



VICTORIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

The Victorian Association for the Teaching of English (VATE) submission to the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) re: the proposed English and EAL study design.

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About the VATE submission

VATE sent its online survey to its approximately 7500 members and asked a range of questions grouped under the following themes: The study of English; Areas of study; The exam. We received 33 responses. Below is the breakdown of sectors and regions:

Catholic	1	3%
Government	20	61%
Independent	10	30%
Retired	2	6%
Total	33	100%

Region	Number	Percentage
South-east	12	36%
South-west	1	3%
North-east	4	12%
North-west	13	39%
Retired	2	6%
International	1	3%
Total	33	100%

NB: 7 of the responses were submitted by one school (Government, North-west).

We reflected on the lower than expected number of responses and believe that the impact of 2020 and the ongoing challenges of COVID-19, compounded by the most recent lockdown in Victoria, meant that teachers did not have adequate space or time to read the proposed design and reflect on the changes. However, the responses that inform this submission were lengthy and fully engaged with the proposed study design and the questions posed.

We look forward to continuing to work with the VCAA to support the English teaching community across the state with the implementation of the finalised study design.



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The study of English

We started the survey with a focus on subject English and the role of senior English in the 21st century and how it equips students to become responsible and responsive citizens in a democratic society.

The predominant thread in the responses was that students need to be able to think critically and creatively in order to be active participants in a democratic society.

The following specific comments were made:

- The key role is to provide opportunities for our learners to build their critical and creative thinking and means to create, interpret and communicate meanings through various modes – speaking, listening, reading/viewing and writing.
- The capacity to interact analytically and creatively with a wide range of texts. The capacity to unpack language in a range of text types and contexts.
- Awareness of diversity, current issues and the skills to engage in a quickly changing society. Students need critical thinking skills – that is, to decipher between real and fake news – and also to be able to recognise ingrained structures in society such as patriarchy.
- To equip them with the critical thinking, writing, and speaking skills to enable them to challenge ideas, assess, critique, and advocate passionately.
- English education in the 21st century needs to equip students to be critical and involved members of society. That means they need to be able to read and understand information from a range of sources and be able to read critically, understanding nuance as well as the material's bias and the writer/speaker's agenda.
- English should be developing a student's capacity to become critical and creative thinkers through their examination of text which springboards discussions around the big questions in life.

The ability to analyse was viewed by many as an essential part of a senior English curriculum.

The following specific comments were made:

- I noted the comment that there is an over emphasis on analytical writing in the current study design – I would argue that this is the foundation of a solid senior English curriculum and effective citizenry. I understand the view that this is some form of academic elitism that excludes some students, but would counter that in fact it is the most marginalised groups who benefit most from a deep and sustained focus on analysis – and any utilitarian emphasis on the job market and writing for economic participation isn't looking across the breadth of the curriculum or at the deeper functions of language. There should be multiple texts to analyse, and multiple essays to write across the course – and creative writing and 'writing for purpose' although they have a role, should be minimised because they make the course more and more subject to the whims or skills set of particular schools (which typically creates more inequity rather than less).
- Effective thinking and analytical skills to enable them to make clear decisions and to confidently express their individual point of view, written and spoken.
- Students' need to be well informed citizens with the ability to analyse, form judgements and create arguments.



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- We want students to be able to interrogate ideas and build their own opinions and perspectives based on evidence and reflection.

The ability to communicate effectively was also seen as essential to senior English.

The following specific comments were made:

- To develop the ability to communicate effectively for different purposes and audiences.
- To communicate ideas, to negotiate with employers, employees, customers.
- To be able to communicate and understand the communication of others clearly and with minimal ambiguity, including the implications of the messages.
- English teaches them to be critical thinkers who have a strong understanding of the ways in which they communicate with others both in writing and verbally.

Finally, the mechanics of the English language were viewed as empowering.

