The VSL celebrated its top-scoring students from the 2014 Victorian Certificate of Education exams at its Annual Top Scorers function at Melbourne University. More than 180 of the 1,600 VCE students enrolled at the VSL received scores of 40 and above, putting them in the ‘exceptional’ category. Twenty-four students topped the state in their language and six students received a perfect score of 50. Surprisingly, some even reported that they would now miss sacrificing their Saturdays or week nights to language learning.

The audience of students, families, teachers, representatives of educational and community organisations, and members of Victoria’s Consular Corps from 15 countries (ranging from Korea to France and Turkey) gathered at the Carrillo Ganter Theatre, University of Melbourne. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier, Mr Colin Brooks, said that “the Government was proud to support the VSL at a time when languages, more than ever, were in demand”. Mr Brooks also paid tribute to the role of the VSL in pioneering curriculum development. The VSL has developed a suite of online materials on behalf of Educational Services Australia for use in all Australian schools. From 2015 and 2016, it will offer Karen and Chin Hakha, languages of Myanmar, as accredited VCE subjects.

Principal Frank Merlino said the VSL’s 80-year track record had been critical in ensuring Victorians learned more languages than students in any other Australian State or Territory. In Victoria last year, out of a possible 50,383 Year 12 students, the percentage of students learning another language was 18.3%. “The percentage drops to something like 6% in some of the other states,” Mr Merlino said. He outlined challenges ahead for the VSL which included:

• arresting the decline in the number of student enrolments in low candidate languages (five have lost their VCE accreditation in recent years);
• securing national funding to develop online resources; and
• meeting the language demand in the new growth areas.

Dr Russell Cross, Senior Lecturer in Language and Literacy Education at the University of Melbourne, spoke about the common assumption that there is no need to learn another language since ‘everyone’ speaks English anyway. He asked the audience what percentage of the world’s population speaks English.
Guesses hovered around the 15%, but in fact, data from Microsoft shows native English speakers account for just 5.1% of the world’s population, other English speakers 3.4%, and 91.5% make up the rest. There are more non-native than native speakers of English, and most people who speak English today are already multilingual. Monolingual English speakers are therefore in a minority.

A perfect score of 50 is an elusive goal. Two of the top scorers, Francesca Coluccio (Italian) and Patrycja Stachura (Polish) addressed the audience. Francesca, who completed her VCE at Brighton S.C., enrolled in Italian by distance education. She explained how the complexity of language learning at a high level also demands conceptual rigour in English. Patrycja, who did her VCE at Werribee S.C., has been in Australia for just two years, coming from Britain, where her family settled after leaving Poland when she was seven. She paid tribute to the support and encouragement of her Polish teacher who steered her in books, history, culture and traditions, and even stayed behind after class.

Calling out the names of the top scorers, Assistant Principal Stefo Stojanovski displayed panache for pronunciation that rivalled former SBS news presenter Mary Kostakidis in her heyday.

The evening also recognised the efforts of students learning a language that is not a part of their heritage: Greer Sutherland studied Italian and Sachdave Singh, a Punjabi-background student, studied Indonesian. The Secretary of the Consular Corps Melbourne, Mr Trent Smythe, presented these two students with the annual Victorian Consular Corps Award for 2015.

The evening concluded with Dr Marco Maria Cerbo (Italian Consul-General) and Mr Takeshi Tanabe (Japanese Consul) representing the first 2 languages taught at the school in 1935, cutting the VSL 80th Anniversary cake.

This was followed with a spectacular Cultural Performance by the Wadaiko Rindo Drummers. At the end of the function everybody mingled while light refreshments were served.
On 3 June the top students from the 2014 Victorian Certificate of Education attended the 2015 VCE Premier’s Awards at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre. Also in attendance at the ceremony were their respective VCE teachers and parents.

The Awards were presented by the Governor of Victoria (Alex Chernov), the Premier of Victoria (Daniel Andrews) and the Minister for Education (James Merlino).

The Victorian School of Languages dominated the awards by receiving the highest number of awards of any school in Victoria - an outstanding achievement. According to the Premier, ‘The VCE is a challenging qualification and to excel as these students have is a reflection of not only talent and ability, but a commitment to achieving excellence.’

