

Ripponlea Institute

Vocational Language Learning in Schools

What are the qualifications?

10297NAT Certificate II in Applied Language

10661NAT Certificate III in Applied Language

The VET Certificates are nationally recognised qualifications in the study of a Language. The Certificates are based on a fixed curriculum, however, there is great flexibility for contextualizing the requirements for specific cohorts of learners and/or training environments.

In order to achieve a VET Applied Language qualification, students must demonstrate 'competencies' described in each Unit of the Certificate. Guidelines are given as to Language that might be covered and settings within which this Language may be used.

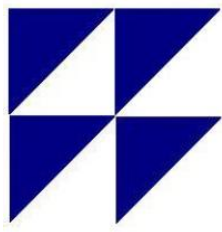
The content of the Certificates in Applied Language reflect the emphasis in the new Australian curriculum on the skills of noticing and observing behaviour and Language use of those around us, development of intercultural awareness, and awareness of self in different linguistic and cultural contexts.

The qualifications are not Language specific and are suitable for delivery in any script or character based Language. Whilst at Certificate II level no prior knowledge is required, where the qualification is undertaken as a VET in Schools program, then it is expected that students would have completed at least one year of study in the Language, or equivalent. The Certificate II qualification is a pre-requisite for the Certificate III.

In terms of Language, what do students learn?

Each Certificate has a communicative focus in that students must demonstrate their capacity to understand and use the Language to communicate. The tasks involved require students to be able to interact with a range of people, in a range of settings – both in social settings and in the workplace. For example, students are required to demonstrate competency in areas such as: talking about themselves, asking and responding to questions, asking for and offering help, explaining, giving directions, and inviting, declining and accepting invitations. Some example tasks might be:

- Make a booking to see a doctor (e.g. days, dates, times) and write it in a diary
- Ask for and give directions (e.g. places in a city, imperatives, question forms)
- Give instructions (e.g. classroom instructions, recipes)
- Write an email (e.g. ask tourist office for information re places to visit in city overseas)
- Read a letter (e.g. complaint re accommodation)
- Chat on the phone to a friend (e.g. basic conversation re plans)
- Leave a voicemail for a friend to call (e.g. name, day, request, call back, phone number)
- Make arrangement to meet (e.g. day, date, time, place, indicate on map) Ask a colleague how to find toilets / photocopy room (e.g. directions, names of places)
- Ask permission from boss to modify work hours (e.g. days, times, give / deny permission)
- Read postcard from friend overseas on holidays (e.g. past tense, places, tourist activities)
- Write thank you note accepting/declining invitation to a dinner (e.g. future tense)
- Write text message to a friend arranging to meet (e.g. days, times, places, prepositions)
- Write entry on Facebook about activities (e.g. leisure activities, past tense)
- Read instructions from boss re preparation for meeting (eg. imperatives, places in workplace)
- Read office memo regarding workplace attire (e.g. obligation, clothes)
- Write note for colleague re requirements for meeting room (e.g. technology vocabulary)



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How does it fit into current Languages curriculum in most schools?

Certificate II is achievable over one or two years, at Year 9 and/or 10 level. The course allows teachers flexibility, which means that they can also cover many of the themes traditionally seen in a Year 9/10 Languages curriculum.

A student who has learnt a Language from Year 4 or Year 7 right through to the end of Year 9 or 10 no longer walks away with nothing to show for that effort. The Certificate II in Applied Language recognises a student's achievement in a second Language and rewards all those years of study, regardless of whether a student chooses to continue study of a Language into their final years of schooling.

What does it mean for students of Languages?

Teaching a VET course means re-thinking approaches to assessment. While summative assessment is still important, such as an end-of-unit test, a mid-year exam, in VET there is a greater emphasis on formative assessment, and the “scaffolding” of learning activities. This reflects current best-practice across Australia in all subject areas. Competency-based assessment may happen in any setting and is not limited to the classroom. Students' capacity to use Language may be assessed in the schoolyard, on an excursion, overseas on exchange, while working with a peer, or working with a Language Assistant. Assessment of oral skill does not have to take place in a one-on-one format between the teacher and student. Evaluation of written competency does not only have to take place during a formal test, it can take place whenever students are undertaking learning activities which involve reading and writing in the target Language.

Teaching a competency-based course also means, however, that a student needs to show that he or she is able to do something in a range of contexts, and at different times. This means that if a student has previously demonstrated competency in a specific context, but then can no longer demonstrate that skill in a different context, at a later stage, then the student may be assessed as Not Yet Competent, and would need to be re-assessed after undertaking further training/learning. A student is required, in an ongoing manner, to show that he or she still has the capacity to understand and express Language that was learnt the previous term or semester. This is a significant shift for students, as well as teachers. However, maintaining competency is an aspect of Language learning towards which teachers, in Australian classrooms, are constantly working. A VET Languages course supports this goal, and helps to achieve a greater capacity for spontaneity and fluency amongst learners.