The following specific comments were made:

- To be empowered by the command of English, students need to be able to use English correctly. There is not enough emphasis on grammar and basic skills for proper communication.
- They will not be able to navigate a democratic society if they do not know how to write effectively and understand what a democracy is.

Members were asked whether or not the proposed study design would equip students with the aforementioned skills. The respondents were evenly divided. Several focused on specific EAL concerns.

Those that commented favourably on the study design stated the following:

- It shows great promise to do so. The proposed study design gives English teachers an opportunity to foreground the craft of writing. Specifically, the removal of the comparative task means that there can be a greater emphasis on teaching a variety of writing styles and allow for a broader approach.
- Yes – the focus on multimodal text production though conceptual lenses assists in open and flexible thinking. Less texts avoids traditional reading and more modern literacy concerns.
- Brings back different forms of writing and communicating.
- The shift from a focus on structural writing to a focus on context, audience and purpose, as well as the added essential component of discussion as a key skill in some areas of study provide opportunities for students to build those skills.
- I think that removing the superfluous comparative and focusing on the essential skills will provide students with a clear understanding, and the opportunity to develop the key skills in English. It also provides a clear differentiation between English and Literature.
- It does because analytical skills are still present and it gives them a greater opportunity to be creative which I think will be a challenge. It may help with encouraging a focus on issues and themes. It might also encourage greater interest from students if they have more choice.



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However, the following comments reflect the serious concerns of respondents about the proposed study design:

- The loss of any comparison in the proposed study design means students will be leaving high school without any explicit training on how to analyse different approaches to things. This is one of the most important aspects of modern education, and also socialisation. Being able to see things from different points of view (and ideally be able to assess their merits) is crucial to living in society
- There is a significant shift towards writing at the detriment of all other macro skills. For EAL the removal of the listening component is particularly disheartening. There is also less reading and viewing.
- Not at the moment. The creative unit is not really relevant to the majority of students who have little or no interest in becoming authors of fiction.
- I am not sure it offers students as much opportunity to examine the ideas of others in order to question their own thinking due to studying fewer texts.
- While I welcome the writing emphasis in the new study design, I think that the authors of the design have little faith in students or teachers and have stuck them in the straitjacket of frameworks in which to write. I have heard the absurd notion that the design is to scaffold teachers because they are not confident in the area of teaching writing. I do not believe that. What it will do is cripple writing of any type as teachers take these frameworks down the school. Voice will be lost and that is the most important aspect of writing.
- The issues aspect of the work is very limited. Once upon a time we thought that the context included the ownership of the press. That has disappeared. How can students understand how an article is positioning them unless they understand its source? Taking out the issues oral task is the final blow to something the student can explore on their own. I find this reprehensible in a world where increasingly students need to be critical readers.

The EAL specific respondents also voiced their concerns about the removal of the listening task and a focus on writing.

The following specific comments were made:

- I feel the proposed study design places a heavy emphasis on writing only. EAL students need to be able to graduate high school with a solid foundation in not only writing, but also speaking and listening.
- I think the proposed study design presupposes that most EAL students have a certain level of English which is not always true. The proposed changes diminish commonly accessible components of the course, namely the listening component. For EAL students to thrive in the 21st century it is imperative that they develop a complete understanding of English in its various forms which necessitates the inclusion of a listening assessment.
- I do think listening should remain as one of the sections in the final year exam as it assesses student's ability to interpret English. It is particularly important for EAL students as I have found there can be a gap between EAL students' listening and speaking with their reading and writing. Students can be excellent in their reading and writing but not actually good at their speaking and listening. A lot of EAL students come from passive learning backgrounds who already focus too much on writing. By changing to another writing task, the structure of the exam will not help improve students speaking/listening.



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Members were asked whether they believed that the proposed study design offered equity for the diversity of student cohorts and a balance of rigour and opportunities for success.

