early childhood centres, schools, students, parents, and the broader community.

Engagement and partnering with families

▶ **How can school staff and teachers support parents and families to be more engaged in student learning?**

　▶ How can engagement and partnership with families of pre-school children support the building of foundational literacy and numeracy skills?

▶ **How can schools and early childhood services work effectively with families and communities to better support the diverse needs of students and families?**

　▶ How can schools and teachers strengthen relationships with families that face significant barriers to engaging with schools and are hard to reach?

　▶ How can schools and early childhood services better engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities to improve student/learner engagement and learning outcomes?

　▶ How can schools and early childhood services better support families and students with a disability to improve student engagement and learning outcomes?

　▶ How can schools and early childhood services better support families and students/learners with a disability?

　▶ How can schools and early childhood services better address systemic issues that may disproportionately affect families and communities that face significant barriers (i.e. mental health; family violence; housing/income insecurity; COVID-19 etc.)?

　▶ How can schools and early childhood services better support families and students impacted by COVID-19?

Engaging and partnering with community

▶ **How can schools best engage with community partners/services to help families support students, particularly those at risk of disengagement and those in rural and remote areas?**

▶ **How can schools best engage with community partners/services to support families and students most impacted by COVID-19?**

Post-school transitions, pathways and further education and training

RATIONALE

The Department is committed to and is making significant investment to **create a stronger and more flexible education system** and to ensure that the choice of high-quality vocational and applied learning is available to every Victorian, particularly those with additional vulnerabilities and from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is to ensure that the Department **meets the changing needs of students**, the **Victorian community**, and **the demands of a rapidly changing, globalised job market**.

The Department encourages research that will enable all **learners to realise their potential** and make informed choices that will equip them with the skills and training to improve their education and life outcomes. The Department **also values research which will inform effective transition strategies** at a systemic and local level, and which helps deliver positive outcomes for learners.

Improved transitions and pathways

▶ **How can we facilitate lifelong learning by improving pathways between VET, adult education and higher education?**

▶ **How can we best support young people to transition from school to further education and/or work that provides further training opportunities?**

  ▶ How can we more effectively track student pathways and outcomes post-secondary school?

  ▶ How can we better equip students on VET pathways with the skills needed for successful transition into further training/ education or employment?

  ▶ How do student and family aspirations impact pathways, and what factors impact aspirations, particularly in rural and regional areas?

  ▶ How do schools and/or school communities define post-school success?

▶ **What are the emerging trends and impacts of COVID-19 on the choices young people are making related to post school pathways into employment and engagement?**

▶ **What are best-practice national and international place-based approaches to develop effective partnership between schools and industries?**

  ▶ How can we better align VET training and respond to local industry needs and growth sectors?

A better understanding of TAFE/vocational students and their outcomes

▶ **What is the level of need for foundation skills in TAFEs and training providers?**

   ▶ What are the types of groups seeking foundation skills? What is the distribution of this need across TAFEs and training providers?

   ▶ How do our current supports interact with the rest of the system on providing for their needs?

▶ **How can we better understand the short and long-term VET/employment outcomes of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, young people with disability or those experiencing vulnerability in other ways?**

Supporting all students to achieve, engage and be happy, healthy, and resilient

RATIONALE

The Department is focused on efforts to create an **environment that allows students to achieve their best** as well as build broader capabilities that will set students up for success. The Department recognises that **student safety and wellbeing, health, engagement and inclusion have positive impact on academic achievement**. The Department has undertaken significant reforms across the education sector to make inclusive education part of everyday practice in all schools and classrooms and improve the achievement, participation, and wellbeing outcomes for all students.

The release of the report of the Mental Health Royal Commission and resulting successful 2021-22 Budget bids has also put a sharp focus on the **positive role of education within a system-wide approach to mental health and wellbeing and building resilience**.

The Department values **research that supports the health and wellbeing of all staff and learners** and contributes to evidence-based best practice and programs to improve wellbeing outcomes of education communities. It further encourages research that connects schools with their communities,

supports an inclusive approach to diversity, and reinforces benefit of positive behaviours and attitudes to building healthy relationships.

