

## CHAPTER 15: QUALITY HEALTH AND EDUCATION

### Key findings of the Committee:

- 15.1 Actions under a reform agenda comprising A new blueprint for alcohol and other drug treatment services 2009-2013, the Victorian Alcohol Action plan and the Amphetamine-Type Substances Strategy are scheduled to be progressively implemented over the next four years.
- 15.2 The Government needs to develop and release publicly a statement that sets out the timing of particular action plans to be developed over the next four years under the new blueprint strategy.
- 15.3 With an integrated policy framework in place to address drug-related issues over the medium term, the Committee considers that it will be important for no duplication to occur between blueprint activities and those earmarked under other policy initiatives.
- 15.4 The Committee noted that during the extreme heat event that Victoria experienced between 26 January 2009 and 1 February 2009, more people died than normal (the total number of deaths was 980 compared to a mean of 606 for the previous five years).
- 15.5 During the heatwave there was a substantial increase in the emergency case load of various health providers such as Ambulance Victoria and emergency departments of public hospitals (e.g. the metropolitan emergency case load handled by Ambulance Victoria increased by 25 per cent, while emergency departments experienced a 12 per cent increase in presentations).
- 15.6 A state heatwave plan titled Heatwave Plan for Victoria 2009-10: Protecting health and reducing harm from heatwaves was released by the Department of Health in December 2009, with a new Heat Health Alert System developed to notify relevant organisations, including health and community service providers, of impending heatwaves to trigger heatwave plans and responses.
- 15.7 As the Heatwave Plan for Victoria is to be reviewed after every summer and continuously revised in order to minimise the public health impact of heatwaves, due to its critical nature, it will be important that modifications are clearly documented and effectively communicated to relevant parties.
- 15.8 Victoria continues to have the highest proportion of 20-24 year olds who have completed Year 12 or equivalent of all the Australian states. The Victorian rate was 86.8 per cent according to 2009 figures compared to 84.5 per cent nationally. In terms of the supplementary measure for 19 year olds maintained by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the completion rate was 80.0 per cent, 4.3 percentage points higher than the 2001 Victorian result of 75.7 per cent.

**15.9** The Committee observed the proportion of early school leavers unemployed after six months improved in the first two years from the 2003 base year (18.5 per cent, 2003; 15.4 per cent, 2004; 14.3 per cent, 2005), worsened marginally in 2006 (14.6 per cent), improved in 2007 (13.5 per cent), but deteriorated considerably in 2008 (17.9 per cent).

**15.10** In the 2008-09 State Budget, the Victorian Government allocated \$71.4 million over four years to fund specific new school improvement initiatives that include interventions in underperforming schools. Schools identified as in need of additional targeted support will engage in initiatives such as building teacher capacity, timely student intervention and support for teachers not achieving at expected levels.

**15.11** After an appropriate lead time has elapsed, the Committee considers that the Department should evaluate whether interventions in underperforming schools, incentives for high performance and the expanded role for school networks have been effective in improving educational outcomes.

**15.12** The Committee's review of the NAPLAN results showed that:

- Victorian students outperformed the Australian averages for the reading, writing and numeracy assessment domains during 2009;
- there was similar achievement in the percentage of Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 students at or above the national minimum standard in 2009 compared to 2008;
- while the Government did not specify writing targets, Victorian students exceeded all of the reading and numeracy targets outlined in the 2009-10 Budget; and
- Victoria performed very strongly in comparison to the other states and territories in terms of the percentage of Victorian students at or above the national minimum standard in reading, writing and numeracy in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 for 2009.

## **15.1. Introduction**

Quality Health and Education is the second *Growing Victoria Together* vision examined by the Committee in this year's Financial and Performance Outcomes Report. This chapter contains outcome-related analysis and comment on government activities which support the Quality Health and Education vision.

## **15.2. High quality, accessible health and community services**

### **15.2.1 Responding to alcohol and other drug use concerns – development of action plans and reporting**

As the future outlook section of the Department of Human Services' annual report for 2007-08 included, as a priority action, launching the Alcohol and other drug (AOD) treatment services blueprint strategy and developing action plans,<sup>403</sup> the Committee was interested in gaining an understanding of the activities undertaken by the Department and timelines that had been set for the development of the abovementioned AOD action plans.

403 Department of Human Services, *2007-08 Annual Report*, October 2009, p.40

The Department advised the Committee that:<sup>404</sup>

- a reform agenda designed to respond to alcohol and drug use concerns comprises the blueprint strategy, the Victorian Alcohol Action Plan and the Amphetamine-Type Substances Strategy;
- actions are scheduled to be progressively implemented over the next four years;
- early effort is being focused on various key areas that include workforce development, promoting family-focused interventions, sector development and indigenous issues;
- in addition to initiatives already announced, initial priorities include reviews and development plans for pharmacotherapy and treatment service models; and
- further priority areas are to be identified and initiated progressively.

The Committee also noted that the blueprint would sit alongside and complement other related government initiatives, including the whole-of-government alcohol and drug prevention strategy and the new mental health strategy.<sup>405</sup>

To assist in guiding reform priorities and investment decisions, the Committee considers that a program needs to be developed and released publicly that sets out the timing of the particular action plans to be developed over the next four years under the policy *A new blueprint for alcohol and other drug treatment services, 2009-2013*. While it is commendable that the blueprint outlines the action plans to be developed, timeframes consisting of elapsed time for developing each plan and key partners, it is now timely for the Government to report on when developmental work is to commence on each plan.

The Committee maintains that actions under the blueprint should be prioritised based on risk to provide a basis for when action plans are to be completed. With an integrated policy framework in place to address drug-related issues over the medium term, it will be important that no duplication occurs between blueprint activities and those earmarked under other policy initiatives.

