

## Recipient Details

Name of organisation or individual: [O] Bendigo Senior Secondary College

Reference Type: School

State or territory: Vic

Serial Identification Number: 477861

## Responses

### Curriculum and assessment

Bendigo Senior Secondary College established the Victorian Virtual Learning Network (VVLN) in 2009 to address a number of key issues that were impacting Victorian students' participation in VCE subjects most significantly in regional and rural locations. The VVLN has developed complete online courses in key VCE subjects with engaging, digital online curriculum which are delivered to students across Victoria utilising broadband technology.

The lack of curriculum breadth caused by teacher shortages in key disciplines and/or small school size in many rural schools has denied students the opportunity to pursue anything but a basic range of subjects and in many cases denies access to VCE subjects that are critical to broadening tertiary options. Through the VVLN senior secondary school students across Victoria now have significantly increased access to curriculum through the provision of high quality, interactive digital content which is delivered asynchronously, enabling students to access it any time, in any location.

In the design of the online courses, the focus is on creating an online experience for students with the learning amenity of a high quality face to face program, with the instructional role of the teacher embedded in the interactive digital lessons, as well as having an online teacher available to support students at any time. A number of key design elements underpinned the creation of the instructional video presentations, these being:

- Delivery to be asynchronous.
- Courses to be instructional and not require students to teach themselves.
- Learning activities to be stand-alone and require no input or direction from the teacher.
- Learning activities to be interactive as much as possible.
- Courses to be individualised to make the student feel involved in the course.
- No costly or specialised equipment required to access the online courses.

Using the approach where all subjects are consistent with agreed quality standards, students from a variety of schools are exposed to a consistent quality of content and instruction that will engage and ensure success, and are not dependent on the individual skills and knowledge of a range of teachers.

Rating: 7

### Teachers and teaching

The VVLN online courses provide great benefit to rural and remote schools that cannot provide students with access to a broad senior curriculum because of teacher shortages or the high costs associated with conducting very small classes.

The use of the online courses created, delivered and supported by an expert teacher provides opportunity for students in a range of schools to have access to an equal standard of teaching and learning. This is particularly important in disciplines such as mathematics and science where many rural schools have great difficulty recruiting suitably qualified staff with a significant number of teachers in our schools who are not formally trained in the specialist area delivering these subjects.

The VVLN subjects are all created using a common design philosophy where the online lessons are entirely instructional and incorporate digital learning resources including video, audio, text, simulations, and high levels of interactivity, monitoring and feedback. In delivering the online course the main role of the teacher became that of a 'coach' where students obtain individualised support for their online learning, including direct instruction to assist in understanding concepts or resolves other issues with course requirements. Skype is used as the preferred method of communication for the VVLN, as staff are able to easily monitor who is online at any time and also provides students or staff with the capacity to initiate a call whenever there is a need, to allow instantaneous feedback and individualised support

Important to the success of online learning is a high level of engagement and regular contact with schools and students. There is a clear benefit from teachers visiting schools at least once each year to build good relationships with the schools and provide 'face to face' support for individual students taking the subject.

Rating: 7

Leaders and leadership

Rating: 7

School and Community

Rating: 7

Information and Communication Technology

The effective use of broadband technology to deliver senior school subjects to students in rural and remote schools can provide tangible benefits through better access to education services no matter where the students are located in Australia. It can also assist in reducing the gap between households, businesses and schools in capital cities and those in regional areas by enabling students to remain in remote communities to complete their secondary education, rather than moving to larger regional or urban centres.

To achieve this support for a model of 1:1 ICT provision in schools coupled with provision of reliable, high speed broadband into regional communities is essential. With the right infrastructure in place an environment can be established to fill a teaching and learning gap through the provision of complete online courses that allow students to learn at a time and place which best meets their needs using a broad range of technologies.

The increased awareness of the use of technology in student learning and increased teacher capacity to create and use digital content in their teaching will benefit rural and remote schools that cannot provide their students with access to a broad curriculum because of insufficient student numbers or teacher shortages. Online subjects can be provided to a minimum of one student in any school; an online class can be comprised of students from a number of schools.