Feedback from students?

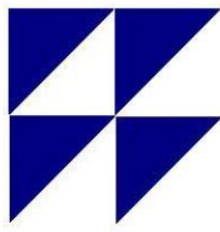
That taking part in this course increases their enjoyment, confidence and motivation, that they see an improvement in their Language skills in all areas, that the emphasis on real, natural ‘spontaneous’ Language is fun and rewarding and leads to greater fluency.

What does it mean for teachers of Languages?

Teaching a VET course means re-thinking a little the way we assess – and this is a positive shift. While summative assessment is still important, e.g. an end-of-unit test, a mid-year exam, there is a greater emphasis on formative assessment, and the “scaffolding” or learning activities. A VET course is competency-based - this means that if a student demonstrates that he or she is *able to do something to the required performance level*, we can judge him or her to be competent in this area. This may happen in any setting - in the classroom, in the schoolyard, on an excursion, overseas on exchange, while working with a peer or with a Language Assistant. Assessment of oral skill does not have to take place in a one-on-one format between the teacher and student. Evaluation of written competency does not only have to take place during a formal test.

Teaching a competency-based course also means, however, that a student needs to show that he or she is *able to do something* in a range of contexts, at different times. This means that if a student has previously demonstrated competency in a specific context, but then can no longer demonstrate that skill, in a different context, at a later stage, the student may be assessed as Not Yet Competent, and would need to be re-assessed after undertaking further training/learning. Importantly, a student can achieve a competency at any stage during the course, and has multiple opportunities to do so – there are no Pass / Fail situations. Students who are unable to demonstrate competency are simply assessed as “Not Yet Competent”.

This approach makes sense to teachers of Languages – that a student be required, in an ongoing manner, to show that he or she still has the capacity to understand and express Language that was learnt the previous term or semester. This is perhaps a bigger shift for students than for us as teachers.



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Feedback from teachers?

That teaching a VET course enhances their teaching skills, that it offers something concrete for students to work towards, that students become more comfortable and natural in their use of oral Language, and that students are thoroughly engaged in the learning process.

The overall picture...

In summary, the introduction of the Certificates in Applied Language into a Year 9 and 10, and/or senior, Languages programme has enormous advantages for students' learning, and for future career paths. Students unsure about the benefits of taking a Language through to non-compulsory Years 9 and 10 have the opportunity to attain a nationally recognised level of achievement in their Language, as well as a contribution to their Senior Secondary Certificate of Education, by completing one or two elective years of Language study.

Parents also see the benefits of such a course and play a huge role in the decision-making when it comes time to choose elective subjects at the end of Year 8 or 9. With parents on board supporting the study of Languages through to the end of Year 10, retention rates can be significantly improved. The profile of Languages across a school can be enhanced due to linking to other programmes such as VET Hospitality.

Ultimately, the introduction of VET Applied Language in Victoria has seen a significant increase in the participation of students in Language learning, choosing to select a Language as an elective during Years 9 and 10. The changes in teaching and learning that accompany the courses have meant that students are better engaged in learning, and students are more likely to choose to continue Language learning into the final years of schooling.

Students leave school with qualifications for which they may receive credit within later study pathways, and will enable them to communicate more easily and with confidence in Languages other than English throughout their lives. This may lead to more open-minded, culturally sensitive individuals, who will have greater choices in life, including the possibilities of work and travel using a second Language.

Testimonial

From: Esther Wang [mailto:EWang@heathdale.vic.edu.au]
Sent: Thursday, 10 December 2015 12:28 PM
Subject: VET Chinese

Hi Fred, Andrew and Sarah

On behalf of Heathdale Christian College I would like to thank you for your ongoing support in our VET Chinese program over the past few years. We have had a very good retention rate since the introduction of VET Chinese and our students have been enthusiastic about completing assessment tasks in order to get a nationally recognised certificate.

Two of my Australian Year 11 students they learned to read job advertisements, write a cover letter and negotiating work hours last year in Cert II VET Chinese, and this year in VCE Unit 1 and 2 they learned to write a resume. These boys desperately wanted to find a part time job so one of them went to a Chinese massage shop at a shopping centre and spoke to them in Chinese if he could apply for a job. The other boy, Gabriel, also saw a Chinese job advertisement and he decided to write a resume in Chinese characters to apply for the job. He spoke some Chinese to the manager as he handed in his resume, and he told me that a few people tried out for the job but the manager strongly recommended him to the owner because he wrote and spoke in Chinese. After he started his job he then had to negotiate work hours, which he had learned to do in the VET course.

We are thrilled to see how the students have used what they have learned in real life situations in Australia. I have also really appreciated the opportunity to re-write and deliver the Cert II and III Chinese courses with Stanley Wang. It helped me to grow professionally. So we want to thank you for all the hard work you have put in behind the scene in helping us to deliver a successful program.

Regards

Esther