The Committee notes that expert alcohol and drug sector and health practitioner advice for the reform initiatives is to be provided by an expert advisory group, while co-ordination and strategic oversight of the reform agenda is being provided by a steering committee consisting of senior officers from the Department of Health.<sup>406</sup>

The Committee also believes that to ensure an efficient and effective approach is applied to addressing drug-related concerns, a reporting regime should be developed that discloses:

- outcomes progressively achieved under the entire suite of alcohol and other drug treatment policy initiatives; and
- which particular initiatives have been successful/unsuccessful in meeting their intended aims.

404 Department of Human Services, response to the Committee's 2008-09 Financial and Performance Outcomes Questionnaire – Part Two, received 18 February 2010, p.47

405 Department of Health, *A new blueprint for alcohol and other drug treatment services 2009-2013: Client centred, service-focused*, < <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/drugservices/downloads/blueprint09-13.pdf>>, accessed 29 March 2010

406 Department of Human Services, response to the Committee's 2008-09 Financial and Performance Outcomes Questionnaire – Part Two, received 18 February 2010, p.47

- Recommendation 42:** The Department of Health advise program timelines on the various actions specified in A New Blueprint for Alcohol and other Drug Treatment Services, 2009-2013.
- Recommendation 43:** The Department of Health prioritise the various actions specified in the blueprint for alcohol and other drug treatment services, 2009-2013 based on risk to provide a basis for the order in which action plans are to be completed.
- Recommendation 44:** In developing action plans, the Department of Health avoid duplication with activities earmarked under other drug-related policies.
- Recommendation 45:** The Department of Health develop a reporting framework that discloses the outcomes progressively achieved under the entire suite of alcohol and other drug treatment policy initiatives.

### **15.2.2 Victoria's Cancer Action Plan 2008-11: setting milestones**

Research by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found that, on average, the annual number of new cases of cancer diagnosed in Victoria between 2001 and 2005 amounted to 22,965.<sup>407</sup>

Based on 2005 data, the risk of an Australian male being diagnosed with cancer before the age of 75 was one in three (before the age of 85 was one in two), whereas the risk for an Australian female being diagnosed with cancer before reaching the age of 75 was one in four (before the age of 85, one in three).<sup>408</sup> For all cancers combined (excluding non-melanoma skin cancer), 5-year annual averages between 2001-2005 showed that Victoria had the second lowest incidence rate of cancer among the states and territories:<sup>409</sup>

- Queensland (494.4 cases per 100,000 persons);
- Tasmania (479.4)
- New South Wales (471.3)
- Western Australia (466.6)
- South Australia (457.6)
- the Australian Capital Territory (453.5)
- **Victoria (448.9)**
- the Northern Territory (425.4)

---

407 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and Australasian Association of Cancer Registries, *Cancer in Australia: an overview, 2008*, December 2008, p.65

408 Commonwealth Government, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Cancer – Australian cancer incidence statistics update, February 2010*, <<http://www.aihw.gov.au/cancer/index.cfm>>, accessed 30 March 2010

409 Commonwealth Government, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Cancer – Australian cancer incidence statistics update, February 2010*, <<http://www.aihw.gov.au/cancer/index.cfm>>, accessed 30 March 2010

Around 70 Victorians per day are newly diagnosed with cancer.<sup>410</sup> With this background in mind, the Committee noted that the Department disclosed in its 2008-09 Annual Report that, among a range of reforms and strategies to improve the health and wellbeing of the community, *Victoria's Cancer Action Plan 2008-11*, launched in December 2008, outlined a vision to 'increase cancer five-year survival rates by ten per cent by 2015'. Importantly, the plan also includes increased screening, immunisation and research.<sup>411</sup>

The Committee noted the Premier stated in the Plan that:<sup>412</sup>

*I have nominated tackling cancer as one of my top priorities for Government ... we will make sure that Victorians have access to the best possible cancer care, informed by world-class research. We will invest in innovative prevention and treatment strategies in order to improve care and save lives.*

A review by the Committee of *Victoria's Cancer Action Plan 2008-11* revealed that timelines had not been developed for all of the tasks identified in Plan. While the Plan is a comprehensive document that discloses numerous targets and milestones, there are some targets where the plan does not indicate a time period for when the task is to be completed.<sup>413</sup>

To illustrate cancer-related initiatives undertaken at the health service level, the Committee's inquiries revealed that Southern Health had worked collaboratively with other providers to improve patient treatment and quality of life through the Southern Melbourne Integrated Cancer Service (SMICS). Established in 2004, SMICS is collaboration between Alfred Health, Cabrini Health, Peninsula Health and Southern Health. The purpose of SMICS is to facilitate and support improvements in the integration and co-ordination of cancer services within and across 10 tumour streams. The Committee was advised that a range of projects had contributed to improving patient treatment and quality of life outcomes for cancer patients during 2008-09, e.g. use of a:<sup>414</sup>

- Multidisciplinary Team Pilot Project;
- regional service plan; and
- continuous improvement advisory group.

