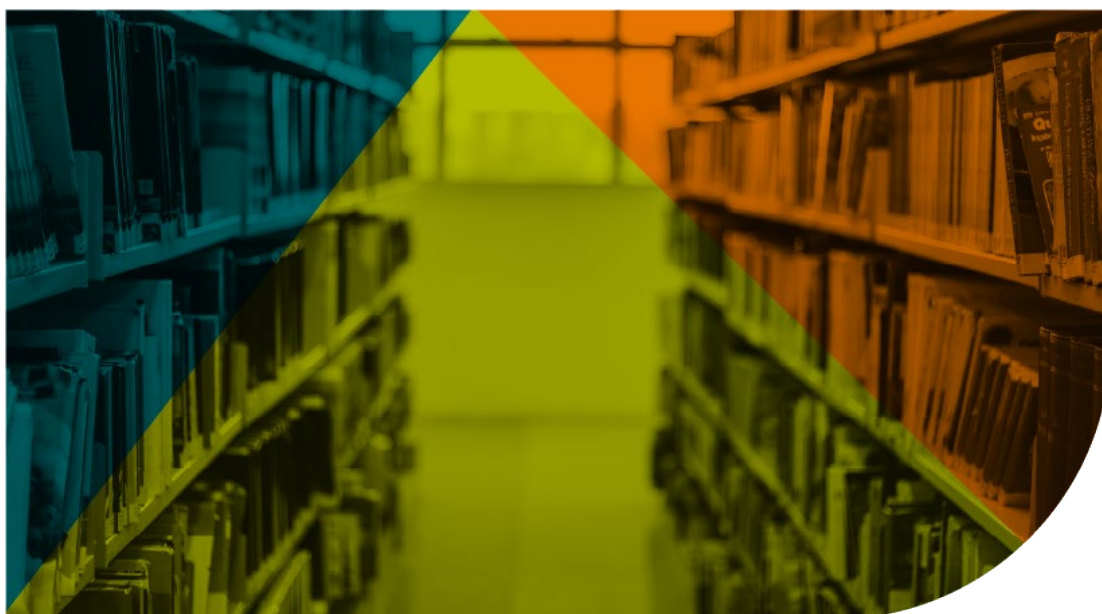


CASE STUDY

Victorian Department of Education and Training

Policy and Advisory Library





Context of the initiative

Commencing in September 2015, Victoria undertook a significant reform agenda known as the 'Education State' that aimed to build a system that provided "every student with the knowledge, capabilities and attributes that will see them thrive throughout their lives, to have the skills that industry needs, and that employers expect."

The construct and delivery of this reform was supported by a high level of engagement and consultation with the Victorian education community, including peak principal organisations and unions. These consultations identified significant workload issues for principals as well as a desire for the Department of Education and Training ('the Department') to take stock and better manage the pace of change. The Department's 'principal Health and Wellbeing Strategy' provided a strong platform through which these issues could be addressed.

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The perception among the profession was that Victorian education had experienced a period of rapid change across policy, programs and operations, and that schools were struggling to keep pace. During this period, the Department had also placed a high priority on strengthening integrity, good governance, probity, financial management, and accountability, leading to an increase in compliance requirements. In a devolved system, accurate and easily-accessed policy and operational guidance are key elements in ensuring that principals can manage their schools successfully and consistent with Department expectations, and improve the educational outcomes for their communities.

A further important goal underpinning excellence in the government school sector was to ensure compliance with Department policies. This was difficult to achieve when there was a lack of coordination and coherence in the way policy information was accessed by principals, resulting in a fragmented experience

with a proliferation of webpages and portals containing advice. A 2019 principal survey reported that 76% of principals found it “difficult” or “very difficult” to find Department policies; one principal called this “the most frustrating and time consuming part of the job” (Operational Policy Reform Principal Survey, Department of Education and Training, 2019).