Again, responses were evenly divided:

- I think rigour has gone. I think the media has to be much more diverse and cater for what students read. I do like the notion of writing but not hemmed in by these artificial frameworks.
- I don't believe the new study design offers equity. Rather it presents an opportunity for higher students to develop while the new criteria will be overly challenging for at least 40% of a typical cohort of EAL students.
- My school includes a lot of students from different backgrounds and this study design will be a lot more accessible for them. They feel more confident designing their own pieces of writing than they do analysing the writing of others, and this study design allows more opportunities for them to create their own work.
- Still too much focus on traditional text analysis. Text essay topics and the consequent essays encourage a narrow kind of reading. Until we move away from the traditional 5 paragraph text essay we are still adjusting in margins only.
- The proposed study design shows improvement in ensuring equity and inclusion as all the areas of study for both English and EAL learners are more aligned. Yet, it is disappointing that the language used for the EAL outcomes (e.g. 'beginning to analyse' or excluding 'analyse') promotes a lower expectation of EAL students' learning capacity, implying that EAL learners are incapable of analysing at Year 11 level. If analysing a text is not part of the expectation of EAL learners, then it does not offer rigour or opportunity for what they can actually achieve.
- Yes, but it is boring. Although there is an opportunity to be creative in AoS 2, English is that subject that should be about exploring different approaches. Unless I have missed the point and we are creating worker bees.
- This offers a much greater scope for differentiation in the removal of the more literature focussed task of the comparative. AoS 2 in the proposed SD offers greater opportunity to engage with writing skills suited to the student's own skills and interests which will be more valuable. The possibility of student-selected texts for part of the work here is a welcome opportunity.
- Not really. EAL students from different countries are good at different aspects of reading, speaking, listening and writing. The proposed study design has a large focus on reading and writing, belittling the importance of speaking and listening. The proposed study design does not offer a fair opportunity to all EAL students to be successful.
- I do not think it benefits the high ability students as much. I think it needs to offer more rigour and opportunities for all students to succeed.

Members were asked to consider how the proposed study design builds on the knowledge and skills developed through the 7-10 Victorian Curriculum/Australian Curriculum.

The major belief from respondents was that the proposed study design will build on the key skills of speaking, listening, reading/viewing and writing already established through the 7-10 Victorian/Australian Curriculum through:



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- A clearer alignment of the key knowledge and key skills (for VCE English) to what is being taught in Years 7-10.
- The emphasis on context, audience and purpose which are key elements of the Victorian/Australian Curriculum.
- Recognising that the analytical, creative and responsive skills taught in conjunction with thinking skills and contextual analysis in Years 7-10 are worthy of study in VCE English.
- The creation of a clearer progression of skills, especially in writing.
- Extending the value placed on creative writing in Years 7-10 and allowing more space for creative choices and creative responses to be rewarded.

Members were then asked this concluding question: Critical literacy encourages individuals to understand and question the attitudes, values, and beliefs in written texts, visual applications, and spoken words. In essence it ensures individuals become thoughtful, active citizens. How does the proposed study design provide opportunities for critical thinking in students?

Most respondents to the survey indicated that critical thinking in students will be enhanced by the proposed study design through a more focused study of texts and how these texts convey meaning. The study should include an analysis of these texts ensuring that students become clear thinkers who can critically evaluate the views, values and beliefs expressed in texts, as well as consolidate and express their own point of view.

Similarly, respondents stated that critical thinking in students will be encouraged by:

- The use of a range of challenging, confronting and rich texts to be recommended by the 'Frameworks for Ideas'.
- The inclusion of individual analytical writing, oral presentations and reflective responses.
- The opportunity to make critical decisions when considering their form, audience and purpose when composing texts.
- The provision of a more focused study of texts whilst facilitating a move away from the more traditional Anglo canon.
- Allowing student advocacy in the selection of contemporary texts written by diverse authors.