In inquiring about whether the Department has assigned a timeframe for when all tasks in the plan are to be completed with specific reference to the UV protection strategy and regional research projects identified in the Plan, the Committee was informed that:<sup>415</sup>

- it is anticipated that many targets and milestones will be completed within the timeframe of the Plan, i.e. by the end of the 2011-12 financial year. However, a number of the screening and prevention targets, and the overall survival target, will not be able to be measured for two-three years after this, due to the lag in reporting from the relevant registers (the BreastScreen Register, the PAP Screen Register, the National Bowel

410 Department of Human Services, *Victoria's Cancer Action Plan 2008-11*, December 2008, p.ii

411 Department of Human Services, *Annual Report 2008-09*, p.10

412 Department of Human Services, *Victoria's Cancer Action Plan 2008-11*, December 2008, p.i

413 *ibid.*, pp.56, 60, 64

414 Southern Health, response to the Committee's 2008-09 Financial and Performance Outcomes Questionnaire – Part Two, received 18 February 2010, pp.6–8

415 Department of Human Services, response to the Committee's 2008-09 Financial and Performance Outcomes Questionnaire – Part Two, received 18 February 2010, p.54

Cancer Screening Register and the Victorian Cancer Registry). It is anticipated that reporting against 2012 participation and survival rates will commence from 2014;

- the early stages of development of the UV strategy have commenced. A consultant has been commissioned to conduct an environmental scan (due for completion by March 2010). A draft strategy will then be developed for comment by key stakeholders by mid-year. It is anticipated that the strategy will be completed by December 2010; and
- the Victorian Cancer Agency has directly funded six regional research projects across four rural regions to date, via its Regional Research Capacity Building funding stream. The Agency, which plans to target regional research in its 2010-2011 research funding strategy, expects to exceed its target for this task.

The Committee believes that when an Action Plan is released, it should disclose timelines in the form of milestones for when the targeted actions are to be completed. This is important from a control point of view to ensure that the planned actions are implemented efficiently so that the intended outcomes can be experienced by those Victorians diagnosed with cancer in a timely manner.

**Recommendation 46: The Department of Health ensure that milestones have been established for all targets set out in Victoria's Cancer Action Plan 2008-11 where feasible.**

### **15.2.3 Extreme heat events – improving the resilience of Victorian communities**

The Committee noted that in reporting on the January 2009 heatwave, the Department stated, in part, that:<sup>416</sup>

*International and Australian experiences show that heatwaves increase the incidence of illness and death – particularly among vulnerable community members such as the elderly, people with a pre-existing medical condition and people with a disability.*

*In January and February 2009, Victoria experienced an unprecedented heatwave with three consecutive days of temperatures soaring above 43 degrees Celsius...*

The analysis of health impacts by the Department showed substantial morbidity and mortality related to the heatwave, with associated demands on health services.<sup>417</sup> In reviewing the Department's key findings of the impact of the heatwave, the Committee noted that between 26 January and 1 February 2009:<sup>418</sup>

- 374 more people died than average (the total number of deaths was 980 compared to a mean of 606 for the previous five years); and
- the greatest number of deaths occurred in those 75 years or older (636 compared to an average of 388) – a 64 per cent increase over the average for the same period between 2004 and 2008.

---

416 Department of Human Services, *Annual Report 2008-09*, p.15

417 Department of Human Services, *January 2009 Heatwave in Victoria: an Assessment of Health Impacts*, 6 April 2009, p.iv

418 *ibid.*, pp.iv, 13

The Department did report, however, that mortality can be difficult to measure during heatwaves. The Department found that:<sup>419</sup>

*...deaths tend to occur from exacerbations of chronic medical conditions as well as direct heat related illness, particularly in the frail and elderly. Excess mortality provides a measure of impact, but does not provide information specifically on underlying cause of death.*

The Committee also noted that during the heatwave, there was a substantial increase in the emergency case load of various health providers. For example, while the metropolitan emergency case load handled by Ambulance Victoria increased by 25 per cent, there was a 34 fold increase in cases with direct heat-related conditions (61 per cent of cases were people 75 years or older) and a 2.8 fold increase in cardiac arrest cases. Emergency departments of public hospitals experienced a 12 per cent increase in presentations (37 per cent increase in those 75 years or older) with an 8 fold increase in direct heat related presentations (46 per cent in those 75 years and over).<sup>420</sup>

The Department foreshadowed that the insights gained from its analysis of health impacts of the heatwave that enveloped Victoria between 26 January and 1 February 2009 would inform strategies under development to improve the resilience of Victorian communities to the impacts of extreme heat events.<sup>421</sup>

As the Committee believes from a risk perspective that it is essential for Victoria to have an adequate emergency response in place to cope with challenges such as this in future and minimise the level of health impacts on the Victorian community, the Committee considered it important to delve into the measures taken to address the population health impact of the extreme heat event that Victoria experienced from 26 January to 1 February 2009. The Committee was particularly interested in learning about the key strategies being considered to improve the resilience of Victorian communities to the impacts of extreme heat events, particularly those that are frail and elderly, and the very young as well as the evaluative mechanism under consideration to assess the effectiveness of these strategies.

The Department advised the Committee that the Government identified in 2006 that heatwave planning was a priority, specifically identifying community and local government level as the most appropriate setting for the provision of information, support and services to at-risk populations.<sup>422</sup> The Committee was also told that since 2006, a significant program of work had been undertaken by the Victorian Government which had been targeted at preparing Victorians and the Victorian health and community sector to support Victorians during periods of extreme heat. This body of work informed the development of the state heatwave plan titled *Heatwave Plan for Victoria 2009-10: Protecting health and reducing harm from heatwaves* which was released by the Department of Health in December 2009. According to the Department, the intensity and subsequent impact of the January 2009 heatwave demonstrated that future responses must be based on a statewide understanding of impacts and actions. Greater emphasis is to be placed on coordination and documentation.<sup>423</sup>

419 *ibid.* p.iv

420 *ibid.*

421 *ibid.*, p.iv

422 Department of Human Services, response to the Committee's 2008-09 Financial and Performance Outcomes Questionnaire – Part Two, received 18 February 2010, p.52

423 Department of Health, *Heatwave Plan for Victoria 2009-10: Protecting health and reducing harm from heatwaves*, December 2009, p.1

As part of the Plan, a new Heat Health Alert System has been developed to notify councils, the Department of Health and health and community service providers of impending heatwaves and to trigger heatwave plans and responses.<sup>424</sup>

A range of other initiatives includes:<sup>425</sup>

- the provision of close to \$2 million to local government to support members of their communities most at risk of heat-related illness (a copy of heatwave responses is required to be sent to the Department as part of the funding arrangements);
- funding for the provision of health and wellbeing checks, including new and expanded community registers;
- developing a suite of public health communication resources; and
- establishing a Heat Health Intelligence Surveillance System to monitor and assess the human health impact of a heatwave, which results in the generation of a weekly report on temperature and associated health events.