Student choice is greatly enhanced and previously restricted subjects become available to students. Although difficult to quantify, benefits will also be realised by students, their families and local

communities as students would no longer be faced with the need to move from their community to supplement or finish their secondary education. By remaining at home, they can support the income generating activities of their family, such as in family farming and small business, or through undertaking valuable part-time paid employment in their community.

Rating: 7

Entrepreneurship and schools

Rating:

Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education and boarding

High quality distance education can provide tangible benefits for students and schools. Many rural schools face the challenge of either denying students the opportunity to study subjects with low demand, or enrolling them with a distance education provider. In many cases schools are reluctant or unable to access distance education models due to past experiences where student engagement and outcomes have been compromised by the quality of those offerings, or by the inability to align timetables for participation such as in video conferencing options.

Since 2013, 950 senior school students in 86 schools across Victoria have accessed VCE subjects through the VVLN using web-based technology. Delivery of all subjects is asynchronous providing flexible timetabling for schools, allowing students to access their subject at any time. The VVLN lessons incorporate interactive digital learning resources including video and high levels of monitoring and feedback. The online lessons are entirely instructional, providing a similar learning experience to the traditional classroom and students receive individual support and direction their online teacher.

Feedback from schools and students using the VVLN is very positive as shown by the ratings and comments received in annual surveys, and provides evidence that online learning is not a last resort or an inferior option.

Principal: “We are very happy with the service provided by the VVLN. The program enables our students to access VCE subjects that we are unable to offer. The standout feature of the program is the quality of the teaching. The teachers are accessible, organised and friendly in their dealings with our students. The online learning materials are of the highest quality and they allow students to go back over their learning at a pace that suits the individual.”

Student: “When thinking of studying via correspondence, you normally think of an impersonal learning environment where you’re all alone. While the VVLN does encourage independence, the learning feels anything but lonely – constant support from your online teacher and thorough video lessons give you what could be a more personal learning experience and relationship with your teacher than even normal schooling.

Rating for enrolments: 7

Rating for clusters: 7

Rating for distance education: 7

Rating for boarding: 0

Diversity

Rating: 7

## Transitioning beyond school

Rating: 7

### Additional Comments

Online provision of secondary education provides an exciting opportunity for schools and the education system, however for wider adoption, there needs a systemic approach to provision of quality online learning with a long term virtual learning strategy. For online learning to become embedded in practice a policy framework that establishes a new model for delivery of distance education using broadband technologies is essential. Systemic adoption of such a model requires a complete review of the current models for distance education and a significant government investment to migrate to an online model that is fully sustainable and allows schools to access courses at reasonable cost.

The VVLN initiative demonstrates that students can study a VCE course of their choice even if they are at a school where there is no viable class for the course and/or no qualified teacher to take the class. The VVLN has allowed students in smaller rural schools to participate in subjects, particularly in maths and science domains that would otherwise not have been unavailable to them and has reduced the need for senior students to leave the school, and town in order to gain greater subject choice at larger schools.

Once online learning is brought to scale, and there is a deeper understanding of the teaching and learning practices associated with online learning, it can contribute substantially to solving the problem of restricted curriculum provision. Online learning can give all students access to the full range of curriculum and enrichment activities at anytime/anywhere by enabling them to experience instruction that is delivered by the combination of excellent teaching and excellent online instructional materials.

Currently the VVLN model is mainly focussed on meeting the VCE course needs of students in rural and remote schools, however the benefits are not restricted to students in country schools or to the Victorian environment. The VVLN experience where twenty percent of enrolments have come from schools in metropolitan Melbourne demonstrates that this mode of learning can be beneficial for students in all schools and there is no reason why, using this approach, students anywhere cannot have access to the expertise of the best teachers.

The VVLN model can provide tangible benefits through better access to education services no matter where the students are located in Australia. By aligning with the rollout of the Australian Curriculum the model as adopted by the VVLN could support universal access across jurisdictions by sharing resources based on the common content of the Australian curriculum and assist in filling gaps identified in the focus areas of mathematics and science.

An overview of the VVLN, along with examples of the online courses can be found on the VVLN website at: <http://www.vln.vic.edu.au/>

The VVLN would be pleased to provide further details through face-to-face consultations if requested to do so