

# Special maths dumped

VICTORIAN students are deserting the most advanced VCE maths subject.

The number of students taking specialist mathematics — the most difficult of the three VCE maths courses — has fallen 20 per cent since 2003.

And universities have removed the course as a pre-requisite for entrance to technically oriented courses such as engineering, maths and physics.

Education consultant Russell Boyle said he believed the trend could cripple Victoria's technical capabilities into the future.

"Many of our best students, who would naturally go on to be our research scientists and engineers, are not choosing to do specialist maths because they don't have to," Mr Boyle said.

In 2003, 6200 students chose to study specialist maths. Last year, 4800 enrolled in the subject.

Mr Boyle blamed universities for the trend, saying they were putting enrolment numbers ahead of standards.

"If our universities continue to

understate the importance of specialist mathematics, the disappearance of the subject from the secondary school curriculum is likely," he said.

"As a consequence, Victoria will dumb down. There will be insufficient Victorians with skills in advanced mathematics.

"We will need to import such people to fill the many vacancies in our biosciences, computing, engineering, finance, physical sciences, risk management and teaching professions."

University entrance in Victoria is based on a system of scaled scores — easier subjects have their marks scaled down against more difficult subjects, which have marks scaled up.

Since 2005, the mean scaled study score for specialist mathematics has slipped from about 41 to about 37.

"Perhaps the Victorian Government should consider doing for specialist mathematics what it has long done for French — provide a greater reward, in terms of university entrance score, to those students who are prepared to study a difficult subject," Mr Boyle said.