Health, wellbeing and development across educational communities

▸ **What is the impact of environmental factors such as COVID-19, bushfires, floods and drought on the health and wellbeing of students, teachers and principals, including in rural and regional areas?**

▸ **What are best practices enabling government services and government funded services to provide coordinated cross-sector supports to improve child outcomes?**

▸ **What are the most effective wellbeing and inclusion practices and programs in schools that lead to improved learning outcomes?**

▸ **How can we best identify and implement interventions that promote safety and wellbeing in schools to address mental health and family violence?**

▸ **What are the most effective physical wellbeing interventions in schools (i.e. physical activity and healthy eating)?**

▸ **What is the impact of remote and flexible learning on student learning, engagement and wellbeing? How can schools support students to maximise the benefits of remote and flexible learning?**

Supporting students and families

▶ **How can we build on existing best practices to improve social cohesion, inclusiveness and school-wide positive behaviour in schools?**

▶ **What are effective school-wide approaches to promote and build resilience, voice, agency, leadership, and self-regulation for all students?**

▶ **What are the most effective ways to strengthen students' sense of global citizenship, and develop their own sense of identity and citizenship in changing times and diverse communities?**

Supporting students and families with additional needs

▶ **How can we better identify and support students with additional learning needs? What are best practices for social cohesion and inclusiveness in schools?**

▶ How can we engage with vulnerable students and families to improve school attendance and engagement in rural and regional areas?

▶ How can we strengthen the workforce capability and expertise across the system to better support students with disabilities?

▶ How can we better allocate resources to foster inclusive mainstream education that meets the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people?

▶ What are effective models for early identification of factors that drive student vulnerability (i.e. family violence, mental health etc.)?

▶ What are effective models of inclusion and early interventions for priority groups e.g. low socioeconomic status (SES), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI), and highly vulnerable children and young people?

▶ How can we build our understanding of contributing factors that lead to aggressive, violent or bullying behaviours?

▶ What are best-practice supports and interventions to address aggressive, violent or bullying behaviours, including prevention strategies for those at greatest risk of displaying these behaviours?

▶ What are effective models of engaging with and supporting vulnerable students and families in remote and flexible learning?

Pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, and outcomes

RATIONALE

Improving student learning outcomes continues to be a key focus for the Department. **Implementation of evidence based pedagogical models and teaching and learning approaches** that adapt and fit student, school and subject context is a key priority area for the Department. The Department values research which provides **evidence on effective approaches and curriculum development and implementation**, areas for improvement and effective teacher practice that meets student needs including those students that have additional vulnerabilities or disadvantage.

Research that investigates effectiveness of assessment methods that help students **improve their learning and develop agency** are also of particular interest to the Department as they provide vital evidence on student progress and teacher practice. Assessments are useful tools to analyse and draw conclusions about the effectiveness of teaching practices, identify areas for improvement, and address student individual needs.

Effective classroom practices high-quality teaching staff

▶ **What pedagogical practices and strategies are most effective for improving student outcomes?**

  ▸ How can we better transfer successful teaching and learning practices and behaviours across education settings to drive student success?

▶ **What are effective literacy and numeracy programs in schools?**

  ▸ What does effective implementation look like for these programs?

  ▸ What are best practice strategies for delivering education online, particularly for young children?

▶ **What pedagogical practices are most effective for supporting/improving the outcomes for students with disability?**

▶ **What pedagogical practices and strategies are most effective in remote teaching and learning?**

▶ **What kind of pedagogical practices and strategies improve the learning outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners?**

▶ **How effective has consent education been in developing students' understanding of sexual consent in Victoria?**

▶ **What are effective national and international models of consent education for different age groups?**

▶ **How can we better deliver Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum – in a Victorian context?**

Improving student outcomes

▶ **What can we learn from schools that have showed sustained improvement in student outcomes over time (i.e. VCE scores; NAPLAN)?**

▶ **What are effective place-based supports and practices (interventions) that lead to improved student outcomes?**

▶ **What are contextual factors (in schools or across the system) that are leading to improved student outcomes?**

Supporting student learning through data and assessment

▶ **How can we better understand and utilise the differentiating assessment practices to support the needs of students (schools, TAFEs)? How do we balance between the need for consistency and the need for differentiation?**

▶ **How do we implement a consistent assessment and data coaching model across the system?**

▶ **How do we effectively assess capabilities and dispositions of senior secondary students?**

▶ **How can teachers best use data to inform and improve their practices and support students to maximise their development and outcomes?**

 ▶ How can we most effectively use data to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes in schools and early childhood settings?