Intent of the initiative

Against the context of widespread change, the Policy and Advisory Library (PAL) initiative was designed. Its stated purposes were to:

- review the range and content of policies and resources available to Victorian schools
- ensure that Department advice to principals and schools was coherent and consistent, by aligning policies with Departmental directions and reducing duplication
- provide an accessible and searchable portal for Department policies and resources



Steps taken and challenges faced

In June 2020, the Department launched PAL for schools as a comprehensive one-stop-shop for all Department policy and related operational guidance and resources that apply to Victorian government schools. PAL was developed as a ‘single source of truth’ policy library on the Department’s public website, replacing a number of previous policy information sources across the Department’s internet and intranet. PAL was intended to ensure staff could

easily access all Department policies and resources in one location. Each PAL page also has a contact point for the relevant Departmental area to answer questions on the policy.

PAL contains operational policy, guidance and resources that apply to schools and school-based staff. PAL does not include advice on programs, professional learning, teaching and curriculum resources, school closures, news, and all other information that is not operational policy. PAL has a dedicated search function so users can search for policy keywords. Categories include Human Resources; Finance and Procurement; Student health, well-being, safety and engagement; Infrastructure and facilities; Occupational health and safety; School operations and student administration; School councils; Learning, teaching, curriculum and improvement; and Information management, security and technology.

PAL is publicly available and there are a small number of topics on the site that also apply to non-government schools, including the School Bus Program, Conveyance Allowance, Structured Workplace Learning, Work Experience, and Vocational Education and Training (VET) delivered to secondary students. PAL is complementary to other information provided by the Department that is more focused on educational programs and delivery and professional development of staff. The Department also provides templates for schools to develop local policies in accordance with their own environment in accordance with the state-wide framework (the 'School Policy Templates Portal').

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The establishment of PAL required a significant time investment to audit the then-available documentation, identify Department owners of that documentation, and work with those owners to consolidate, reorganise and where time permitted, improve readability of the material under central oversight. From this process, approximately 1,200 documents and unique URLs were reduced to 410 topics. Consultations involved around 300 principals, 266 business managers, and 100 corporate staff, both initially and as part of user-testing of the new arrangements.

Department executives championed the PAL initiative as a major reform, and their leadership was a significant factor in the success of the project. A further key element to the project's success was the establishment of an oversight

function within a branch of the Department. This oversight function was given responsibility to review proposed policy documents and prompt areas of the Department to maintain a “reducing red tape” focus in their work.

A notable challenge facing the project was the shift to ‘digital first’ for all policy information: moving away from PDF and Word documents containing standalone policies or guidelines, and converting that content to html text on a webpage. This was important to ensure accessibility and that important information was not missed by being ‘locked’ in documents. Every word of policy and guidance is now searchable through the PAL keyword search function, removing the need for the user to know in which policy the search term is located to find the required information.

As a single policy library, that is searchable, accessible, and well-written, PAL has had a positive impact on the workload of principals. Additionally, the PAL structure provides an organising framework for Department branches to carefully consider the resources they will develop and put online to support schools implementing policy. The PAL ‘Resources’ tab provides the potentially time saving mechanisms for schools, housing template letters, forms, posters, fact sheets, and FAQs, among its contents.



Evaluations of the initiative

PAL has received extremely positive early feedback from principals and school leaders. However, it is a continuous work in progress as content is updated and improved; this continuous process is needed to ensure that schools are able to access clear and accurate information. Between its launch on 15 June 2020 until mid February 2021, PAL had nearly 2.3 million page views, and its search function was being used between 6,000 and 7,000 times per week. PAL provides an option for immediate user feedback upon leaving a page, but is also included in a formal evaluation process as part of a broader suite of reforms aimed at improving principal health and well-being.



Future developments

PAL content will be reviewed at a minimum every 3 years; many policies will be reviewed more regularly. Feedback from the evaluation will inform future developments, as will PAL user feedback.

This is part of a series of better practice examples to share how education systems and sectors across Australia are reducing the burden of compliance and administrative tasks on school leaders and teachers.

→ [Browse all practice examples and reducing red tape report](#)