

Summary and submission to the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) arising out of a VATE consultation meeting concerning the proposed changes to the draft VCE English / EAL Study Design

Submitted by the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English

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Preamble

A meeting was held at the VATE Offices in Collingwood on Tuesday 24 June 2014 of VATE members to discuss the proposed changes to the existing VCE English/ EAL Study Design. In attendance were Ross Huggard and Paul Martin, representing VATE Curriculum and Assessment Committee and VATE Council, Sean Box, Curriculum Manager-English VCAA and 23 members of VATE. At the outset of the meeting, Sean Box outlined the key proposed changes and indicated that the implementation of the new Study Design would be staggered. The following submission reflects both the views expressed at this meeting, as well as those conveyed in response to an online survey of members (number of responses?).

It was explained to the meeting that this Review was an opportunity to refine the substantial review of the English/EAL Study Design, which took place in 2007.

1. Agreed recommendations from VATE Consultation Respondees

- We strongly endorse the proposal to again stagger the implementation of the Study Design, beginning with Units 1 and 2 in 2016 and Units 3 and 4 in 2017. We believe that given the scope of changes proposed and the teaching and learning implications, such a staggered implementation is essential.
- We believe that in order to appropriately skill and prepare students for the final exam, there needs to be a clear reflection in the nature of the Unit 4 assessment tasks. In the draft document, the Unit 4 assessment outcome for Area of Study 2 is the oral presentation. This clearly does not directly prepare and skill students for the connected exam task. We would therefore advocate a reversal of the Unit 3 and Unit 4 related assessment tasks such that the written analysis task is in Unit 4, which will thereby directly connect with the direct preparation of students for the exam. Were the provisions of the

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existing draft Study Design this to remain as it stands, only one of the Unit 4 assessment tasks would directly connect with the exam, which is serious cause for concern.

- Given the fact that in many schools EAL students are taught within mainstream English classes, there was considerable concern raised about the practicalities of conducting aural assessment within an integrated class. This may present insuperable logistical difficulties.
- In a number of key areas of change, which are observable in this draft Study Design, considerable clarification is urgently sought about precisely what is being sought and what is expected of students and the criteria for assessment.

2. VATE has arranged its response to the draft Study Design under five major headings, as follow.

2.1 Reading and creating texts

VATE, in general, supports the thrust of developments reflected in the draft Study Design, but wishes to convey the following concerns, as raised by its members.

Observations of note include:

- There was much discussion about the new compulsory Unit 3 creative assessment task response. Many were of the opinion that this should be an optional form of writing about set texts as opposed to a compulsory one.
- Some believed that such creative ways of responding to texts ought to be part of the teaching and learning process as opposed to a formalised assessment task.
- Clarification is needed about the precise nature of what constitutes a creative response and to what extent this necessitates replicating stylistic textual elements as opposed to creatively exploring elements within a text, given that the skill base of many Unit 3 and 4 English students would not always enable this.
- Such a creative form, allied with its written explanation, provides a welcome contrast to the existing expository focus of current textual writing, which better connects with earlier years of secondary schooling.
- Should the written explanation be explicitly assessed and included in the actual score for the assessment task (p 12)?
- There would seem to be ambiguity about the role of a written explanation in cases where the student delivers the creative response orally (p 22).
- In the Key Knowledge for Unit 1 (p 10) there is a potentially misleading reference made to "the way authors respond to **different** contexts, audiences and purposes". There was a view that this ought to read "**particular**" to be more accurate.

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- A question was raised as to whether a list of appropriate metalanguage ought to be provided in this part of the Study Design (? see the VCE English Language Study Design as a possible model to consider herein).
- Is there any expectation that drafting will be encouraged or permitted in undertaking the related assessment task?

2.2 Reading and comparing texts: Units 2 and 4

VATE, in general, supports the thrust of developments reflected in the draft Study Design, but wishes to convey the following concerns, as raised by its members.

- Some VATE members continue to be supportive of the existing Creating and presenting/Context model whilst others perceive this innovation to be a logical and welcome one.
- A number of VATE members were unhappy with the whole proposed area.
- Clarification will be needed as to the style of writing sought here i.e. is it assumed that this must be expository?
- Concern was raised that this new development must avoid any tendency to promote simplistic thematic comparisons between set texts. This indicates the vital importance of VCAA-endorsed/provided models and professional learning for teachers to ensure a shared understanding.
- There was a strong view that the way in which the text list for this section would be presented and organised needs to be sufficiently flexible and not too narrow in focus. The suggestion was posed that texts for comparison might be clustered or selected from an appropriately connected group of texts. This might involve an overall guiding statement.

2.3 EAL Listening task

- There was significant concern raised about the practical implementation of this Area of Study, as opposed to its pedagogical basis.
- This would need to be revisited in connection with hearing impaired students who are currently designated EAL students.
- This could be advantageous for mainstream students in cases of joint classes.
- Would this disadvantage offshore EAL students?
- How long will be the listening component of the 3 hour exam, as opposed to the written component and will this be conducted on the same day?

2.4 Analysing and presenting argument

VATE, in general, is concerned that there needs to be clarification about what the essence of this Area of Study actually is (argument? or language? or?) and the sequencing of the assessment tasks across Units 3 and 4 (see opening comments) and wishes to convey the following concerns, as raised by its members.

- Concern was raised about what is meant of this new focus on "argument" and what is being sought of students.

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- Concern was raised about the perceived implied evaluation judgement of arguments, arising from the way in which the preamble key knowledge and skills are currently written.
- There was a marked division of views from respondents on the issue of the oral component. Some teachers saw the benefit of moving it to Unit 4 as part of preparation for the exam. However, others took the opposing view and believed the oral task ought to be in Unit 3.
- Concern was expressed that many students would potentially find this oral task unduly stressful if scheduled in Unit 4, with the clear focus on the final exam at this point in time; rather than as a positive, enjoyable and useful learning experience.
- EAL teachers sought clarification about whether note-taking would be retained in the exam. If it is to be retained, greater clarity about what is explicitly sought here is requested.

2.5 Word length and conditions for SACs

- The inclusion of suggested word lengths and time limits for oral presentations were generally endorsed by VATE respondents.