 ▶ How can we most effectively support students to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes as they transition from Primary to Secondary school?

▶ **How can we most effectively use data to inform differentiated teaching to support diverse learners across our schools and early childhood settings?**

▶ **What strategies and initiatives are most effective in helping educators and policy makers monitor and measure impact and improve practice?**

▶ **What is the impact of the learning specialist role in schools and the role of observations and demonstration lessons? How has this reflective practice enhanced teacher inquiry and learning?**

Early childhood education investment and impacts

## Early childhood investment and practices

RATIONALE

There is strong evidence that the period from birth to five years of age is vital for children's development and has a positive impact on their future outcomes. The Department recognises that **access to high quality early childhood education can counteract the disadvantage some children experience**, improve their social and cognitive development, and provide them with an opportunity to achieve school readiness, wellbeing, and positive health outcomes.

The Victorian Government's significant investment in 3-year-old kinder underscores the importance of early childhood education. The Department encourages **research that investigates evidence based practice, effectiveness and impact of early childhood programs** and ways to drive quality improvement across the sector to foster student wellbeing and safety. The Department encourages research that examines the **effectiveness and impact of early childhood education for vulnerable and disadvantaged children**.

- **How does social and emotional safety and wellbeing in early childhood influence an individual's developmental trajectory?**

- **What is the impact of COVID-19 on the development trajectory of children in early childhood?**

- **What are strategies and practices that help prepare children for successful learning in early childhood learning centres and schools?**

- **What is the impact of 3-year-old kinder?**
  - Who is not attending? Why are they not attending?

- **To what extent does the physical environment contribute to outcomes of children in early childhood?**

- **What additional supports are required in early childhood to maximise development and outcomes for young people?**

- **What are the outcomes of universal kindergartens compared to specialist approaches?**

- **How useful are the Victorian Government's current ways of measuring and rating early childhood education providers? Do they correlate with meaningful increases in the effectiveness of providers?**
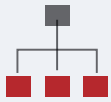
Sector structure and market design

RATIONALE

Growth, demographic changes and associated impacts such as workforce shortages and increased demand for student support services will continue to be a challenge for the Department. The significant population growth across Victoria is also **increasing demand for early childhood, schools and higher education services across the State**. More facilities will be required to meet demand.

The long-term economic trend towards a more complex, competitive and highly skilled job market means Victoria's Vocational Education and Training (VET) system will also need to adapt. To achieve this, the VET system must ensure it is of high quality, accessible to all working age Victorians in an equitable and efficient manner and responsive to the needs of students, employers and industries.

The Department encourages research that examines demographic changes and demand for services; education areas and their relevance to particular industries; education pathways and required skills for in high-demand industries; and research that leverages Victoria's infrastructure program and education and training opportunities particularly in regional settings.

Sector need and market design

▶ **How should the geographical placement of early childhood services be decided – what measures should determine this (including environmental factors)?**

▶ **What influences parental choice in early childhood education?**

  ▶ What informs market participants? What impact does price play in selecting services? How sensitive are parents to price? Are quality and price related?

▶ **What influences parent choice in school education settings?**

  ▶ How can factors like school academic performance, inclusion, infrastructure, specialised support, and location influence parent choice?

▶ **How can we instil pride and confidence in Victorian government schools?**

▶ **How do we incentivise employers to upskill workers in areas of skills gaps in the labour market?**

  ▶ How do we match gaps to courses? How do we ensure we are targeting skills areas that are of interest to employers and students?

  ▶ How can we better align VET training and higher education and respond to local industry needs and growth sectors?

▶ **What is the educational and social impact of Victoria's International Student Program on schools and the broader community**

▶ **What is the impact of COVID-19 on education systems and what adjustments need to be made to the sector and market to meet new and emerging needs?**

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