The English Teachers’ Association (ETA) is a voluntary group of professionals with a membership of over 1700 individual English teachers in New South Wales and 300 English faculties.

To compile this document, the ETA invited members to respond to an online survey over the three-week period which we estimated would fall at the end of HSC trial marking. At this time of year teachers’ concerns are focused particularly on preparing their students for the HSC examination.

We thank the BoSTES for the opportunity of providing feedback on their proposals for the broad directions of the Senior English Syllabus.

The views in this document represent those of 183 members.

The proposed Stage 6 English courses provide flexibility to meet the needs of the diversity of learners.

Members generally agreed that the courses provided enough flexibility to meet the needs of the diversity of learners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All students are well covered</th>
<th>All students are adequately covered</th>
<th>Most students are covered</th>
<th>Some students are covered</th>
<th>The needs of significant numbers are not met.</th>
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<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>16%</td>
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Those who claimed that their students were well covered cite the addition of the EAL/D and English Studies courses as important additions for their students. Amongst those claiming adequate coverage was mentioned:

- a recognition that the amendments to the Standard course will make this more accessible
- the ongoing issue of the inclusion of the common content of the Standard and Advanced course as disadvantaging Standard students.

This latter point was the main concern of respondents who believed that only most students were covered. They say that there is no accommodation in the current or proposed new courses for the significant numbers who want an ATAR and so do not undertake the English Studies course. They also claim that
The Standard English course is often still too difficult for many of the candidates. The number of related texts, the Electives and Modules, as well as the level of language analysis and evaluation is often too much for the candidates for this course.

There was once again confirmation that the Extension courses were an essential inclusion in NSW suite of syllabuses and there was a request for Extension 2 courses in Years 11 and 12 to be undertaken without Extension 1.

The proposed revisions of the English (Standard) and English (Advanced) syllabus content are appropriate.

- The key principles underlying the syllabus

The vast majority of members agreed that the key principles underlying the syllabus revisions will provide a rich learning experience for students of English.

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<td>17%</td>
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Not all those agreeing with the proposed revisions commented, but those who did endorsed the inclusion of literature in all courses.

The main element of disagreement lay in the perceived devaluing of creative writing. There is a view that removing creative writing from the external examination will give the creative experience less status than examined areas of the curriculum.

- The time for the Area of Study should be reduced

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Good arguments were given for both these choices. Those who agree focus on the length of time to complete this aspect of the course and its weighting in the final assessment.

Absolutely. We have been crying out for this for years. Standard students become bored with the AOS while Advanced students and teachers are faced with a lack of time for those massive modules and literary texts. All too much. We aren't teaching or encouraging a love of literature or critical analysis under the current balance of 40/60.

They also point out that a reduction in the time would require a corresponding reduction in assessment and the examination.

Those who disagree with the proposal for a reduction in time argue the importance and difficulty of the exploration of a concept through texts and its usefulness is addressing some of the more contemporary types of texts.

Teaching conceptually based units in the required detail takes time and taking away from this common unit will diminish its importance.

Area of study allows for experience of many shorter, multi modal and more current texts. Modelling shows ways to analyse and respond to texts, sets students up for
managing their own related texts later on. Creative writing is encouraged. So we need the time to accomplish all of this.

- The module rubrics, electives and text requirements should be reviewed to allow more flexibility while maintaining rigour.

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There is strong support for reviewing the module rubric to allow more scope for writing electives. This question elicited responses that showed some members frustrated by the fact that prescribed texts seemed sometimes to be “twisted” to fit into modules. Many asked that the range of prescribed texts be extended to allow for real choice as the combination of the text requirements and the comparative text module were enough to dictate the full text choice for a school with a limited book room. As one school commented:

*The problem is that there are not enough texts for teachers and students to choose from. The list may look long but when it is broken down into modules and electives, it works out that there is often only ONE text left after you are locked in by initial choices. WHY not give several choices in each text type/elective/module?*

Some respondents also felt that the courses required too many areas where students needed to find related texts and would like to see this emphasis reduced.

While there was a minority of members who disagreed with the proposition their comments showed that they were motivated by a concern that

- the syllabus may be narrowed or that
- there might result some gaps in knowledge and skills by a freer approach to course design.

What is clear is that members strongly believe that the combination of modules reflects the range of approaches to English used in NSW schools and that the syllabus be devised to prepare our diverse student body for the different contexts for which they will need the learning offered by a broad definition of the discipline of English.

- A school-based option or module without prescribed texts providing opportunities for independent investigation and learning should be included in the Preliminary courses.