In an article in the Herald Sun newspaper on June 3, Education Reporter Kathryn Powley wrote:

‘The Victorian School of Languages was the top performing school with students receiving 15 awards, ahead of Scotch College (12), Methodist Ladies’ College (11) and Melbourne High School (10)

The Victorian School of Languages students who received a Premier’s Award were:
• Patrycha Stachura – Polish - University HS Centre
• Kara Willand – German – Dist Ed.
• Prisha Dadoo – Hindi – Glen Waverley Centre
• Dalila Hota – Bosnian – Carwartha Centre
• Tijana Avramovska – Macedonian – Thomastown
• Francesca Coluccio – Italian – Dist Ed.
• Cesar Dobre - Romanian – Dandenong Centre
• Marko Matkovic - Croatian - Keilor Downs Centre
• Amira Alzahabi – Arabic – Dist Ed.
• Ivana Dobrevska – Macedonian – Thomastown Centre
• Liyan Bojeh – Arabic – Lalar Centre
• Annika Hoffmann – German – Distance Ed.
• Nivan Kaya – Turkish – Roxburgh Centre
• Andrea Osuno – Spanish – Dist Ed.
• Maria Veresova – Russian – McKinnon Centre

Our congratulations are extended to the above mentioned students who are to be commended for their hard work and commitment to the study of their respective languages.
VCE Top Students in the State

The Victorian School of Languages congratulates all of its 2014 VCE students and especially those who received scores between 40 and the maximum 50. The following 27 students received the top marks in Victoria in their language and/or a Premiers Award.

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**Dalila Hota - Bosnian**

Dalila attended Carwatha Secondary College in 2014 where she completed her VCE. At Carwatha she studied Psychology, Biology, English and Maths Methods. She studied Bosnian at the Carwatha SC Centre of the Victorian School of Languages. This year she is enrolled at Deakin University studying law and criminology.

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**Ji Woo Lee – Korean First Language**

Studying Korean is more than just knowing how to speak, read or write its characters. It involves a great deal of delving into its culture, history and beauty, and being able to actively appreciate it. One challenge was not to be overwhelmed by the workload and to find the time to dedicate to the language study and to pace yourself. I tried to plan ahead to prepare for the exam, never rushing, and to regularly train myself into how Korean is tested at the VCE. Reading widely and listening to news are the two must-do’s. The VSL class was made up of a great cohort of people, making the VCE enjoyable, with friends learning together and supporting and complementing one another. My current goal is to study psychiatry and literature at the tertiary level.

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**Sneha Gill - Punjabi**

Studying Punjabi has given me a better understanding of my family culture, history and way of thinking. Learning Punjabi was an enjoyment in itself. I faced a number of challenges, such as I wasn’t initially able to pronounce some sounds correctly or spell words properly causing me not to believe in myself and fearing that I would fail miserably. However thanks to the support of my aunt, my uncle and my teacher, all of whom did everything in their power to support me, I achieved an excellent score. I encourage students to believe in themselves, be optimistic and have fun with the language. I would very much like to undertake a medical course and in myself, be optimistic and have fun with the language. I

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**Kester Adalia - Filipino**

Growing up in Australia I noticed that I had forgotten a lot of words and lost some language skills. Therefore, by studying Filipino at VSL I was getting the best of both worlds: studying the language that I love and working to improve my ATAR score. I found waking up early on Saturday mornings a challenge. However, the amazing experiences and the friendships that I made in the class made up for it. Being bilingual also allows us to interact and communicate better with a wider range of people. My advice to students is to speak the language you’re learning whenever you can, especially at school, and to practise your essay writing. Studying Filipino will also provide me with greater work opportunities.

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**Nabila Wahyuningtyas - Indonesian First Language**

Nabila completed her VCE studies at Bayside Secondary College. She studied Indonesian First Language with the Distance Education section of the Victorian School of Languages. Nabila is now an undergraduate student at an Indonesian University.

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**Prisha Dadoo – Hindi**

As someone who has never lived in India, I felt that I needed to connect with my culture and roots. Studying Hindi at the VSL was the best way to learn about my heritage and has enabled me to talk to friends and family in India with ease. In the words of Nelson Mandela, “If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart”. Hindi has provided me with the opportunity to enhance my communication skills, improve my creativity and expression and the ability to read and write another language. My best advice to language students would be to enjoy yourself and try to look beyond scores and exams.