The Committee acknowledges the extensive framework that has been developed, including the development of heatwave planning at a state and local council level as well as by health and community service organisations, to minimise the health impact of extreme heat and provide a co-ordinated statewide response to heatwaves.

The Committee was pleased to see that the *Heatwave Plan for Victoria 2009-10* will be reviewed after every summer and continuously modified and revised to ensure its effectiveness in minimising the public health impact of heatwaves.<sup>426</sup> The Committee believes that to ensure there is an adequate trail of amendments made to Victoria's Heatwave Plan over time, especially in view of the wide range of parties involved across the state in its implementation, it will be important for modifications to be documented and easily accessible by interested stakeholders. The emergency nature of heatwave responses calls for modifications to the plan to be effectively communicated to relevant stakeholders and for the Government to be accountable for such changes.

**Recommendation 47:      Given the critical nature of heatwave responses, revisions made to the Heatwave Plan for Victoria be documented by the Department of Health on its web site to enhance the dissemination of information to interested parties and improve accountability for modifications that are made over time.**

---

424 Department of Human Services, response to the Committee's 2008-09 Financial and Performance Outcomes Questionnaire – Part Two, received 18 February 2010, p.53

425 *ibid.*

426 Department of Health, *Heatwave Plan for Victoria 2009-10: Protecting health and reducing harm from heatwaves*, December 2009, Foreword

### 15.3. High quality education and training for lifelong learning

#### 15.3.1 *Completion of Year 12 (or its education equivalent) by young people by 2010*

The Committee noted that, in regard to the GVT target for 90 per cent of young people to successfully complete Year 12 or its education equivalent by 2010, the actual proportion achieved for 19 year olds in Victoria had grown from 75.7 per cent in 2001 to 80 per cent in 2008.<sup>427</sup>

In inquiring about how this outcome compares with other jurisdictions, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development brought to the Committee's notice that progress against the GVT target is monitored using the nationally comparable measure of the proportion of 20-24 year olds who attained Year 12 or equivalent (Australian Qualifications Framework Level II), sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Survey of Education and Work.

The Committee learnt that the Department calculates a supplementary measure of Year 12 or equivalent attainment for the 19 year old population using data sourced from local administrative certificate attainment records and the ABS Estimated Resident Population series. As this measure is calculated using local administrative data, it therefore cannot be used as a comparison with other jurisdictions. The Department indicated, however, that the 19 year old measure is a leading measure of the 20-24 year old attainment rate.

The Committee was pleased to hear that Victoria continues to have the highest Year 12 or equivalent completion rate of all the Australian states. According to the *ABS Survey of Education Work 2009*, the national Year 12 completion rate for young people aged 20 to 24 years was 84.5 per cent, while the Victorian rate was 86.8 per cent. Only the Australian Capital Territory recorded a higher completion rate, with 95.1 per cent.

The 2008 attainment rate of 80 per cent for Year 12 or equivalent at age 19 years in Victoria was higher, by 4.3 percentage points, than the 2001 Victorian result of 75.7 per cent.<sup>428</sup>

Based on the rate of improvement achieved since 2001, the Committee also sought a view from the Department about whether the 90 per cent target would be achievable by 2010.

With regard to this issue, the Department advised that over the past decade, Victoria has seen a generally positive trend with Year 12 completion rates. The percentage of 20-24 year olds completing Year 12 or equivalent has risen from 81.6 per cent in 2000 to 86.8 per cent in 2009. According to the Department, Victoria's ability to achieve the 90 per cent attainment target in 2010 will depend on:<sup>429</sup>

- the attainment profile of the 19-23 year old population in 2009;
- additional attainment in the period May 2009 to May 2010, the majority of which would be in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector;
- the resulting effects from interstate and international migration between 2009 and 2010; and
- sampling error in the 2010 survey.

427 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *2008-09 Annual Report*, October 2009, p.34

428 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, response to the Committee's 2008-09 Financial and Performance Outcomes Questionnaire – Part Two, received 28 January 2010, p.18

429 *ibid.*

While the 2009 figure showed a slight drop on the 2008 figure of 88.7 per cent, the Department indicated that the reduced sample size used for the 2009 ABS survey meant that the 2009 result was statistically different to the 2008 result. In 2010, the Department advised that the ABS would restore the size of the sample to the level used in 2008 and earlier.<sup>430</sup>

On the subject of whether the Government is on track to achieve the *Growing Victoria Together* target of 90 per cent by 2010, the Victorian Skills Commission expects that:<sup>431</sup>

*The downturn in economic activity, which has resulted in a reduction in apprentice and trainee commencements over 2009, may hinder achievement of the GVT target. Persons who complete a VET qualification at Certificate II level or higher are counted in the statistics as having attained the equivalent of year 12 or above. Therefore, a decrease in apprentice and trainee commencements or those in training from 2008 may have a negative impact on the GVT result in 2010.*

Against this backdrop, the Committee elected to ascertain what strategies were in place to accelerate the rate of improvement and move towards the 90 per cent target. The Department advised that a wide range of strategies are aimed at accelerating the rate of improvement. These are outlined below:<sup>432</sup>

- young people can choose a range of options to attain a Year 12 or equivalent qualification (i.e. the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) or International Baccalaureate) and a wide range of education settings are offered in which to complete their qualification;
- VET in Schools (VETiS) and VCAL continue to be valuable retention strategies. The 2009 On Track survey showed that 45 per cent of early leavers would have stayed at school if they could have participated in a vocational program;
- the Managed Individual Pathways program (funded by more than \$15 million annually) provides all 15 to 19-year-olds in government schools with individual pathway plans and associated support; and
- Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) cover the State, working with relevant local partners to improve outcomes for local young people.