However, there were a number of respondents who expressed the view that specific attention should be directed toward:

- The preoccupation with success in the VCE English exam and the way it influences what skills schools choose to focus on which may mean that critical thinking skills are not taught or encouraged.
- The need for the text list to give scope to the goal of critical thinking by ensuring that the selected texts challenge the status quo or offer new ways of looking at things.
- Ensuring that the language analysis component of the exam is fully realised to allow students broader scope to expand/demonstrate their critical thinking and communication skills.
- Ensuring that foreign students and the difficulties they experience in interpreting and understanding idiomatic language, English humour, irony, visuals, and other nuances of the English language are addressed through appropriate text selection.



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The Areas of Study

English: Writing

Overall, the majority of respondents approved of the expansion of the study design to include writing, but were dubious or unsure about the Frameworks themselves, the set texts for these Frameworks, and the assessment of both SACs and the exam.

Members were asked the following in relation to this new area in the proposed study design:

A criticism of the current study design has been the lack of diversity of writing. Please comment on the new areas of study (Crafting texts and Creating Texts). Do these adequately address those concerns?

There was a mixed reaction to this question. About half of the respondents saw the new area as a positive change, stating:

- It's a step in the right direction.
- I feel it allows for more opportunities in the area of writing.
- It creates more scope for students to explore their own writing.
- Very pleased to see something other than analytical writing.
- Welcome a greater range of access for my students.

However, they, and others in the group, stated the following reservations.

Firstly, regarding the clarity of the task:

- It needs to be clearer, especially what it would look like in the exam.
- It still seems to be a bit vague in the types of writing they would do in this.
- Still very vague at the moment so I'm not sure.
- The proposal is quite broad at the moment.

Secondly, regarding the 'Frameworks' document:

- Much depends on what schools and teachers judge as acceptable within the parameters of the study.
- The diversity of writing can be better achieved if the performance descriptors/assessment rubrics move away from structural focused writing.
- Certain forms may arise as more favourable than others and therefore may stifle creativity or be actively discouraged in classrooms.
- The last thing EAL teachers want to see resurrected is the study of Context and writing or 'crafting' texts around this.
- My difficulty with these Frameworks is that they are so open to interpretation and teachers will be lost as to what to do. It reminds me of the Context requirement of the last VCE iteration. Teachers were lost. It's not as if these Frameworks aren't a good idea at times but should they be a requirement?
- I am not sure why it has to exist within the umbrella of 'Frameworks'. It feels similar to Context and this hinders true creative license for students. When I was in Year 12, I did a writing folio and we had complete freedom to choose what form, audience, purpose, etc. we wanted and it was then driven by our interests.



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Thirdly, in relation to assessment:

- We are concerned that schools which have taught the creative response and SAC in a perfunctory way because it is not on the exam will do the same with the new creative area of study. Areas of study not assessed at the end of the year will always run the risk of getting less attention, especially in schools focused on results above everything else.
- We have found creative writing, even when based on a text as in the current study design, to be very problematic to grade.
- The criteria for assessment and conditions of completion of this SAC would need to be stringent and specific.

Finally, in relation to the exam:

- The exam looms large.
- It needs to be clearer especially in relation to the exam.
- Not all (writing styles) will be deemed equal and certain forms may arise as more favourable than others in an examination and therefore stifle creativity or be actively discouraged within the classroom.
- I can't imagine how examiners will mark responses. Good writing is evident through a voice in the piece, an elegance in the way things are expressed, meaning, accuracy of information rather than language. Show not tell. These are the things examiners should be looking for in writing, not some artificial Frameworks which can be prepared before an exam.
- I suppose it depends on whether this area of study has been designed to be examined or not. This would be even more problematic.
- It may be difficult to assess equitably.
- We also ask how the exam will be structured. A creative response is difficult to plan and write in exam conditions, and two text responses would defeat the purpose of reducing the current emphasis on analytical writing.

One respondent saw the text selections for this area of study problematic for students but there was only one teacher who was totally against the changes stating:

- More emphasis on 'diversity of writing' will further water down the curriculum.

Further, another respondent felt that teachers would need professional learning, questioning:

- It requires a shift in some teachers' understanding and practices, which often emphasises structure when it comes to assessment. Are teachers equipped to assess a variety of writing?

