**Senior Syllabuses Draft 3: English, Essential English, Literature, English as an Additional Language**

**ETAQ response, November 2016**

**Introduction**

The English Teachers Association of Queensland (ETAQ) has provision for both individual and school corporate membership and a conservative estimate of membership coverage extends to at least 2800 teachers. It has a reach across the state and across schooling sectors and has a history of strong advocacy for English teachers.

This response is based on commentary and feedback we have received to date from members of the association, and expert perspectives provided by members of our Management Committee.

**Learning area structure (Figure 1)**

This graphic seems to be missing a dark grey bubble for the ‘Extension’ category, which would connect to the ‘English & Literature Extension’ block.

**Recommendation 1:** Add a box for the ‘Extension’ course category to complete Figure 1.

**Rationale**

The rationale is currently very similar across courses with some significant variations. For some aspects, the lack of commonality across the suite of English subjects is problematic e.g. texts by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers are identified specifically as essential to include in *Essential English*, *Literature* and *EAL*. However, this is not mentioned at all in the equivalent spot for *English*.

There are a number of minor differences which seem caused more by the fact that expert writing teams have worked on content separately and independently, but it is essential that these rationales now be cross-checked to ensure the information provided helps schools to understand how the subjects vary. **We have provided with this submission an example of the ‘reading across documents’ that an English teacher would do to start interpreting the differences in these rationales alone.** Teachers need to be confident that any points of differences between the syllabus texts have been thoughtfully and intentionally crafted.

**Recommendation 2:** That the rationales in each of the English subjects contain a clearer reference to what is different between the subjects, including reference to the cohort of students most suitable for each subject.

**Recommendation 3:** That additional comparison tables or similar be added to each syllabus allowing at-a-glance comparisons of key features in each syllabus. These should include comparisons between courses of

* the number and type of texts required for in-depth study,
* the unit titles and assessment types,
* the objectives and subject matter.

**Recommendation 4:** That the rationales in each of the English subjects are compared carefully to ensure that commonality is used for those aspects which deserve to be common, e.g. currently shifting references to Australian/Indigenous/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers.

**Pathways**

The Pathways sections of the various English syllabuses need to provide clear guidance to schools, students and parents as to which cohorts of students should select the various English courses on offer. Currently they do not provide adequate differentiation. The advice that schools will need to issue to guide subject selection needs to be comparable and clearly based on the syllabuses.

Take these differences for example:

*English* ‘Pathways’ extract:

*English* is a general subject that offers Queensland students from diverse cultural, social, linguistic and economic backgrounds, opportunities to pursue pathways beyond Year 12 that lead to work, vocational education and tertiary studies.

*EAL* ‘Pathways’ extract:

*English as an Additional Language* is a general subject suited to students who are interested in pathways beyond Year 12 that lead to work, vocational education or tertiary studies.

**Recommendation 5:** That the Pathways section be reviewed to include more useful information, using purposeful and direct language.

**Reporting Standards**

We are glad to see “the relationship between text, context, audience and purpose” appear as a feature of the reporting standards.

We are also glad to see that students must demonstrate their ability to employ “use of mode-appropriate features to achieve particular purposes”, and that the elaboration of the term “mode-appropriate features” includes written, spoken, signed, and complementary audio and visual features. We suggest, however, that the summative assessment plan be reviewed, checking that enough opportunity has been provided for students to demonstrate their skill in using features across **all modes** (written, spoken and multimodal) and **across mediums** (print, live, digital).

The current proposal for BOTH tasks in Unit 4 to be conducted as exams places serious limitations on our ability to confidently apply the reporting standards.

**Recommendation 6:** That internal summative assessment 3 is CHANGED from an exam, to provide another opportunity for students to be assessed in various modes and on fully developed work.

**Conceptual Framework**

We once again ask that the conceptual framework for English be expanded. Compared to other subject syllabuses, it is very short on detail and direction.

We have previously suggested that the text-context model of language would be useful in this section. Other conceptual areas that could be included are:

* Comments on **language modes** - explaining that English is the study of written, spoken/signed and multimodal language
* Comments on **mediums** - explaining that English is the study of texts in print, live, and digital/screen mediums of production
* Comments on the importance of developing knowledge/enjoyment of Australian literature

**Recommendation 7:** That the conceptual framework be expanded to include further concepts central to the teaching of English.

**Subject Matter**

The additional layer of ‘subject matter’ in the syllabuses is quite confusing. We aren’t sure how it is intended to relate to the assessment criteria, or other elements of the syllabus. There is also inconsistency in how the subject matter has been designed across the courses. To illustrate:

The organising framework for the subject matter in *English* is:

* Texts in contexts
* Language and textual analysis
* Responding to and creating texts.