According to the Department, these strategies will underpin further improvement beyond the current 90 per cent target. Under the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions, Victoria has committed to a COAG target of 92.6 per cent completion of Year 12 or equivalent by 2015. Additional initiatives expected to contribute to the achievement of this enhanced target include the establishment of Trade Training Centres in schools, the creation of the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions, a requirement for Victorians to be in school up to the age of 17 (unless they are participating in education, training or employment), places for 15–24 year olds wishing to participate in education and training being guaranteed by the Victorian Government and the introduction of the State-wide Youth Connections program.<sup>433</sup>

---

430 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, response to the Committee's 2008-09 Financial and Performance Outcomes Questionnaire – Part Two, received 28 January 2010, p.19

431 Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, response to the Committee's clarification questions, received 8 February 2010, Attachment B, p.2

432 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, response to the Committee's 2008-09 Financial and Performance Outcomes Questionnaire – Part Two, received 28 January 2010, pp.19–20

433 *ibid.*, pp.20–1

The Committee acknowledges the thrust of the Government's vision for a higher quality education and training system by every student aiming to complete Year 12 or its equivalent (such as an apprenticeship or traineeship) as a foundation qualification for stable and rewarding employment.<sup>434</sup>

The Committee has formed the view that the GVT measure of 90 per cent of young people in Victoria to successfully complete Year 12 or its educational equivalent by 2010 would have been more meaningful and enabled strategy development to be more focused if the age group that makes up the term 'young people' had been clearly defined as those between 20 and 24 years of age.

In terms of the likelihood of whether the 90 per cent target would be achieved by 2010, the Committee has noted the qualifications conveyed to the Committee. As stated above, the Department, in bringing to the Committee's notice that Victoria continues to have the highest Year 12 or equivalent completion rate for young people aged 20 to 24 years of all Australian states (86.8 per cent based on 2009 figures compared to 84.5 per cent nationally), predicts that various strategies are expected to result in the current GVT target of 90 per cent being exceeded beyond 2010. However, with regard to the Victorian Skills Commission's view that the downturn in economic activity may hinder achievement of the GVT target due to the reduction in apprentice and trainee commencements over 2009, the Committee considers that to assist in attaining the GVT target, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in conjunction with the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, needs to closely monitor trends in apprentice and trainee commencements and assess the impact that these trends are having on young people securing stable and rewarding employment.

- Recommendation 48:**    **To assist in attaining the GVT target for 90 per cent of young people to successfully complete Year 12 or its education equivalent by 2010, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in conjunction with the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development:**
- (a)        closely monitor the impact that the economic situation is having on apprentice and trainee commencements; and**
  - (b)        assess the impact that this situation is having on the proportion of young people successfully completing Year 12 or its equivalent.**

---

434     Department of Premier and Cabinet, *A Vision for Victoria to 2010 and Beyond, Growing Victoria Together*, 2005, p.10

### 15.3.2 Early school leavers unemployed after six months

The Committee noted that, in regard to the GVT target for a decline in the number of early school leavers who are unemployed after six months, 2008 saw an increase to 17.9 per cent in the proportion of early school leavers in this category compared to 13.5 per cent in 2007.<sup>435</sup>

In relation to the Department's comment that this result should be interpreted with care because of the relatively small samples achieved in the survey,<sup>436</sup> details of the samples obtained by the Department are shown in Table 15.1.

**Table 15.1: On Track Early Leavers Survey – Achieved samples 2003-2009**

Year	Sample size
2009	4,676
2008	4,740
2007	4,075
2006	4,783
2005	4,529
2004	3,197
2003	5,214
Total	31,214

Source: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, response to the Committee's 2008-09 Financial and Performance Outcomes Questionnaire – Part Two, received 28 January 2010, p.21

The Committee was informed that strategies are in place to increase the size of the samples in future, thereby improving the reliability of the survey results. These strategies involve the provision of contact details for consenting early leavers by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority who source these from schools. Schools are reminded, prior to the survey, to check student details to ensure that they are up-to-date. This measure is designed to assist in reducing the number of consenting early leavers who cannot be contacted, increase the achieved sample and enhance the robustness of the data.<sup>437</sup>

The Committee sought information about whether any numeric targets had been established with regard to unemployment rates for early school leavers, whether any qualitative data such as regional spread and concentration had been gathered and whether any benchmark data to assess performance in this area had been collected by the Department. The Committee was advised that:<sup>438</sup>

*System wide targets for early leavers have not been set. On Track destination data cannot be used for these targets for the reason that many early leavers make a planned exit from school and make optimal post school transitions, especially to apprenticeships.*

435 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008-09 Annual Report, October 2009, p.34

436 *ibid.*, p.34

437 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, response to the Committee's 2008-09 Financial and Performance Outcomes Questionnaire – Part Two, received 28 January 2010, p.21

438 *ibid.*, p.22

*Since 2003, the On Track Final Report has included a chapter on early leaver data with regional analyses of trends, gender, socio-economic status, curriculum studied, satisfaction with school experience and results and career advice, reasons for leaving school, factors which would have influenced decisions to stay at school and student wellbeing.*

