



Westralian Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

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Mr Robert Randall
General Manager Curriculum
Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)
Level 10
255 Pitt Street
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30 July 2010

Dear Mr Randall,

The Westralian Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (WATESOL) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback for the senior school English courses.

The following response has been prepared and reviewed by members who have extensive expertise in the field of curriculum development and teaching for learners of English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D).

WATESOL welcomes the opportunity to consult further with ACARA and to collaborate in the ongoing development and implementation of the national senior English curriculum.

Yours sincerely,

Belinda Stewart
President WATESOL

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**Westralian Association of Teachers of English to
Speakers of Other Languages
(WATESOL)**

**Response to draft
Australian Senior English Curriculum**

30 July 2010

Preamble

WATESOL views the writing of an Australian English curriculum as an historic opportunity to create courses that will be considered exemplary in a worldwide context, demonstrating a commitment to inclusivity and to education as a human right for all. In the context of the current political climate in which migrant/refugee intake figures are used to manipulate voters, and in which the participation levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students is poor in many communities, we value the opportunity to have input into a curriculum which has the potential to both engage the disengaged and marginalised, and extend the strongest students, so that they become confident and competent communicators within Australian society. These courses have the potential to add social capital to students who are easily forgotten, despite numbering up to 25% of the Western Australian school population.

Senior Schooling in Western Australia underwent curriculum change in recent years. Thanks to extensive lobbying from committed educators and advocates for our students, and to the commitment undertaken by the Curriculum Council that the new courses best meet student needs, we are now able to offer a selection of **eight** (four pairs) units which allow students to choose pathways according to their interests, ambitions and abilities, valuing their pre-existing language skills, giving them the sociocultural understandings and language learning strategies and communication skills for engagement in Australian society, leading to the workplace or further study at technical colleges or university.

Our new EAL/D course has enabled students to continue to develop their English language skills through relevant contexts at a variety of levels appropriate to their needs. Those students who in the past were forced to enrol in Vocational English (Essential English) are instead enrolling in EAL/D units which better target their specific linguistic and sociocultural needs. Anecdotal evidence collected from across the state suggests that these students, rather than fossilising, are continuing to improve their language skills, enabling them to better achieve their future goals, and take their place as citizens who contribute to our nation.

Stronger students with academic ambitions are being extended in higher level units, and are able to use EAL/D as a scoring subject for calculating their ATAR score. Universities recognise that despite the significant differences between other English scoring subjects and EAL/D, there is parity between the courses.

Dialect speakers, particularly in remote Aboriginal communities, are enrolling in and benefiting from our EAL/D course which addresses their linguistic and cultural needs and offers sufficient flexibility to enable teachers to match student interests.

WATESOL members are alarmed by the draft senior English curriculum for these learners. Implementation in its current form would mean stepping into the past, where those students with the most need are forced to enrol in a course which was not written with their needs in mind, and in which teachers are unable to make their own professional judgements about which texts are appropriate to their students' needs and interests.

The philosophy behind the WA EAL/D course is one of equity and inclusivity. Students from language and dialect backgrounds other than standard Australian English can enrol in a course which is **different** to the English course, but which best allows these students to achieve success in Australian society through the acquisition of English language appropriate to their levels. The draft senior English curriculum appears to value 'sameness' over equity, implying in parts, a watered down version of English; a poor second cousin, rather than a course which can stand proudly on its own.

In sum, two related aspects are clear: firstly, that the current draft will exclude students most in need; and secondly, that access to equity will only be achieved through a curriculum that facilitates access, which the current draft does not do. The current senior secondary curriculum in WA achieves the required equity, inclusivity and parity that is crucial for ESL/D learners in a manner that is rigorous, culturally inclusive and appropriate.

Numbering and questions correspond to the online feedback survey. **EAL**

1. The rationale provides clarity about the position and importance of the course.

STRONGLY DISAGREE

- Both the **title** of the course and the **rationale** should explicitly state that this course is intended for dialect learners as well as learners of English as an additional language. Dialect learners can include for example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students and refugee students from overseas countries such as Liberia. Both groups speak dialects of English which differ significantly from standard Australian English. Many of our members are concerned that the name of this course “EAL” is exclusive of these cohorts and is not in keeping with overseas trends (in, for example, Canada and the UK) and should be changed to “English as an Additional Language or Dialect” (EAL/D). Indeed the target language, in the case of all students, is Standard Australian English. This renders EALD as, therefore, the most appropriate name. In Western Australia, recent curriculum change saw ESL replaced with EAL/D. The change in name and course focus have led to an increase in enrolments from our Indigenous population, leading to improved engagement and retention rates at a senior secondary level.

Suggested change:

English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) is designed for a diverse cohort of students who are *learning English as an additional language or dialect*. [...]