In summary, the teachers welcomed the inclusion of a diversity of writing in the VCE but were critical of the Frameworks, felt the study design was too vague, and that the examination of this writing needs to be clearer.



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More specific concerns/ queries about the Frameworks

Key ideas

There were a range of views on this. Most were positive, although again there was some criticism of framing writing within key areas:

- They seem to be quite broad which is good. They are open enough that students will be able to develop their own ideas and write on topics which interest them, while given stimuli to help them find direction.
- They are all appropriate and effective.
- An interesting range of key ideas. Broad enough to be accessible for most students. A wide range of forms.
- I particularly like the fact there are more non-fiction texts and more media texts.
- I would like to see included in key ideas a focus on community, in relation to country, in forming personal values and community symbols in order to address ethnocentrism before students graduate.
- I don't like framing key ideas even though I can see you have made them loose.
- It might be better to drop the Frameworks altogether and allow students to write what they want to write.

The stimulus texts

Many respondents felt the texts were too difficult, too long, and without purpose.

The following specific comments were made:

- It seems pointless for students to study long/complex texts when they do not need to refer to them in their text response. If the text being studied is not going to be the primary focus then it should be short and simple, so less time is devoted to it.
- Some of the written texts are far too challenging and will take a long time to study.
- I would very much prefer it if all the prescribed texts were much shorter (i.e. a few pages in length) for example, speech letter, opinion piece, blog post, diary entry etc – model the writing students would produce.
- The opportunity for multimodal texts to be used as stimulus is great.
- Stimulus texts are too limited at this stage.
- I have major concerns about the stimulus texts.
- Given that the task is about creating texts, there seems to be a disconnect between the expectations (in terms of these set texts) and the SAC task.
- The written texts prescribed are long, difficult and challenging (i.e. *Heart of Darkness*). Our school would not be able to select any of these texts. Moreover, if we were to choose multimodal texts, then we would not be able to go on to study multimodal texts in U2/4, which is very limiting.
- It would be much better if the suggested list of four texts included short articles, short stories, letters or emails – short, easy to understand texts that would not take a long time to study.
- Currently, it seems redundant to study some of these longer/more challenging texts, only for these to 'support' students' study, rather than be the focus of their study. If there is 'no expectation that students must use the ideas... of any stimulus text in their writing', then what is the point of spending so much time studying it?



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A few people felt the stimulus texts were interesting, stating:

- Love the modern range of texts.
- A valuable resource for teachers which would support equity, inclusion and student agency.

There were also others who were not clear how the stimulus texts related to writing and needed more information. Many were frightened that writing would 'morph into Context writing'.

There was not much support for the notion of form, audience and purpose:

- What benefit do EAL students get out of having to write about form, purpose, content?
- Audience and purpose are overrated. Of course, you eventually have an audience and purpose but often this comes as the writer writes. Too much emphasis on these things at the beginning destroys writing.
- Sometimes I feel that these things can become arbitrary for students. For example, audience – other teenagers. Purpose to pass this unit.

One teacher did point out that 'Form, audience and purpose are fine – it is good for students to bear that in mind when they write, and to understand how they shape writing and language.'

Members were asked: What opportunities and challenges do you see with these Frameworks?

Respondents felt the challenges outweighed the opportunities and some teachers could not work through this given what they thought was the vagueness of ideas in the study.

Opportunities included:

- Somewhere to start from.
- I like that they will give choices to students about what they write about and what form they use. They will allow students to choose based on their strengths.
- Opportunities for more teacher engagement.
- Student choice and voice, strength-based approach.

Challenges included:

- They could become formulaic, like the old statements of contention for Context pieces.
- Some schools may impose choices on students, however, which may reduce this benefit.
- Some issues may arise around the changes for change's sake and the possibility of the social conditioning of student thought.
- Students' decision-making ability and assessment criteria.
- EAL students need direction and scaffolding. Creative writing is not their strength. It is difficult and not a concept that they have been exposed to until they come to Australia. The end products are quite often not that good.
- Creative writing is not something I would advocate for EAL students.