The Committee noted the following reasons as to why this indicator is important as stated by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, citing research by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare:<sup>439</sup>

*Secure and satisfactory employment offers young people not only financial independence, but also a sense of control, self-confidence and social contact. In contrast, the health risks associated with unemployment, particularly depression, have been found to increase with the duration of unemployment. People who experience long-term unemployment may also find it difficult to maintain and develop skills relevant to the work place, and so may have greater difficulty in finding work.*

In examining the trend in the percentage of early school leavers who were unemployed after six months from 2003 to 2008, the Committee observed an initial improvement whereby the proportion declined in the first two years from the 2003 base year (18.5 per cent, 2003; 15.4 per cent, 2004; 14.3 per cent, 2005), worsened marginally in 2006 (14.6 per cent), improved in 2007 (13.5 per cent), but deteriorated considerably in 2008 (17.9 per cent).<sup>440</sup> Given that the achieved sample of 4,740 represented only 43 per cent of the target sample for 2008 of early school leavers and the early leaver data needs to be treated with caution according to the Department<sup>441</sup>, the Committee supports the efforts made to increase the response rate and improve the reliability of the survey results.

However the Committee notes that the On Track survey initiated by the Victorian Government found that ‘*the sample is much larger than any other early school leaver data collection and enables more detailed analyses than would otherwise be available*’.<sup>442</sup>

The Committee is also of the view that, in addition to requiring a downward trend, the Department should develop a target equal to or less than the national average relating to the proportion of early school leavers who are unemployed six months after leaving school.

**Recommendation 49:** **To assist in evaluating the effectiveness of school retention strategies aimed at boosting school completion rates and outcomes for young people, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop a target equal to or less than the national average for the proportion of early school leavers who are unemployed six months after leaving school.**

439 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, VCAMS, <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/researchinnovation/vcams/children/16-3schoolleaversunemployed.htm>>, accessed 9 April 2010

440 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *2008-09 Annual Report, October 2009*, p.34

441 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *The On Track Survey 2008, The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria Statewide Report*, April 2009, p.6

442 *ibid.*

### 15.3.3 Year 12 or equivalent programs supported by the Victorian Skills Commission – employment outcomes for students

Given the Committee's interest in examining the achievement of stable and rewarding employment outcomes for students, the Committee sought details regarding employment outcomes for students relative to the different Year 12 or equivalent programs supported by the Victorian Skills Commission (VSC), i.e.:

- Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) in schools;
- Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL);
- Vocational Education and Training (VET) in schools;
- schools-based apprenticeships and traineeships;
- VET in TAFE institutes, Adult and Community Education (ACE) organisations and private registered training organisations; and
- Technical Education Centres (TECs).

The Committee also explored how the Commission measured the relative effectiveness of these different programs in terms of achieving the VSC's strategic plan strategy of '*increasing workforce participation*'.

The proportion of Victorian VCE/VCAL completers in employment over the 2006 to 2009 period is shown in Table 15.2. The Committee was advised by the Victorian Skills Commission that employment outcomes for these students should be viewed with the knowledge that a significant proportion will be in full-time study after completion of year 12, and are therefore less likely to be engaged in the workforce than the general population.<sup>443</sup>

**Table 15.2: Percentage of employed year 12 completers 2006-2009**

Certificate Completed	2006	2007	2008	2009
VCE	19.9	21.3	23.7	22.5
VCAL	27.9	30.7	31.2	28.7

Source: On Track Surveys 2006-2009, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

Table 15.3 shows the proportion of Victorian VET graduates who were employed six months after completion of their course. The figures show the slight decrease in employment outcomes in 2009 compared to the prior year, reflecting the slowdown in economic activity in 2009.

443 Victorian Skills Commission, response to the Committee's 2008-09 Financial and Performance Outcomes Questionnaire – Part Two, received 8 February 2010, p.5

**Table 15.3: Percentage of Victorian VET Graduates employed 6 months after completion of their course**

Qualification completed	2008	2009
Diploma and above	82.7	82.2
Certificate IV	86.2	84.2
Certificate III	85.2	82.5
Certificate II	75.0	72.3

**Notes:**

- (a) *Figures above show the proportion of VET graduates employed in either part-time or full-time jobs.*
- (b) *VET graduates who have attained a Certificate II or higher are considered to hold a Yr 12 equivalent or above.*
- (c) *Employment outcomes for students who have completed a VET in Schools program, a school based apprenticeship/traineeship or who attended a TEC cannot be provided as employment data is not collected for these particular groups of students.<sup>444</sup>*

Source: *NCVER Student Outcomes Survey results, 2008 and 2009 publications*

The Committee also had an interest in ascertaining how the Commission measures the relative effectiveness of these different Year 12 programs in achieving the VSC's strategy of 'increasing workforce participation'.

The Committee was advised that Skills Victoria, on behalf of the VSC, provides detailed annual and quarterly monitoring reports to Commission members. These reports contain a number of key indicators that measure the performance of the VET system in Victoria and are aligned with the Commission's strategic objectives.

Indicators reported in the *VSC Outcomes Monitoring Report 2009* that specifically measure the Commission's objective of 'increasing workforce participation' include the following:

- Employment status pre and post training – VET graduates
- Annual apprentice and trainee completions
- Number of students completing VCE
- Year 12 or equivalent completion rate for those aged 19
- Year 12 or equivalent completion rate for those aged 20 to 24
- Number of VCAL enrolments
- Number of students enrolled in VET in schools
- Number of secondary school students enrolled in the TAFE or ACE sector
- Young people at risk – proportion of 15 to 19 year olds in neither full time study nor full time work.