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There was considerable enthusiasm for this idea as some saw it as an opportunity for giving more choice to students. Many commented that this was already allowable in the current Preliminary syllabus structure and saw this as adding a level of prescription to the course.

Those who responded negatively to the idea simply commented that

*many schools construct their courses around the HSC Modules anyway to prepare students*

and that a change in this practice would be unlikely without clear direction.

It is interesting to note that there appears to be a tension between the desire for a more open way of interpreting syllabus requirements and the ability to implement more innovative
structures. While teachers seem happy with the idea of choice, there seems to be an institutional pull towards examination preparation.

- **The proposed changes to internal assessment and the HSC examination are appropriate**

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<th>Strongly agree</th>
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The majority of members broadly agree with the proposed changes and would like to see the examination paper revised to prevent pre-prepared responses including the annual review of examination rubrics to specifically reflect the focus of each module.

They would like to see greater flexibility in the examination paper, including a change from using a similar style of question across the modules in Paper 2.

Other changes have been proposed such as
- reducing examination time to bring English into line with the other 2 unit subjects and
- providing choice of section for students in the examination paper.

The issue that has caused the strongest responses is that of removing creative writing from the examination. Members do recognise that an examination context is not the best way to assess creative writing.

> **40 minutes for a creative writing piece seem inappropriate if quality work is to be achieved.**

> **Completing the creative writing piece internally should ensure the crafting process is greater and that should provide students with insight into how texts are created which can be transferred to their exploration of the prescribed and related texts.**

However, as can be seen from the percentage who strongly disagree with the proposition the majority resolutely resist any moves that diminish the importance or weight of the creative in the syllabus.

> **Devaluing creative writing by making it internal goes against the current social trends that people, young and old, are active participants in text creation, rather than merely passive. In an age where it is increasingly important that we communicate in the written medium with each other we should be honing these skills not devolving them.**

What is apparent from the responses is that there is little confidence that with the pressure of examination requirements creative writing will be not be accorded its due time and weight in teaching and learning.

Unless the BoSTES can find a way to internally assess this element of the curriculum that will not compromise either its standing or its validity, ensuring equality of standards in schools and circumventing the involvement of tutors, members will not be able to support this proposal.

Members hold the principle that

> **assessment needs to more realistically reflect what we want the students to take away from studying the courses.**

They also acknowledge that
while an external examination is being used to rank students, the formal in-school task can become meaningless as students want to be prepared for sitting an examination and many schools replicate this context in their internal assessments.

Members believe that a reduction in the complexity of internal assessment weightings and components may be helpful in this

There need to be fewer aspects that impinge on each other, making tasks convoluted, with small parts worth virtually no marks in order to satisfy a percentage requirement etc.

However, they warn that such elements of the syllabus that cannot be assessed in an examination should not be compromised

Internal assessment weightings allow for a variety of learners to be assessed [and give all] an opportunity to do well

Valid and serious assessment of the range of modes is critical in a subject where the focus is communicating ideas and information in the 21st century.

The proposed revisions of the English Extension 1 syllabus content are relevant and appropriate.

- The proposed clarification of the Extension Preliminary course

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There is general agreement that the course module description should be clear in its intent and the current course outline is so.

[T]he requirements are clear, perhaps it comes down to ensuring the teachers are teaching what is required according to the course modules

However, members have suggested that clarity could be enhanced by text suggestions, samples and ideas for constructing the module.

Some claim that the direction of the module was new and fresh when it was written but its specificity now tends to limit choice. There has also been a call for more variety in the Preliminary Extension 1 course and it has been suggested that there may be more than one module, allowing choice for schools of approach to the very broad title Text, Culture and Value.

The proposed revisions of the assessment and examination specifications for English Extension 1 are appropriate.

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<td>9%</td>
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While the statistics show that a majority of members agree with the changes proposed for the examination, it is the members who disagreed with the proposed changes that provided comments and these objected particularly to shortening the HSC examination.

I don't think the proposed revisions are clear enough to comment on. Why reduce the length, it is only two tasks?

The length of the Extension 1 paper ensures students can show off their yearlong study of their chosen Module. To reduce the time of the exam would disadvantage students who have flair and passion for imaginative and critical writing.

To take time away and then expect students to respond in the required depth… would be difficult and would compromise the integrity of the course.

By reducing the duration something must be sacrificed, whether this is creative or critical. This also would lead to reduction in content and this should not be encouraged

Allow time for thought and substantial responses that reflect the work students have done

Others questioned the reason for and nature of a core component.

