

Victorian Student Representative Council Submission

Inquiry into the approaches to homework in Victorian schools, focusing on the impact on student learning

Introduction to the VicSRC

The Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) is the peak body representing secondary school students in Victoria. We are a democratic network of SRCs working to represent the views of students at every level of decision making. Student Representative Councils (SRCs – sometimes known by other names) are the bodies that exist within most secondary schools to represent the opinions of students. The VicSRC has over 80 member SRCs representing more than 40,000 secondary students. Our vision is to bring Student Representative Councils together across Victoria to make the voices of students heard at all levels and, through that process, enable students (and their organisations) to develop their vision and capacity for making a difference in their school and across the state.

The VicSRC is auspiced by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, the peak body and leading policy advocate on young people's issues in Victoria. The Youth Affairs Council provides a means through which the youth sector and young people voice their opinions and concerns in regards to policy issues affecting them. The Youth Affairs Council believes that strong student representative structures are essential for the continued achievement of improved student learning outcomes. These structures are the most effective way to engage with students where they are at and thus enhance teacher and school capacity to respond to changes in student learning needs.

Background

The Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) is glad to be part of the discussion around *approaches to homework in Victoria, focusing on student learning*. This timely inquiry provides an opportunity to investigate some of the existing challenges for homework in schools and also consider students' perspective about the role of homework in the future.

Student Reflections

Ensuring the VicSRC is representative of a broad range of viewpoints was important. In order to capture the voice of students in Victoria we conducted an online survey. The survey was completed by 30 students ranging from Year 8 – 12. Students came from 25 different schools including catholic, independent and government. The survey asked a total of 12 questions under the major headings of:

- The value of homework in relation to learning
- Current approaches to homework
- Future of homework in Victorian Schools

It is important to recognise that the results of the survey do not represent the views of all Secondary School students in Victoria; however the evidence provides a good sample of student opinion on the topic. This submission will draw on themes that emerged from the online survey and students reflections.

1. What is the value of homework to your learning?

Benefits to individual students' learning

Most students agreed that homework benefits their study and revision as they don't usually have sufficient time to complete their work in class. Some students stated that it was good to revise the work that they had covered over school, so that the next day it would be fresh in their minds.

One student said *"The value of homework to my learning is that it enables me to revise and improve on my knowledge, whilst being more independent. It also encourages me to seek help or further research via other sources, rather than relying on a teacher."* Another agreed, saying *"Homework provides an ideal way to further work and engage students, whether individually or in a group, usually without the assistance of teachers."*

Contribution to discipline and other life skills

Throughout the responses that were provided, students primarily thought that homework was valuable in developing self-discipline and self-motivational skills. They thought that it helped them with time management *"It keeps us from getting lazy. It helps us in preparing for the future, when one day we will have to do homework for our workplace."*

Engagement of parents in student learning

Many students thought that homework didn't engage parents as study at home is very much one-dimensional. Some believed that it was even a hassle if parents began asking about their homework. In other cases, it is partial motivation for students to do homework, as it reminds students of their parents' expectations.

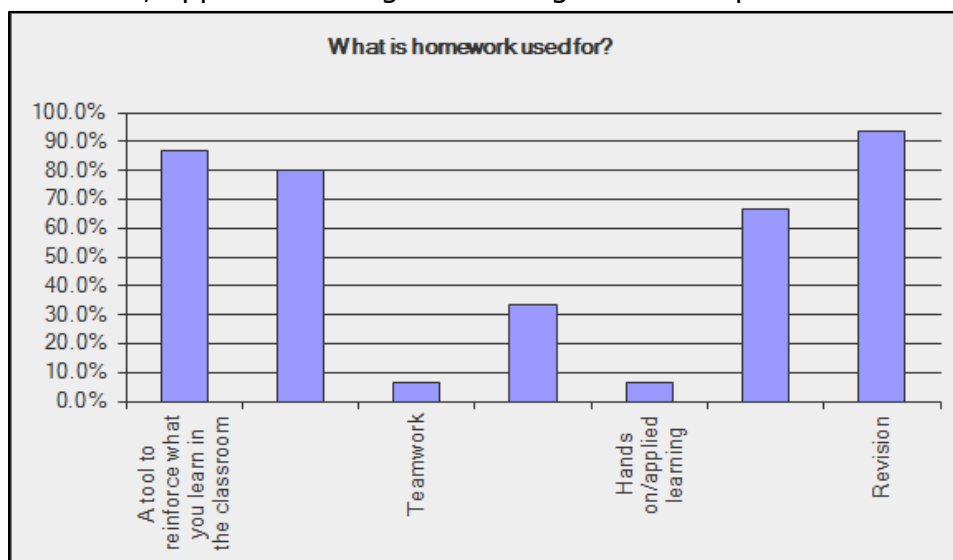
"I never really felt like homework engaged my parents/carers to any extent as I was very independent in school, however I suppose it aims to make them feel a part of their students' education and so that they can actively be involved in what their children are doing (mostly relevant for primary school in my opinion) and be able to help and see where their children may be struggling."