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**Luka Savin – Serbian**

I came to Australia when I was twelve years old and continuing to speak and learn Serbian was very important to me. It’s important to remember our traditions and culture while at the same time integrating into the Australian way of life. By studying Serbian I was also able to discover much more about myself and the unique experiences of others. The first challenge I faced was to understand the subtleties of the exam, which made me nervous, but our teacher trained us well. Most enjoyable aspect of the class was learning with my friends and also making many new friends throughout the year. In the future I’m planning to work in an area where I can use my language skills, such as Logistics and Supply Chain Management.

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**Patrycja Stachura - Polish**

Friends of my family recommended the VSL Polish classes, and on their advice I enrolled, and never regretted a single moment of my experience. I did face some challenges, such as sacrificing my Saturdays. This meant that I attended school six days a week, and gained additional homework. However my time spent studying at the VSL was one of the most enjoyable experiences of my life. As well as meeting new people and making new friends, I had a supportive and enthusiastic teacher - which contributed to enhancing my passion for learning Polish. Pursuing language study, widens an individual's knowledge, as well as their horizons - students should not be afraid of making mistakes - for that is how we learn.
helping to maintain the language here in Australia. To getting a job. But what matters to me most is that I am now that studying Khmer will help to have an edge when it comes such an abstract language that has so much to offer! I know never failed to impress me with its richness in culture and it is new friends and explore a new world. The Khmer language has wider range of employment prospects and a greater awareness possibilities for me, to meet with By being multilingual, one has greater travel opportunities, a return to Australia to do my university studies. of world cultures. At the moment I am visiting Mexico and I will possibilties for me, to meet with The biggest hurdle I faced was getting immediate answers, but communicating by phone and the internet helped – so here’s to technology! The biggest hurdle I faced was getting immediate answers, but communicating by phone and the internet helped – so here’s to technology! Learning Macedonian was very impor"tant to me as part of my background in customs at an international airport. The biggest hurdle I faced was getting immediate answers, but communicating by phone and the internet helped – so here’s to technology! Studying a second or third language is one of the most important things a young person can do. It can help to facilitate friendships, aid cultural understanding and be an incredibly rewarding challenge. While studying two languages at school, I came to understand that the most important thing you can do to improve your comprehension and speaking skills is to completely immerse yourself in the language. I studied Spanish by distance mode with the VSL as it was not offered at my school in Ararat. The distance course had been constructed so carefully and thoughtfully that although I was physically ‘distant’ from my teacher, I never felt like I was on my own. The highlight was definitely the regular seminars where I got to meet and make friends with all the other students studying Spanish. I also loved that we not only learned the language, but also the Spanish-speaking cultures, history, geography and literature. By being multilingual, one has greater travel opportunities, a wider range of employment prospects and a greater awareness of world cultures. At the moment I am visiting Mexico and I will return to Australia to do my university studies. I arrived in Australia by boat on my actual birthday 12th March 2012 fleeing persecution in Iran. One of my teachers recommended that I study Persian at the VSL, and this helped me to achieve a great ATAR score. This was extremely important for me as I had no funding after my high school graduation and I depended on a good VCE result to secure a university scholarship. Every Saturday I made my way from Lalor to Dandong - a distance that I never considered too far! This year I am studying Bio-Medical Science at La Trobe University, I am also working as a volunteer at Melbourne Museum and a whole new species of sea cucumbers was named after me: Globosita elnazea! My advice to younger students is to not let the problems and obstacles of life destroy your dreams. The key factor for me was confidence and a good teacher. My plan is to get a study score above 90 and get into Monash University to study Aerospace engineering. I will definitely use my language skills in the future and I am grateful that studying Persian has also helped me to improve my English skills. I was thrilled at the opportunity to study Arabic in the VSL distance education section. The biggest hurdle I faced was getting immediate answers, but communicating by phone and the internet helped – so here’s to technology! Last year I completed year 12 at Lalor Secondary. This year I am undertaking a Bachelor of Criminology and Social Justice and in the future I hope to work in customs at an international airport. Learning Macedonian was very important to me as part of my background and personal identity. I was thrilled at the opportunity to study Arabic in the VSL distance education section. The biggest hurdle I faced was getting immediate answers, but communicating by phone and the internet helped – so here’s to technology! Despite the extra commitments, I was also able to socialise with others my age and made some lifelong friends in the Turkish classes. The laughs we had in class are memories that I will cherish forever. An additional benefit was that I can better communicate with my parents & grandparents who are unable to speak English. Although studying a language may seem difficult, I advise all students to persevere - the challenges you may encounter will be compensated by the number of opportunities that will become available to you.
Marko Matkovic - Croatian
I chose to build on my knowledge of Croatian by enrolling at the Keilor Downs Centre of the VSL. The greatest challenge I found last year was juggling my priorities and responsibilities whether it be language school, secondary school or extracurricular activities. I greatly enjoyed exchanging positive thoughts and ideas with my fellow classmates and striving to achieve the best results. I would recommend to any students approaching their VCE year to consider studying a language, as it will not only contribute towards your ATAR but will give you more career choices. I hope to study Law so that I can apply my second language skills in dealing with clients who have difficulties communicating in English.

