

Summary and submission to the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) arising out of a VATE consultation meeting concerning the proposed changes to the VCE English Language 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 Thursday 20 March of VATE members to discuss the abovementioned changes. In attendance was Paul Martin, representing VATE's Curriculum Committee, Sean Box, Curriculum Manager - English, VCAA, Kate Gillespie, Education Officer VATE, and eight members of VATE.

It was explained to the meeting that this review was an opportunity to refine the substantial review of the English Language Study Design which took place in 2010. The meeting also heard that the status of English Language has not changed, despite any moves or developments concerning the Australian Curriculum. The new Study Design for English Language, incorporating the results of this current review, will be implemented in 2016. It will remain as an English option to complete the VCE.

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VATE's consultation meeting was structured around an examination of the document entitled 'Proposed Changes to the VCE English Language Study Design' which can be found on the VCAA website. This submission will be informed by VATE members' response to, and discussion of, this document.

The first point of interest related to a change to the introductory comments which takes the following form, 'students are required to understand and use metalanguage provided in the unit and area of study introductions, and the key knowledge and skills. The following is not an exhaustive list'. Discussion highlighted that teachers should expect to examine all of the study design when looking for relevant terms and concepts that may appear in the examination. It is important that teachers understand that the metalanguage list has been extended but that the list is not exhaustive. The key knowledge and skills are vital here. VATE members discussed whether this whole point could be expressed more clearly and **VATE supports the suggestion that 'The following metalanguage is not an exhaustive list' be moved to the front of the sentence as it applies to both Units 1 and 2 and Units 3 and 4. The association also accepts the definition provided for code-switching which is to be added to the study design in order to eliminate some confusion that has arisen over that term.**

An additional heading, 'Other Metalanguages' was proposed and this is to appear underneath Semantics in both the Metalanguage for Units 1 and 2 and Metalanguage for Units 3 and 4 pages of the study design. Discussion concerning this proposed change raised a number of questions. **One suggestion, which VATE supports, is that 'rapport' and 'register' be added to the list of Other Metalanguage.** Questions were also raised as to whether 'metalanguage and concepts' should be adopted and also whether code switching ought to be considered in written as well as spoken language. **VATE supports the proposed change involving the addition of 'Other Metalanguage' to the study design. It also supports the proposed change to Unit 1 Language and communication which replaces 'gesture' with 'sign' as well as the proposed minor additions to the Unit 2 Area of Study introduction.**

VATE endorses the proposed changes to Units 1 and 2 Assessment, including the provision which states 'Assessment tasks may be written, oral or multimodal'. Analytical Commentary is to be added to the proposed list of alternative forms of assessment.

The proposed changes included that 'students continue to explore the concepts of linguistic relativism and determinism'. **VATE supports the suggestion that the specific naming of the concepts be withdrawn from page 11 (Unit 1 Language and communication) of the draft study design and that the broader 'social and cultural understandings' replace this.**

The option to discuss linguistic determinism and linguistic relativism should remain as part of Unit 1 studies but these specific concepts should not be mandatory. Specific

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mention of both these concepts should appear in Unit 2 Area of Study 2. This will cater for teachers getting through the necessary amount of content and metalanguage in Unit 1 and allow students time to develop a necessary context for the understanding of both of these concepts.

Moving on to Units 3 and 4, consistency and clarification is requested concerning the spelling of doublespeak (with a hyphen?) and the use of upper or lower case in the spelling of non-standard English. VATE is interested in whether 'broad', 'general' and 'cultivated' continue to be useful and whether it would be better to talk about 'a variety' rather than to simply focus on accents in this way. Discussion noted that some students wish to go beyond writing about accents in the way these three terms offer. This may be a matter that could be included under Units 3 and 4's 'Other Language'.

Discussion occurred about the items mentioned in the seven dot points at the top of page 4 of the 'Proposed Changes' document. These were changes relevant to Metalanguage for Units 3 and 4. **VATE supports a request for clarification as to whether 'Overlapping' should be included in the 'Non Fluency' list mentioned here. It could also be included in Strategies'. Clarification should also be sought as to whether a 'dramatic pause' is to be considered a prosodic feature. Should it come under Tempo?**

On page 5 of the 'Proposed Changes' document, VATE supports the suggestion that 'a range of historical and contemporary texts' be replaced with 'a range of texts'. This is to ensure that contemporary texts are used in Unit 4 and to make the point that historical texts are not obligatory, while the option to use them remains. Also, on page 5, five further minor amendments to the wording of Unit 4 Area of Study 1 are itemised. VATE supports the adoption of each of these.

VATE supports the proposed amendments to Unit 3 and Unit 4 assessment set out on page 6 of the 'Proposed Changes' document. There was, however, strong disagreement from some VATE members concerning the addition of 'The total length of the student responses should be approximately 600-800 words'. The mandatory feel of this sentence was not seen as appropriate. **VATE suggests that wording which speaks about a suggested word limit may be more helpful.**

Finally, VATE considered a proposal that would consider the mandating of other-than-exam tasks for SACs. VATE overwhelmingly rejects the adoption of such a proposal and notes that what such a proposal might be seeking to achieve can occur through class discussion and activities while leaving teachers free to construct SAC tasks in a way that they regard appropriate to their school's context.