The organising framework for the subject matter in *Essential English* is:

* Understanding texts
* Language and textual analysis
* Responding to and creating texts.

But the subject matter in *Literature* is organised completely differently, using ‘Areas of Study’.

**Recommendation 8:** That the differences and similarities between subject matter in each of the English subjects are deliberate and carefully considered after a considered comparison of the approach for each of the subjects.

**21st Century Skills**

ETAQ acknowledges the important work that has been undertaken in the ‘analysis of educational trends’ (November 2015) undertaken by the QCAA to determine which 21st century skills are most widely understood as critical for students’ success in further education and life.

**Recommendation 9:** That final design of assessment in *English* subjects provides scope for tasks that can engage students in collaborative and highly creative work, in particular using digital publishing mediums.

**The status of Essential English**

If *Essential English* is to be the replacement for *English Communication*, and adequately cater for all of the cohort of students who currently take that course, there needs to be a convincing explanation as to why the new *Essential English* is to be a general, rather than an applied, course and to contribute to an ATAR.

The difference in level of difficulty of *Essential English*, compared to the rest of the suite of English subjects, makes this difficult to understand and undermines the value of the ATAR itself. It is extremely unlikely that any university will judge *Essential English* as the appropriate entry requirement for courses.

**Recommendation 10:** That *Essential English* is developed as an Applied subject rather than a General subject.

**Instrument-specific marking guides (ISMGs)**

In subject *English* in Queensland, there is a long tradition of pieces of student work being marked holistically rather than separate marks/grades being allocated for the various criteria derived from the syllabus. If the new syllabuses are to depart from this long-standing practice, there needs to be some convincing justification rather than it just being imposed. At the very least, some justification for the balance of attention that each assessment objective is given.

To be practically useful, criteria/standards marking rubrics for individual pieces of student work need to be able to be fitted on a single side of A4 without the print being so small as to require a magnifying glass. It does not appear that the ISMGs in the draft syllabuses will be able to be presented in this manner.

It is recommended that the performance standards descriptors that differentiate one grade level from another (e.g. discerning, effective, suitable, superficial) be separated from their stems and shown in separate columns so that the key items of information are not time-wastingly hidden in dense thickets of repetitious verbiage.

**Recommendation 11:** That the ISMGs be redesigned with the end user in mind - an English teacher who will have to use them to communicate standards of achievement with a teenage student (and their parents).

**Summative Assessment**

The detail for internal assessment across the subjects is clearly defined and, for the most part, offer opportunities for students to demonstrate their skills. However, there are a number of serious weaknesses with some elements of senior assessment, weaknesses which could be reduced with simple changes.

Firstly, with the move to 4 pieces of assessment, it is very concerning that 50% of the assessment load is now under exam conditions. This severely undermines the preparedness of students to work in the real world of writing and speaking where editing is the critical skill. It also severely limits the capacity of students to work in a multi-modal style.

**Recommendation 12:** That, for all English syllabuses, the external exam is the only task to be completed in exam conditions, making tasks completed in exam conditions 25% of the total rather than 50% of the total mark.

Secondly, the level of prescription in draft 3 is unnecessary, even within the context of high prescription syllabuses across the board. It is possible for the purpose of assessment and the nature of the units to be maintained whilst schools could have a choice of mode (spoken/multi-modal or written). The ISMGs could easily be adapted to allow schools to include the most relevant elements for their chosen modes. For example, in *English*, a school could choose to fulfil the content and skill sets for Internal Assessment 1 by speaking and the content for Internal Assessment 2 by writing. The same could apply in all of the syllabuses.

**Recommendation 13:** That there is some flexibility allowed to schools to adapt the mode of delivery to best match the content of the unit studied.

Thirdly, Internal Assessment 2, in the *English* syllabus, is a very poorly constructed task which is unlikely to allow students to achieve at their best. It has two great weaknesses.

Firstly, the basis for the unit is an analysis and appreciation of media texts. However, the assessment is completely at odds with this intent as it asks students to create a piece of persuasion. It is very likely that the important work of understanding how to analyse and appreciate representations within the media, a critical component of the *English* syllabus (as compared to the *Literature* syllabus) will become secondary to the quite divorced task of persuading the public, based on research.

Secondly, **Internal Assessment 2** is not based on the set of texts within the unit. It is, instead, a unit which requires students to complete Social Science-like research to write a piece of persuasion. Experience of panelists and teachers in ETAQ very strongly recommends that such a task has a strong likelihood of limiting the potential of students to achieve at the highest levels. It would be a much stronger task if it asked students to respond to a specific text or set of texts.