Kara Willand - German
Studying German by distance education meant handing in work every week. It took time to get used to not having daily contact with a teacher. For me the most enjoyable part was the seminars. They were extremely helpful, especially leading up to the exam, and it was great to meet so many new people. I am considering studying in Germany or doing a European Gap Year.

Liyan Bojeh - Arabic
Last year Liyan studied VCE at Lalor Secondary College and she studied Arabic at the VSL Lalor Centre. She received the second highest score in Victoria for Arabic and a Premier’s Award. Liyan is now enrolled in a Bachelor of Science degree at Monash University.

Ana Carolinina Machado - Portuguese
I come from an international family, being born in Austria, raised in Australia and culturally inspired by Brazil. I choose to study Portuguese as it is part of my identity and I believe languages are the key to communication. The VSL helped me reach this goal by highlighting the importance of developing language skills within our globalised world. I am undertaking a Bachelor of Arts degree majoring in International Studies at Swinburne University to gain skills of understanding global relationships with the focus of building a stronger union between different cultures on our planet. This is something I’m passionate about and I hope to support and prioritise the importance of languages wherever I go.

Maria Veresova - Russian
In my life I have lived in three countries - Russia, Finland and Australia - and this has given me unique experiences relating to things I am passionate about, such as languages and travel. My other interests include music, performing arts and photography. In Year 12 I studied Russian, Media Studies, Mathematical Methods, Specialist Mathematics and English as an Additional Language. I also studied Units 3&4 of Psychology and Further Mathematics in Year 11. This year I commenced a science degree at Monash University, aiming to pursue a career in psychology.

Francesca Coluccio - Italian
My teacher at Brighton SC suggested that I study Italian at the VSL Distance Ed section as the language was not offered at the school. At my home school I also studied VCE French as I have great passion for languages and eventually I would like to have a career where I can use my three languages. Studying Italian by Distance was certainly a new experience for me as I didn’t really know what to expect. My Italian teacher understood what my needs were and she went ahead and designed a different type of course for me which also included how to tackle the demands of the examination. My fantastic Italian score helped to get into my preferred course – International and Global studies at Monash University.

Tijana Avramovska - Macedonian
Last year I was a student at Lalor Secondary College where I studied Biology, Chemistry, Literature, Maths Methods, and Health and Human Development. At the school I was also involved in sport, the school production and peer support. As my school did not offer Macedonian I was very pleased to study the language at the Thomastown Centre of the Victorian School of Languages. Thank you to my teacher and my fellow students for the wonderful experience. This year I am studying a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Melbourne.

Cezar Dobre - Romanian
Cezar studied Romanian at the Dan-denong HS Centre of the Victorian School of Languages. His base school was Mentone Grammar. His Romanian teacher was Mrs Licinia Surcel.

Yoshiyuki Fred Sako - Japanese 1st Language
Yoshiyuki was an International student. In 2014 he studied Japanese First Language with the VSL Distance Education section. His base school was Geelong Grammar. He is now studying in Japan.