2. Current approaches to homework

Overwhelmingly, students said the current approach for homework is;

- Individual work
- Used to reinforce what has been learnt in the classroom
- Revision

There was little evidence to suggest that homework encouraged teamwork, applied learning or learning new concepts and ideas.



Reporting and feedback methods

Homework was generally used for feedback and reporting. The majority of students reported that homework was given some form of feedback including;

- Teacher signs the homework when complete
- Marks
- Comments
- Corrections
- Notes and grades
- A record if it was done or not

Different approaches between primary and secondary school

Students noted a difference between the types of homework given in Primary and Secondary school.

In primary school, homework is minimal, especially due to the ever-sustaining assistance from their parents, making better interaction between child and parent. Students felt that homework in primary school was used to reinforce basic skills such as nightly reading. Homework in Primary School seemed to be more hands-on and practical, with activities like projects and small presentations.

In secondary education, many students said that success of homework depended on them.

Most students have stated that any unfinished work in class is simply homework, as well as teachers giving them set homework to prepare and understand the concepts of what they are to learn. But in this case, more homework should be given during the junior years of secondary school, as it will provide better opportunity to organise and step into habitual routine for which they will need in their senior years. *"The workload, complexity and importance become much more significant in secondary school."*

Best practice

According to the students surveyed the best practice model for homework was when it had clear direction. One student noted that *"I personally just like questions from text books or research tasks- but not just the generic 'tonight read over your notes'.* Other evidence suggested that more

creative approaches to homework should be encouraged such as "Group projects, research of student's choice, online discussions and anything creative." Another student noted that the best kind of homework was *"Projects, interviews, interactive pieces of work, anything which the students are passionate about. Many of these are outlined by Alfie Kohn, an education guru which coincides with my views somewhat."*

3. Future of homework in Victorian Schools

Student hoped that the future of homework in Victorian Schools will be more *'enjoyable and valuable'*. Another student said they hoped for *'Interactive, stimulating, engaging for ALL students, not only the bright ones, or the average ones, or the underachievers.'* Some students called for homework to be *'less and less'* arguing; that *'it should be phased out to better balance a students' life'*. Overwhelmingly students saw the future of homework in Victoria being online in different forms. One student wrote *"I think the future of homework is soon to become an online one, where students will complete their homework and assignments on portals where teachers can monitor them."*

Balance between reinforcing and extending what has been learnt in the classroom with time to undertake extracurricular activities and to spend time with family.

Students had very strong views on this, with many answering that family and leisure time was essential, and that homework sometimes decreased the amount of time left for these activities. Students generally found it difficult because of their other commitments. Students made the comment that often extracurricular activities support health, wellbeing and stress management and should be encouraged. Teachers should also take into account what their students do apart from their daily school work, homework *"...can take away precious time."* The majority of students said similar things *"Of course there should be a balance. Students need to have fun whilst learning, that way their minds are fresh and open to new ideas in the classroom."* Having an average of one hour per subject, restricted other areas of their life, such as social life, outside-school activities, family and other non-school related occupations.

Differentiated approaches for primary and secondary schools

Students felt there needed to be differentiated approaches for primary and secondary schools.

With primary school, many students believed that there should be less homework. Alternatively, as younger students move into later year levels, homework should gradually increase and become challenging, in order to keep consistency; especially if nearing to the transition primary to high school. It is also suggested that it should be fun and engaging to encourage a better understanding of the work and the students' are doing at home and in the classroom and to also reinforce work ethic. One student has stated that *"...just enough to instil basic life skills for high school as well as things like spelling, time's tables and reading."*

"Perhaps in upper primary there should be better preparation for what secondary homework will be like." Secondary school homework should be more centred on the subject *"Secondary school homework should be given quite a lot before reaching the senior years as in the senior years it will become a routine."*

Application of and access to technology to assist learning

Technology and learning seem to go hand in hand for students. It provides information, having [easier] access to "tricks and tips", especially from the internet. Many students found technology to be a benefit. *"I think particularly the internet is the single greatest friend a student has in terms of learning"*.

According to VCE students who completed the survey online groups and portals helped build better interaction between students and teachers, *"...it's when students are making decisions about their own education and really are helping each other and wanting feedback from teachers..."*

In contrast, others have said that the classroom is not adapting quickly enough to manage efficiently, and that it could be a possible setback if one does not have access, especially if one does not even have print/hard-copied resources to aid them beforehand. While many secondary schools have implemented the idea of providing students with tablets, laptops, etc to aid schoolwork in and outside the classroom, some state that is a distraction, with another student stating that it *"...can make things very frustrating when something go wrong..."*.

Hearing from Students

The VicSRC believes it is imperative that the Parliament of Victoria Education and Training Committee hear directly from students about the benefits of homework as

they experience it. It is important to engage students as active partners in their own education and learning, both individually and collectively. Such an approach clearly reflects the Government's vision for students within the Victorian education system. Students have a unique point of view about the education they receive and often have ideas to improve teaching and learning. Not only do the results of this inquiry impact them directly, but also the Education and Training Committee will benefit from hearing what they have to say.

The VicSRC is happy to help facilitate further discussion with young people during this inquiry.

Yours sincerely,



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On behalf of the VicSRC Student Executive



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