- The EAL (or “EAL/D”) course must not be, and must not be perceived to be, of lesser status and complexity to the English course. It must be recognised as a course which is of equivalent status and which encompasses differentiated rationale, aims and content that meet the English language learning and skills development needs of learners of EAL/D. The rationale must signal that the EAL (or “EAL/D”) course meets the requirements for university entrance and that it is of equal status to the English course.
- English has become the language of international communication. Universities, technical colleges and workplaces are not simply asking for complete accuracy and fluency. They are asking for school graduates who can demonstrate general fluency, good communication skills and reading skills.
SUGGESTED CHANGE 'focus on accuracy and fluency' *change to* 'sufficient accuracy and fluency to communicate effectively in a range of contexts.'
- SUGGESTED CHANGE
'explore expectations of language use in various domains of Australian society' *change to* 'use language and consolidate skills needed for effective communication in all walks of Australian society'

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The rationale should recognise the rich cultural and linguistic knowledge that EAL/D learners bring to the classroom.
<p>2. The aims of the course are clear and understandable.</p> <p>DISAGREE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The meaning of dot point two is not clear.
<p>3. The aims of the course are appropriate for the senior secondary years.</p> <p>STRONGLY DISAGREE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The aims signal that the course is pitched at too high a level for a large proportion EAL/D students in years 11 and 12. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> While governments are legislating for students to remain at school until year 12, they are beholden to provide appropriate courses for those students who are the most challenging to engage. Furthermore, the nature of humanitarian visa students has changed in recent years, with a greater proportion (almost 50% in WA) having had a limited schooling background. Many students from ethnic groups from Burma have spent their entire lives in refugee camps, with little access to quality schooling. Universities, technical colleges and workplaces are no longer asking for accuracy and fluency alone. They are asking for school graduates who can demonstrate good general communication skills and reading skills, leading to graduate attributes which will enable them to function effectively in the workplace SUGGESTED CHANGE as above- shift focus away from accuracy alone, to effective communication. SUGGESTION Add four extra units to the course to ensure equity and inclusivity for all students. The aims of the course should be the empowerment of students from language and dialect backgrounds other than standard Australian English to enable them to pursue tertiary studies or careers.
<p>4. The ‘aims’ of the course relate well to the overall content.</p> <p>DISAGREE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should signal that students will draw on their existing knowledge and the learning language is an active process. Should include research skills.
<p>6. The ‘organisation’ of the course provides a coherent view of the key elements and features of the curriculum.</p> <p>STRONGLY DISAGREE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The description of the EAL/D course (pg 1) places the students as passive participants in the learning process. Needs rewording. The description of the EAL/D course states that it ‘...accommodates a range of starting points...’, however, this is not the case. The course content is pitched at a level too high for many EAL/D students. Level of difficulty <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ‘Level of Difficulty’ statement recognises varied prior learning, but does not state clearly enough that some students will have had

very little or no time in K-10 classes.

- The second sentence (However, all student require a level of English...) is extremely unclear. Is it saying that the Australian curriculum will not provide appropriate courses / units for the students who most need to improve their English? This is in conflict with the COAG national Education Agreement to focus on retention of students to year 12, and with national policy to make schooling compulsory to year 12, enacted in states and territories.

The **'Eligibility Requirements'** are poorly worded and need to be rephrased to clarify the eligibility of dialect speakers.

Suggested change

The following students will be eligible for entry into the EAL (or "EAL/D") course:

- *migrant, refugee and international students who are learners of English as an Additional Language or Dialect and who have had no more than seven years of schooling in Australia or overseas with English as the medium of instruction*
- *migrant and refugee students who are learners of English as an Additional Language or Dialect who have experienced significant disruption to their studies and who have had no more than ten years' total schooling in Australia or overseas with English as the medium of instruction*
- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who speak traditional/ heritage Indigenous languages, Creoles (including Torres Strait Creole, Kriol and other creole languages as yet unrecognised) and Aboriginal Englishes as their home language.*
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- The **'Pathways'** statement in EAL uses the term 'work', but in English, the term 'careers' is used. Is this a subtle message about the expectations held for EAL students? If not, then consistency should be maintained in the terminology used.

- **Text requirements**

- WATESOL does not object to the suggested range of text types.
- WATESOL strongly rejects the need for a prescribed text list. This would limit teachers' abilities to select material to match student interests and implies teachers lack the professional judgment to select appropriate texts.
- It may be appropriate that EALD students study fewer texts than those in English, but then again they may also study more so as to be introduced to a wide range of text types. The inclusion of this statement in this doc. reflects an Eastern States notion of EAL as a watered down version of English.
- A recommended (but not prescribed) text list would be welcomed.
- Concerns that moderation would be impossible without a prescribed list are misplaced. In WA, examiners and teachers have experienced no problems.