Ridme Dolamulla - Sinhala
Studying a language like Sinhala has given me a great deal of personal satisfaction and has also assisted with my educational future. If it hadn’t been for Sinhala then I wouldn’t have been able to get into the course I wanted. During the year I did have to work very hard and I even shed a few tears due to the work load and stress. At the end of the day I am extremely grateful for all those restless, sleepless nights. I would definitely recommend future students to study a language because not only can it contribute to your ATAR score but it is also a great way to keep your language, heritage and traditions alive.
Distance Education Seminars – making the language alive - three examples

On the map of Australia, Victoria appears to be a small State. By comparison with many countries, however, it is not. At around 237,629 km$^2$, Victoria is slightly smaller than the United Kingdom, and not too far behind countries like Italy and Japan. Hence the Education Department and the State Government have the responsibility to ensure that students who live in regional or country Victoria have as much access to a wide curriculum as metropolitan students. That is why former governments established the Correspondence School (now DECV) in 1909 and the Victorian School of Languages (VSL) in 1935.

The VSL has the responsibility as a State-wide provider of assisting students who cannot study the language of their choice at their home school. The VSL teachers 11 languages in its distance education section, the equal highest in Australia. The teaching is done using distance education methodology, online courses, specialised workbooks, weekly lessons by telephone or video conferencing, email, interactive whiteboards and other technologies that students have access to.

A key important tool is the seminar, especially for senior students. Students either attend the seminars at the VSL Head Office in Thornbury or at its city venue. Sometimes if the distance is significant the teachers visit the students. Here are three separate examples, involving students of Spanish, Japanese and Italian.

On 5 June Year 7-8 students of Spanish attended the Spanish seminar in Thornbury. Joining the teachers (Ms Flora Osorio and Rose Páez), were the Spanish Advisor (Mr Manuel Moreno Alcauce) and musician (Mr Juan Pablo Vera Aragon). As well as the standard class activity the program also included a dance demonstration and a musical activity where students tried out instruments like las congas, el cajon and el guiro. The students also had the opportunity to taste dishes from three different countries – Spain, Chile and El Salvador.

On 27 March, Year 11 Japanese students attended a seminar at the city venue, with teachers Ms Andrea Collinson and Mr Boris Grizelj. As the venue is close to the Victoria Market, the students undertook a “scavenger hunt” around the market, following directions and answering questions in Japanese about various shops. Afterwards they had lunch at the Market.

Students in Mildura obviously find it more difficult to attend seminars in Melbourne – so the teacher went to the students. On 29 May Italian teacher, Mr Enzo Calati, made a flying trip to Mildura to present an intensive six hour seminar to four Year 12 students.

The VSL is playing its part in implementing the Education Department’s Languages policy and a priority is its service to students outside of the metropolitan area.
Key 2015 Term 2 Dates

2 May  Centre VCE Interim Reports distribution
3 June  Premiers Awards, Melbourne Convention Centre
6 June  Queen’s Birthday Long Weekend (No Centre classes)
10 June  VCAA VCE GAT (General Achievement Test) Exam
20 June  Centres Semester 1 Report Distribution
20 June  Final day for Years 1-10 classes for Term 2
27 June  Selected VCE language classes. Please check at your Centre
13 July  Term 3 resumes
18 July  First day of centre classes (Saturday) for Term 3

Term 2 - Professional Development

26 April  Macedonian Teachers Meeting (Thornbury)
28 April  VCE Study Design Consultation Meeting 2 – Karen (Thornbury)
1 May  MLTAV conference
27 May  VCE Study Design Consultation Meeting 3 – Karen (Thornbury)
28 May  VCE Study Design Consultation Meeting – Vietnamese FL (Chisholm, Dandenong)
24 June  Centre Coordinator Meeting 5:30-7:30pm (Thornbury)

Additional Images from the 2015 Top Scorers Evening

Section of the audience

School Council President Dr Bruno Mascitelli

Top French Students with French Consul-General Mrs Myriam Boisbouvier-Wylie

Top German Students with Consul-General Mr Michael Pearce

Top Korean students with Consul Mr Shin Min-cheol

Main Speaker, Mr Colin Brooks

Eighty years’ of service!