444 Victorian Skills Commission, response to the Committee's 2008-09 Financial and Performance Outcomes Questionnaire – Part Two, received 8 February 2010, pp.5–6

Indicators monitored by the VSC, as reported in the *VSC Quarterly Dashboard Report*, which can also be used as measures of workforce participation include the following:<sup>445</sup>

- Apprentice/trainee commencements by quarter
- Apprentice/trainee numbers in-training
- Apprentice/trainee completions by quarter
- The 'Out of Trades Register' which measures the number of apprentices who have lost their jobs but are continuing their apprenticeship studies

The Committee noted that the slowdown in economic activity during 2009 has contributed to a slight decrease in employment outcomes for Victorian VET graduates. For this reason, it will be essential that the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development and the Victorian Skills Commission closely monitor whether economic conditions in Victoria are continuing to have a detrimental affect on securing the best possible employment outcomes for VET graduates.

The Committee has discussed in Chapter 14 of this report the value of making the *VSC Outcomes Monitoring Report* and *VSC Quarterly Dashboard Report* publicly available.

While the Committee acknowledges the existence of a wide range of indicators to measure the Commission's objective for increasing workforce participation, the Committee is of the view that the Commission should consider measuring employment outcomes for students who have completed a VET in Schools program, a school-based apprenticeship/traineeship or who attended a Technical Education Centre.

**Recommendation 50:**     **The Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, together with the Victorian Skills Commission, continue to monitor employment outcomes for VET graduates in this state.**

**Recommendation 51:**     **The Victorian Skills Commission consider measuring employment outcomes for students who have completed a VET in Schools program, a school-based apprenticeship/traineeship or who attended a Technical Education Centre.**

### **15.3.4 Schools where student outcomes were below expected levels**

The February 2008 *Annual Statement of Government Intentions* announced that the *Blueprint for School Reform* would include a particular focus on schools where student outcomes were below expected levels. Strategies were to be considered to utilise the most highly talented and capable principals and teachers more effectively through encouraging them to work in the most challenging schools.<sup>446</sup>

---

445 Victorian Skills Commission, response to the Committee's 2008-09 Financial and Performance Outcomes Questionnaire – Part Two, received 8 February 2010, pp.5-7

446 Hon. J Brumby, MP, Premier of Victoria, *Annual Statement of Government Intentions*, February 2008, p.6; Department of Education and Training, *Blueprint for Government Schools, Future Directions for Education in the Victorian government school system*, 2003, pp.6, 23; Department of Education, *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development*, September 2008, p.26

The Committee asked the Department to provide an update of the initial outcomes that have emerged from implementing these strategies to date and development of other subsequent strategies (e.g. Regional Network Leaders, school report cards etc).

The Department indicated, in part, that the Victorian Government, through the 2008-09 Budget, allocated \$71.4 million over four years to fund specific new school improvement initiatives, namely interventions in underperforming schools, incentives for high performance and the establishment of Regional Network Leaders. The interventions and incentives ('strategic interventions') form part of the comprehensive school improvement agenda. According to the Department, the strategic interventions, which are well established in the Victorian government school system, contribute to an enhanced approach to transparency and accountability for school improvement.<sup>447</sup>

With regard to human resources related interventions, the Department advised that its approach included the *Teacher Career Transition Program*, which provides a grant of up to \$50,000 for 180 teachers who lack contemporary teaching skills and have lost the passion for teaching to leave the profession and pursue other careers. To date, 305 applications for the Career Transition Grant have been received.<sup>448</sup>

With regard to the implementation of the *Teacher Career Transition Program*, the Committee maintains that the Department should review the extent to which schools have been successful in filling positions that have become vacant by teachers paid to leave the profession.

The Committee noted from information provided by the Department that, in terms of enhancing transparency and accountability for school improvement, school performance summaries have been published for all Victorian schools. The summaries, including new intake-adjusted measures of school performance, were published in November 2009. In early 2010, a Victorian School Performance Summary will be published for every Victorian school, regardless of sector. These summaries will contain student outcome and pathways and transitions data, as well as important contextual information about schools.<sup>449</sup>

The Committee noted from media reports that, based on figures released by the Government on 27 November 2009 in the new report card for schools, about 100 Victorian primary and 30 high schools were performing worse than expected on student test results, more than 150 schools were doing better than expected and about 1,200 were performing broadly similar to others.<sup>450</sup>

After an appropriate lead time has elapsed, the Committee considers that the Department should evaluate whether the interventions in underperforming schools, incentives for high performance and the expanded role for school networks have been effective at improving educational outcomes in schools where student outcomes have been below expected levels.

---

447 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, response to the Committee's 2008-09 Financial and Performance Outcomes questionnaire – Part Two, received 28 January 2010, p.23

448 *ibid.*, p.24

449 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, response to the Committee's 2008-09 Financial and Performance Outcomes questionnaire – Part Two, received 28 January 2010, p.25

450 John Masanauskas, 'More than 130 Victorian state schools identified as underperforming', the *Herald Sun* newspaper, 28 November 2009, <<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/more-than-130-victorian-state-schools-identified-as-underperforming/story-e6frf7jo-1225804754251>>, accessed 31 March 2010

**Recommendation 52:** An evaluation be commissioned after an appropriate lead time by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to assess the effectiveness of the suite of strategies targeted at improving student outcomes in underperforming schools over time.