<p>7. The units in the course are appropriate and work well together.</p> <p>STRONGLY DISAGREE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The concepts and content described in the unit titles are valid, but should be embedded throughout the course in increasing complexity to reflect the increased standard Australian English skills of the students. • The unit titles are artificial and inappropriate. They do not reflect the developmental and ongoing nature of language learning which is fundamental in an EALD course of study. • The units need to be re-named. SUGGEST looking at the titles of the WA EAL/D units. (1A and 1B Moving Between Cultures, 1C Life Experiences, 1D Cultural Differences and Communities, 2A Ways of Life, 2B Making Choices, 3A Australia as a Cultural Community, 3B Language and Empowerment.) These titles suggest the themes and issues that are likely to be of relevance and interest to the students who are at the level of these courses. The skills, concepts and strategies of learning language are described in the course content.
<p>8. The units in the course are clear in their purpose and rationale.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We disagree with current wording as stated above.
<p>9. There is a clear alignment and a clear pathway evident from K-10.</p> <p>STRONGLY DISAGREE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no K-10 EAL course, therefore no links, alignment or pathway evident. • There is no recognition that EAL/D students may have spent little or no time in K10, depending on their age at arrival to an Australian school.
<p>11. The content of the course clearly represents the essential content to be taught.</p> <p>STRONGLY DISAGREE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The course gives too much weight to text analysis at the expense of the acquisition of additional language/dialect skills. While a small proportion of the strongest EAL students might wish to refine their standard Australian English language skills through the study of literature, this is not the priority of the majority of learners. Those who do wish to take the literature path, could enrol in English or Literature concurrently or exclusively. • Content points such as ‘making inferences’, and ‘selecting and synthesising appropriate content’ are very high-level skills, yet are listed in the earliest unit. • If it were not for the EAL labels in the draft document, this course could not be identified as one written for EALD learners.
<p>12. There is essential content that is missing.</p> <p>AGREE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aside from Unit 1, there is little focus on developing and improving knowledge and understanding of the English language for improving the modes of listening, reading and viewing, speaking and writing. • There is a surplus of content which describes what students will do with language and a lack of content describing what standard Australian English skills they need to develop.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The course requires a greater focus on research skills.
<p>13. The content is similar to what is currently expected in our state curriculum. DISAGREE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some content is similar to the upper four units of WA's eight unit course, more so the highest pair, but overall, the course lacks the focus on improving the core English language modes which can be found in the WA EAL/D course. The content described in this course begs the question, why would a student this confident with the English language enrol in this course? There is very little content which could be mapped to the lower 4 units of the WA course. The draft EAL course has much more emphasis on analysis of text, and less on production of (both spoken and written) texts.
<p>14. The content is clear and unambiguous. DISAGREE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The content is only clear in that it does not even attempt to cater for the full range of EALD students. It became evident at the Sydney feedback meeting that different states had different understanding of terminology used within the draft EAL document. SUGGEST creating a glossary.
<p>15. The content is manageable and able to be taught in depth and within the time available. STRONGLY DISAGREE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is difficult to make a judgement on this without having the opportunity to trial the course but from experience one would not want to do this as it is totally inappropriate for the targeted cohort. It is difficult to make this judgement without seeing how the course is to be assessed or sample programs to know what is expected.
<p>17. Indigenous perspective</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Along with the recognition of "the histories, cultures, traditions and languages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island students" within the <i>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dimensions</i> section of the cross curriculum dimensions, an explicit acknowledgement should also be made that a significant proportion of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student cohort in Australian schools are learning English as an additional language or dialect. This should be accompanied by a consideration of who "owns" this knowledge, the teacher or the community in which the teacher is working. Inclusion of Indigenous perspectives as a cross curriculum dimension should not be tokenistic and should reflect a genuine commitment to educating Australia about Indigenous issues, but also to providing quality, accessible education to our ATSI student population. To illustrate this commitment, the course title should include D for dialect and the course should demonstrate its inclusivity through the addition of four lower level units within the course.
<p>18. A commitment to sustainability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The definition of 'sustainability' as life long learning is at odds with popular understanding of the term, particularly in the context of issues surrounding climate change.