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- May be too broad for students who need explicit instruction in a form.
- Our student cohort are not readers and therefore have little exposure to different text types outside the materials provided to them (and sometimes read to them) in class.
- Formula ++ all the way down the school. Preventing the voice of students.

Many of the teachers felt that the suggestions in the study design were too broad and too vague for them to make comments.

The removal of the comparative text response

Members were asked to consider the following:

The comparative study has been removed from the study design and replaced with 'Crafting texts' and 'Creating texts'. Please comment on this change and the opportunities and challenges.

There was a mixed response to this request. Those who did not want the change argued the following:

- I believe that the comparative essay has no place in the EAL study design but it did have a place in the English study design.
- I think this is a bad decision, being able to make connections across texts is a skill which students should have as it allows them to also make connections across area of their own lives.
- I think the ability to compare is essential. Either the analysing argument should have a mandatory comparison component or the single text response should be changed into a comparative text response
- There is no replacement for the comparative in the study design.
- We actually enjoyed the comparative response and so do the students. All that effort has gone into preparing resources over the past few years is now wasted.
- Further information is needed.
- The comparative is valuable as it encouraged lateral thinking, however, it was difficult for students to achieve a high level of success.
- Many teachers find the comparative study much better than the previous Context study. Whilst it does mean there is an emphasis on texts, I think this will be a loss, particularly in terms of the critical issues it raised in the study.
- Apart from the text/theme stipulations, the tasks don't really compare. Teaching the comparative text analysis, I felt the students enjoyed it and it developed the text analysis skills in an appropriate manner. I am sorry it is gone.
- I personally loved the comparative study but I also like the idea of creating and crafting texts.

Those who supported the change argued:

- Much better. Teaching two complex texts for the comparative was a huge ask. It was also too similar to an analytical text response to offer anything new.
- I think that this is better and will allow for students with more diverse needs to access the content better. The comparative task was too complex for many students.
- I think this is a good decision. Including two SACs focused on text response will allow them to develop these skills properly.



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- Our school would like for one text response to be based on a novel and the other on a film.
- The paring back of texts allows for single texts to be studied more thoroughly.
- Good riddance to an egregious and banal exercise.
- With the new study design, the higher-level skill of comparison can be covered by Literature.
- It makes the study design less 'text heavy' and analytical which is a good change.

It was evident through many of the comments of support that respondents wanted to keep this area of study because it offered a way that higher order thinking skills could be honed and valued.

Those who wanted it to go often argued that it was too difficult for their students. As one respondent argues:

- It appears that we have English 'Lite' in this new study design and that conceptual hard thinking has been removed in favour of easy thinking. The vision of English as a spur to student agency, critical thought and democracy has been lost and this is extremely serious.

English: Change involving the oral assessment being moved

Opportunities provided by the change included:

- Teachers felt that this change gave students the opportunity to be 'truly creative'. The fact that it will allow students to still present an argument, if this is what they are comfortable with while allowing others to do other things based on their strengths, interests, background etc. was well received.
- It was noted that this change is a sensible shift from 'an oral assessment approach' to 'a discussion focused approach' and was positive because it aligns with the focus on context, audience and purpose in a practical way.
- The change was welcomed because it encourages students to speak about something they have created and hopefully care strongly about, rather than a restricted topic about which they are pretending to be interested in. A rider observation was added that choice can lead to engagement, though if it is too broad students can feel lost.
- This change can make students' oral presentation more authentic as they can 'discuss their own choices as writers'.