Unclear as to what the 'core component' is and how this will work, so hard to agree or disagree on this point.

I do not believe that there should be a core component in the assessment requirements - this will just increase pressure on both students and teachers.

The proposal to retain the current English Extension 2 syllabus content is appropriate.

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Members' comments provide the usual accolades for this course.

Extension 2 allows students to follow a passion. We think that the assessment of it is applicable as it is.

This is a great course and it is designed specifically for the very best and most creative of English students. Let's keep it as it is.

There are also some suggestions

Short story could be expanded to allow for other types of creative writing.

Students in low SES schools feel they are only open to write the short story as the school funding allowance won't have equitable comparisons to high SES schools. Perhaps changes can be made to this to consider addressing this issue.
Would love to see students be able to access this course without Extension 1. It would be great if there was a Preliminary level of the course also.

I think some sort of restriction regarding late changes to Ext 2 choice should be created. I had a student change from short story to poetry 4 weeks out from the due date this year!!

**The proposed revisions of the assessment and examination specifications for English Extension 2 are appropriate.**

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<td>17%</td>
<td>56%</td>
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There is strong support for changes that will bring more clarity and transparency to the assessment of the Extension 2 course. Teachers believe that this will, along with other support materials, bring about more effective teaching and confident learning.

There is a complete lack of transparency about Extension 2 assessment and marking. There are too many unknowns for first-time teachers or teachers with little experience or schools with few candidates. More resources are needed, sample programs, sample structures and resources for supporting students through the course. It currently relies on teachers taking it over a few years and working out what works from their hits and misses.

It is difficult to know whether the internal assessment and the drafting process is consistent in all centres.

It would mean that students are more certain about what is required and that the drafting process is valued.

There are suggestions for refinements including

- Looking at the journal in addition to the Major work and Reflection statement.
- A 'Turnitin' report checking for plagiarism be submitted with every major work and reflection.

**The proposed revisions of the English EAL/D syllabus content are appropriate.**

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<td>30%</td>
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There is general support for the changes proposed with the caveat of ensuring the academic rigour of the course, particularly in Module B and sufficient scope for teacher professionalism

Course should require for teacher discretion as well as maintaining connection to BOSTES requirements.
The proposed revisions of the assessment and examination specifications for English EAL/D are appropriate.

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<tr>
<td>29%</td>
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Those who agree argue

As an ESL teacher, I welcome the change to the Listening stream, to an internal examination. We teach Living and Working in the Community (Module B) and while this is a valuable course in that you can integrate life skills, it does not lend itself to external examination. I welcome the change in examination process for this exam.

Students find the 3 examinations: Paper 1, Paper 2 and Listening overwhelming. The complexity of the examination creates a high level of anxiety and confusion.

However a contradictory opinion has also been put forward

While it does make sense for Module B to be assessed and examined internally in terms of authenticity of tasks and context, it is important to have an externally examined (and produced) Listening paper for EAL/D students. There is currently a strong focus on reading and writing in the HSC examination. For students who are struggling to develop academic language proficiency, yet with time in Australia have developed their oral/aural communicative ability, the Listening paper offers a balance allowing them to demonstrate a range of their English language skills under exam conditions. I would argue also that the Listening paper for the English (ESL) HSC is carefully constructed to consider a full range of levels of questioning, incorporating comprehension of what is said and how it is said. It would be difficult to ensure the rigour of the task if examined internally. There is a risk of having listening skills incorporated into other tasks in such a way that they tick the box but do not effectively test the skills.

The proposed revisions of the English Life Skills syllabus content are appropriate.

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<td>21%</td>
<td>68%</td>
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There were no comments accompanying these choices.

The Fundamentals of English course should be retained as a course option.
The ETA asked members if they believed that the Fundamentals course should remain as a course option, recognising of course that changes to surrounding courses could render this one unnecessary. The question produced the most evenly divided response. There are those who believe it should go as

*This course does not run very often.*

Others believe it should stay

*This has been extremely useful for lower end Standard students who need their skills reinforced and developed. I'm not convinced that the new Standard course (which will still be 2 Units) will make success any easier for these students and the English Studies course will not gain them an ATAR.*

*[T]his is particularly good for both ESL and those wanting a greater understanding*

The fate of the Fundamentals course does indeed rest with the ways in which student needs are addressed through the Standard and EAL/D courses.

**The proposed revisions of the English Studies syllabus content are appropriate.**

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<td>24%</td>
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Members broadly agreed with the Board’s proposals for the English Studies course commenting that

*in its current form it is running well and meeting the needs of students.*