**Recommendation 14:** That Internal Assessment 2, in subject *English*, is entirely reconsidered to ensure that the desired content and skills outcomes are in consonance with the assessment and that the type of task is based on a set of texts/a text.

The dilemma of **Internal Assessment 2** comes from the broader choice of the extremely narrow and limiting nature of the framework of the syllabus, not allowing schools to construct the best types of tasks due to unnecessary levels of compulsion.

Another lost opportunity of the limiting and narrow prescriptive nature of the Internal Assessments is the potential ‘squeezing’ out of the feature article as a mode of persuasive writing. Many schools have been very successful in using feature articles in particular ways and they are now frequently required in university assessment. Schools will have a limited opportunity to access/teach certain genre such as feature articles because of the level of narrowing of the types and modes of assessment for each unit. More flexibility in allowing schools to choose their modes of delivery will allow schools to continue to work the particular modes of writing and speaking that they have honed well in their local contexts.

**Internal Assessment 3**, in *English*, is further evidence of the problem of having such narrow opportunities for schools to construct their own programs which best suit their local contexts. Completing the creative written task in exam conditions mitigates against the real skills of collaboration and editing that would normally apply for such a piece of writing in a realistic context. This could severely limit the effectiveness of this type of writing and undermine the excellent work that many schools do around encouraging realistic creative writing. Such skills are essential for a society which requires flexible thinkers and creative individuals who can think outside the square.

**Recommendation 15:** That the modes of writing and conditions are not tied to specific sets of content to allow schools the flexibility to choose their own ways of meeting all set conditions, using all required modes and covering all sets of content.

Unit 4 in *Literature*, which gives students and schools the opportunity to engage in an open-ended investigation is considered a highly appropriate option for this subject. This provides the example of where more choice is possible within more of the syllabuses.

Assessment in *Essential English* shows an improved variety of assessment which matches, more closely, the current *English Communication* SAS, and is an improvement on draft 2 of this syllabus. The strength of these units is that they also provide a degree of openness of approach and content.

**Advice around Syllabus Implementation within Schools**

Advice to LARGs has been a strong suggestion that schools begin their units 3 & 4 work in the year 11 year. This creates an enormous problem for schools in terms of equity. What would stop a school from starting earlier in year 11 and allowing their students a much greater window of time to complete their tasks? How equitable would it be to compare results across schools? Secondly, English achievement varies enormously according to the age of the student. Therefore, having all assessment in year 12 would allow students to best demonstrate their best performance in writing and speaking. Another major problem with having students complete unit 3 & 4 assessment in year 11 is that it will make transfer between schools extremely fraught for students. If one school is enabled to begin at the end of year 11 semester two, another at term 4 in year 11 and another in year 12, students will then be obliged to complete missed elements of their assessment, in their new schools, with minimal teacher support and guidance. This is likely to increase the vulnerability and inequity for students.

All of the same arguments apply for beginning units 1 & 2 in year 10.

**Recommendation 16:** That the QCAA offer equitable and clear guidelines as to when units 1 & 2 and 3 & 4 should be completed and that units 1 & 2 should not begin until year 11 and that units 3 & 4 not begin until year 12.

**Resources to be Made Available to Schools**

It will be essential for schools to have access to a wide range of resources in order to be ready to implement successfully in 2019. Some of these include:

* Example/practice papers available for the first cohort of students
* Marked papers of sample exams available to first and ongoing cohorts
* Sample tasks for Internal Assessments 1-3, marked, annotated
* Wide range of tasks suitable for use for Internal Assessments 1-3.

More importantly, the QCAA has indicated that workshops for each subject will be available from July 2017 onwards. These will be appreciated but will be ‘just a drop in the ocean’ of need for teachers.

Teachers associations, such as ETAQ, are in the best position to be the prime provider of quality professional development for teachers. This service will be unlikely to fit within the normal framework of services currently provided. It is also likely that students will be keen to access advice on how they can best be prepared for their exams. Therefore, it is essential that the QCAA works with teacher associations in finding the best way to prepare teachers through:

* Access to materials/past papers/expertise which will assist teachers in preparing for such a change
* Access to QCAA staff and people in positions such as Chief Marker to address teachers (and students)
* Financial support in the move to be able to provide such important PD across the state (some in person and some on line)
* Financial support to allow associations to be best able to research the best models of provision of support for teachers and students in other states.

Such a change requires a change of thinking in terms of best supporting teachers in Queensland. There is much experience in the nation on how best this can be achieved. It is critical that a strong partnership between subjects associations such as ETAQ and the QCAA is maintained and strengthened as we face the introduction and maintenance of the next phase of senior assessment in Queensland. ETAQ remains keen to ‘bear the load’ and is keen to work cooperatively to create the most seamless transition possible.