Challenges provided by the change included:

- A number of teachers had reservations about the change because 'persuasive speeches are an important aspect of life and should not be lost from the study design'.
- Concern was expressed that comparability for assessment purposes may be an issue.
- Some teachers sought more detail about how this change will unfold. Will schools, for example, simply mandate a task that will most closely align with the exam to the detriment of the breadth of education intended by the change? Will it be allowed to just become a 'replacement persuasive oral' (depending on the chosen Framework)?
- A number of teachers observed that this change furthered the study design's lack of encouragement to students to look forensically at the whole of the media. This was



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encouraged in early versions of the VCE English study design. Teachers also observed that this absence was a 'great drawback', and that it made 'the course much less rigorous. One teacher commented: 'I really liked having the oral assessment in the issues unit because this is the one chance students had to research the current media climate and find out who owns the media in Australia, who has vested interests in the media and their issue and why, and why does it all matter. I would like to see this one moved back.'

- An observation was made that at present the oral presentation in Unit 4 attracts 40/100 marks. This has been a great boost for students whose strength lies in oral rather than written work. This advantage, it is claimed, will be lost if an oral presentation becomes only part of the overall mark for the Creative SAC in Unit 3.

English: Response to the extent that the issues component of the course reflects the media that most of the students are consuming, allowing for critical reflection and production of such media.

- Respondents to this concern were overwhelmingly at pains to emphasise that this component tends, in practice, to reflect old media. Many observed that most students access their information about their world through social media. There was, however, recognition that the proposed study design does explicitly include, 'texts in a variety of forms, including print and digital, and aural, visual and multimodal ...'
- The definition of an issue was considered sufficiently broad and there was support for the description now saying 'in the media' and not 'Australian media'.
- Although teachers universally commented on the social media sources students use to access information, they were not unhappy about having to help students engage with and critically reflect on more substantial materials from 'appropriate news channels'.
- The point was made that, in reality, teachers 'work hard to provide engaging material to our students and to issues that are accessible for all.' Building up the skills of reading media texts is still regarded to teachers as an important area of focus for senior English, especially in light of the fact that students privilege viewing rather than reading media content.
- An observation was made favouring no longer having to compare in the analysing argument task.

EAL

Respondents saw both opportunities and challenges in the combined study design.

Regarding opportunities, respondents argued that the combined study design encouraged the development of learning communities with greater inclusiveness and equity, and opportunities to build cultural capital. They believed that it will be especially important in schools who have few EAL students and have been, therefore, unable to offer separate classes.

These respondents felt that a combined study design will, in turn, lead to more capable learners, but will require skills on the part of teachers regarding differentiated teaching and learning. Currently the capacity to deliver such in mainstream English classes remains problematic. EAL students need more scaffolding than non-EAL students.



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One respondent stated strongly that the attempt to meet the needs of EAL students in a combined study design sells both EAL and non-EAL students short. It will result in a dumbed down English curriculum and EAL students will remain silent and hidden. It will compound the disadvantages from which EAL students already suffer.

Regarding the removal of the listening assessment task, only a few respondents saw this positively.

The following specific comments were made:

- If our focus is context, audience and purpose across all four key skills, then EAL students are building, practising and reflecting on their listening in class in an organic way through listening to instructions and participating in discussions. This organic way also provides them opportunities to ask questions and re-voice what they hear to clarify and check their understanding – an effective interactive way to authentically build their listening skills.
- The listening task is artificial and its removal will require EAL students to see the relevance of building their listening skills.
- The listening task was problematic for hearing impaired EAL students.

The objections to the removal of the listening assessment task made the following points:

- There is no formal listening component to any outcome in the study design.
- Listening is an essential life skill and needs explicit teaching and assessment.
- The listening task rewarded students who have non-traditional English skills.
- Listening will become marginalised in the 7-10 curriculum
- A listening component is a standard part of language courses in Australia and across the world.
- The decision to remove the task is based on administrative convenience rather than important issues of wellbeing and pedagogy.
- The decision undervalues the amount of work teachers have put into developing pedagogies and resources for teaching the task.



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The exam

There was little support from respondents for maintaining a three-hour exam. Objections to its length were grouped around the following concerns: student wellbeing, equity with other 'Englishes', and the duplication/repetition of skills assessed.