### **15.3.5 2009 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy in Victoria**

The Commonwealth Government launched a national literacy and numeracy testing program in 2008, which replaced the individual tests previously conducted in each State and Territory. The *National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy* (NAPLAN) tests are conducted in May each year in all government and non-government schools to assess students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 on numeracy, reading, writing and language conventions (spelling, punctuation and grammar). In Victoria, NAPLAN replaced the Achievement Improvement Monitor (AIM) tests formerly held in August each year.<sup>451</sup>

The Committee reported that NAPLAN uses a different methodology to measure student achievement than that used in previous state and territory tests. In contrast to student attainment being formerly assessed against benchmarks developed at a national level that represented minimum acceptable standards in reading, writing and numeracy, student achievement under NAPLAN is measured against a national minimum standard based on the attainment of pre-determined achievement scales for each year level.<sup>452</sup> As the introduction of NAPLAN therefore required student achievement in literacy and numeracy to be measured against the new national minimum standards, replacing national benchmarks, the Committee recommended that the GVT measure ‘*the proportion of Victorian primary students achieving the national benchmark levels for reading, writing and numeracy will be at or above the national average*’<sup>453</sup> be adjusted accordingly. The Committee noted that this change has been made.<sup>454</sup>

With particular reference to the reading, writing and numeracy assessment domains, the Committee was interested in comparing the results for Victoria for 2009 with the results for 2008, 2009-10 targets, national averages and the results achieved by other states and territories, bearing in mind that 2009 is only the second year of NAPLAN. In doing so, the Committee is conscious of the following comment made in the NAPLAN Summary Report for 2009:<sup>455</sup>

*Equating one test with another is a complex procedure and involves some degree of statistical error. For this reason, there may be minor fluctuations in the average NAPLAN test results from year to year when, in reality, the level of student achievement has remained essentially the same. It is only when there is a meaningful change in the results from one year to the next, or when there is a consistent trend over several years, that statements about improvement or decline in levels of achievement can be made confidently. Some caution is required when interpreting changes in the performance across 2008 and 2009.*

---

451 Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, *Report on the 2009-10 Budget Estimates – Part Two*, October 2009, p.188

452 *ibid.*, p.189

453 *ibid.*, pp.193–4

454 Department of Treasury and Finance, Budget Paper No.3, *2009-10 Service Delivery*, pp.400–2

455 Commonwealth Government, *National Assessment Program, Literacy and Numeracy, NAPLAN Summary Report, Achievement in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy*, 2009 NAPLAN results, released mid September 2009, p.2

### **Reading, writing and numeracy results of the 2009 NAPLAN tests for Victoria compared to 2008**

The Committee's review of the NAPLAN results showed that there was a similar achievement in the percentage of Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 students at or above the national minimum standard in 2009 compared with 2008.

Assessment domains that showed the largest fluctuations between 2008 and 2009 are shown in table 15.4. The category that showed the largest movement occurred in relation to numeracy for Year 9 students where a 1.2 per cent improvement in the percentage of students performing at or above the national minimum standard was achieved in the test results between 2008 and 2009.

**Table 15.4: Percentage of students at or above the national minimum standard – largest fluctuations between 2008 and 2009**

Year students	Assessment domain	2008 (%)	2009 (%)	Difference between 2008 and 2009 results (% change compared to 2008)
3	numeracy	96.5	95.6	-0.9
5	writing	93.9	94.8	1.0
5	numeracy	94.6	95.6	1.1
9	numeracy	95.2	96.3	1.2

Source: Commonwealth Government, *2009 National Assessment Program, Literacy and Numeracy, NAPLAN Summary Report, Achievement in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy, 2009 NAPLAN results, released mid September 2009, p.38*

### **Reading, writing and numeracy results of the 2009 NAPLAN tests for Victoria compared to 2009-10 targets**

The Committee's analysis revealed that Victorian students exceeded all the reading and numeracy targets outlined in the 2009-10 Budget. The Government did not specify writing targets for Victorian students for 2009-10. The categories that exceeded targets by the largest amounts were:<sup>456</sup>

- Year 3 reading:
  - 4.2 percentage points over target
  - (95.2 per cent of students reaching the minimum standard compared to the target of 91 per cent)
- Year 5 reading:
  - 4.3 percentage points over target
  - (94.3 per cent of students reaching the minimum standard compared to the target of 90 per cent)

456 Commonwealth Government, *National Assessment Program, Literacy and Numeracy, 2009 National Assessment Program, Literacy and Numeracy, NAPLAN Summary Report, released mid September 2009, p.38*; Department of Treasury and Finance, *Budget Paper No. 3, 2009-10 Service Delivery, pp.75-6*

### **Reading, writing and numeracy results of the 2009 NAPLAN tests for Victoria compared to the national average**

The Committee found that for 2009, Victorian students outperformed the Australian averages for the reading, writing and numeracy assessment domains. The two areas where assessment results exceeded the national average by the largest amounts were:<sup>457</sup>

Year 5 reading	• 2.6 per cent of students greater than the national average	• (94.3 per cent of students compared to the national average of 91.7 per cent)
Year 9 writing	• 2.6 per cent of students greater than the national average	• (90.3 per cent of students compared to the national average of 87.7 per cent)

### **Reading, writing and numeracy results of the 2009 NAPLAN tests for Victoria compared to other jurisdictions**

A comparison of the percentage of Victorian students at or above the national minimum standard in reading, writing and numeracy in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 to the NAPLAN test results of the other states and territories revealed that Victoria performed very strongly. Of the eight states and territories, Victoria scored the highest (6 categories), equal highest (2 categories) or second highest (3 categories) percentages of the 12 assessment categories.

The assessment category where Victoria led the field by the greatest margin was in relation to Year 9 numeracy where 96.3 per cent of students were at or above the national minimum standard in 2009. The next highest performer was New South Wales with 95.4 per cent of students in this category.

---

457 Commonwealth Government, *National Assessment Program, Literacy and Numeracy*, 2009 National Assessment Program, Literacy and Numeracy, NAPLAN Summary Report, released mid September 2009, p.38