19. Australia's engagement with Asia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This section currently focuses on understanding Asia solely through a study of “texts from Asia” (and “world literature”). We believe that the senior secondary English courses should address and acknowledge the impact of Asia on Australia in a deeper context: through the processes of immigration and the increasing international student enrolments (e.g., through the inclusion of texts reflecting the rich traditions of multicultural and post-colonial literatures within Australia and elsewhere)
21. Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As previously noted, focus on developing the skills of literacy (listening, speaking, reading and writing) is a function of language (in this case, SAE) and not given sufficient prominence within the course content.
28. Intercultural understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The senior secondary English courses should cater more effectively to the general capability of <i>Intercultural understanding</i> through the inclusion of texts reflecting the rich traditions of Indigenous, multicultural and post-colonial literatures within Australia and elsewhere, in addition to the study of “texts from Asia” and “world literature”.
32. Online format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The provision on the Australian Curriculum home page of a supplementary EAL/D document which describes key stages in English language learning for students whose first language/dialect is not standard Australian English, with links provided from the English as an Additional Language (or “English as an Additional Language <i>or Dialect</i>”) course documents, will assist teachers of EAL/D learners to devise relevant and appropriate programs of learning for this learner cohort. • WATESOL recommends writers look at the WA Department of Education ESL/ESD Progress Maps as an excellent reference for this. WATESOL sent a draft copy to Mr Robert Randall earlier in the consultation process. (Additional copies can be posted or emailed on request.)
35. What do you perceive are the overall strengths in the curriculum content for this course.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The emphasis on developing students' sociolinguistic competence and sociocultural understanding as an integral part of their English language and literacy skills is also a significant and worthwhile impetus. • Within the curriculum content there is the recognition that a significant number of students speak a non-standard variety of English as their primary language and as a result they are learning Standard Australian English at school as a markedly different dialect to the variety of English they use in their everyday lives.
36. What are the overall challenges or issues you perceive in the curriculum content for this course?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The level at which the course is pitched excludes a large portion of potential EAL students within the community. • There needs to be a very clearly articulated progression of content/learning from one unit to the next with appropriate content headings providing coherence and cohesion across the units.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will the current structure achieve equity and inclusivity? • How will it allow for multiple entry points and beginning EALD learners? • The content needs to reflect the diversity and needs of the cohort and also current research that indicates that if learners' cultures and languages are not recognised and utilised as a part of the learning process then optimum learning will not occur. • The course content focuses too much on the analysis of text at the expense of learning the structure, content and use of language and its application for audience and purpose. We use the term language in its true and broad sense to acknowledge the role of the home language in developing proficiency in standard Australian English.
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Addendum – General comments

WATESOL is concerned that the EAL (or “EAL/D”) course mirrors the other three English courses in aim and content and that it does not take into account the unique nature and content of existing EAL/D courses on offer in some states and territories including Western Australia. These courses aim to extend and refine language acquisition and academic skills of students with extremely disparate educational backgrounds and levels of knowledge of English through a wide variety of text types and genre. These EAL/D courses teach English through pedagogy that is not solely based on the study of literary texts. EAL/D learners have different needs to students studying English as a subject; they require different pedagogy, different (negotiable) texts, and different assessment tasks. In this regard, please note the following concerns:

- If more units are not added to the course, many students will be forced to enrol in Essential English, which was not written with the needs of these students in mind.
- The course caters well for more capable students but it is outside the reach of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and those with limited/disrupted schooling. Although the aims state that this course “accommodates a range of starting points”, no such accommodation has been made in the essential content, it starts around level 5 of the NLLIA Bandscales.
- Many students new to Australia in years 11 and 12 (those with refugee backgrounds for example) have little or no literacy in their first language and none or little in English. These students need a course that allows them to focus on language acquisition and basic academic skills in order that they can function at school and access a wider curriculum, and also function in the broader community as new residents of Australia. The proposed EAL (or recommended “EAL/D”) course does not meet their needs.
- Many students are literate in their first language but possess limited literacy in Standard Australian English. These learners require a course which allows them to extend their literacy and academic skills across a range of curriculum areas so that they can achieve their (leaving)

certificate and function in the workplace or at CIT/TAFE. The proposed EAL (or “EAL/D”) course does not meet their needs.

- A number of students, especially International Private Students and students who have had some years of instruction in English in Australian schools, study EAL/D or ESL/D courses to help them gain access to university. They need a course which refines their existing literacy and academic skills across the curriculum so they can succeed at university. The proposed EAL (or “EAL/D”) course does not meet their needs.
- A few students are highly literate in their first language/s, have studied for many years in Australian school settings, have an excellent English vocabulary, good grammar skills, excellent research skills, and wish to refine their literacy skills by analysing English literature. This course meets their needs, as do the other English courses on offer.
- There are excellent existing EAL/D courses across the country which could be used as the basis of a national curriculum, with multiple units catering for the variety of needs and backgrounds of students, and thus with multiple entry and exit points. WATESOL invites ACARA to investigate the WA course documents to see how this works.

[http://www.curriculum.wa.edu.au/internet/Senior_Secondary/Courses/English as an Additional Language Dialect](http://www.curriculum.wa.edu.au/internet/Senior_Secondary/Courses/English_as_an_Additional_Language_Dialect)