Several responses suggested that the length of the exam was psychologically stressful and physically demanding. One respondent said there are very few examples in real life where one is expected to concentrate for three hours. A mitigating fact, one respondent suggested was that the three-hour exam is marked kindly and encourages students to work effectively and efficiently.

Similarly, several respondents suggested that the length of the exam was an equity issue when compared with the length of the Literature and English Language exams. One queried whether the length of the exam was a reason for students not choosing English.

There was considerable criticism of the fact that the three questions duplicated the kinds of skills assessed, especially the requirement to assess texts in two different contexts. The skills required are still analytical. One respondent suggested that VCAA do some data analysis to see what impact on results/rankings a removal of one of the current text response questions would have.

Another suggested that the current English exam be split into two parts, sat at different times. One with learnt content, one with unseen material.

While several welcomed the idea of a creative response, there was a range of concerns about how effectively that might be implemented under exam conditions, largely to do with how difficult it is to be creative in the time allowed, and how difficult such a response is to assess. Several recognised a possible repeat/continuation of the current dilemma with creative writing: if it is not assessed in the final exam it will be treated cursorily by many teachers.

The majority of respondents preferred a two-hour exam though there was considerable variation as to what the components of that exam might be.

The following suggestions were made:

- A text response and argument analysis or the opportunity to create a text.
- One argument analysis and one creative response for a specific purpose.
- A model used in some states in USA where the emphasis is on researching, reading, thinking, analysing, and communicating skills through a flexible approach where students are given questions for an essay and a short time frame for them to consider them before sitting the exam.
- Space for short answer questions rather than always relying on extended argument analysis.

Regarding how the new writing areas of study might be assessed the following suggestions were made:

- One analytical essay on studied text.
- One set of short answer questions with a shorter analysis essay.



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- An open prompt or guideline with stimulus material relevant to the framework which would allow students to write in any form – persuasive, expository, creative.
- Provision of stimulus material/article with students required to write a letter to editor response.
- Language analysis component should have a point of view response.

Several thought this component of the study design should be assessed through the SAC process by:

- Oral presentation.
- Portfolio of writing authenticated by drafting and peer assessment and moderation processes.



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Additional comments

- EAL needs to be treated as a stand-alone study design that is more aligned with English, with extra funding provided to schools to allow for specific EAL classes.
- Removing the comparative section in favour of some general writing task is a mistake that will weaken the curriculum and lower teaching standards. The comparative should be replaced with another text response, with a requirement that the two responses use different text types.
- The traditional text essay dominates subject English because of the external VCE exam.
- The new study design is an attempt to broaden the curriculum in line with the 7-10 curriculum. However, when English teachers at 7-10 are encouraged, with little if any resistance it must be said, to incorporate VCE work in the lower levels there will be little change at any level while VCE exam requirements dominate thinking about subject English.
- There is a lack of specificity in the study design as it stands, especially regarding the new AOS2. More information is required about the exam before the study design is finalised.
- A completely overhauled study design was not necessary given we have only just come to terms with the current one.
- Regarding Section C, there should be an attempt to include issues that adolescents are actually interested in.
- Remove the section where students are required to write an extended piece analysing visual and written language, and replace it with a point of view piece which is more useful and less challenging to master.
- The text list for proposed AOS2 should be modified. The requirement for students to read texts like *Heart of Darkness* and *Catcher in the Rye*, is unrealistic. The list should include a selection of short/simple texts such as short stories, articles, letters, emails, or schools should be able to select their own texts for study in this unit.
- The inclusion in English of more multimodal texts would be representative of the types of texts students read and view, particularly for the issue analysis area.
- The review group should rethink reading as a skill which builds instead of focusing on the study of a particular text.
- Who determines the changes to a study design? What is their expertise and experience? There should be transparency as to who these personnel are and to what degree genuine representation of professional teaching associations is recognised.
- My colleagues are uneasy about changes, but generally welcome the refocus on the writing craft and exploration of expression.