

**SENIOR ENGLISH REVIEW
COMMITTEE**

REPORT

on the

**DRAFT ENGLISH STAGE 6
SYLLABUS CONSULTATION**

June 1997

Executive Summary

This Executive Summary provides a synopsis of the report to the Board of Studies (June 1997) on the findings from the consultation on the *Draft English Stage 6 Syllabus*.

Background

The report of the Senior English Review Committee (June 1997) documents information gathered in the consultation on the *Draft English Stage 6 Syllabus*, which was undertaken as part of the Board's longer-term review and revision of the existing senior English courses.

The draft syllabus was developed by a project team appointed by the Board of Studies in 1995. The project team worked from the revised writing brief which had been endorsed by the Board in August 1995 following wide community consultation. The draft syllabus was released for consultation in May 1996 in concert with the consultation on the McGaw Green Paper, *Their Future: Options for Reform of the Higher School Certificate*. The period for consultation on the draft syllabus was from May to November 1996.

The consultation sought to determine the responses of teachers, academics, consultants and other interested parties to the draft syllabus, using a survey instrument, oral and written submissions, focus groups and written advice from the English Years 7–12 Syllabus Advisory Committee. The Review Committee analysed the consultation data and prepared a detailed report on its findings. The report was submitted to the Board in June 1997.

The Consultation Report

Section 1 of the consultation report outlines the background, context and approach to the consultation. (Appendix A of the report documents the timeline of events and decisions relating to the review and revision of the senior English syllabuses.)

Section 2 of the consultation report outlines the data gathered from the respondents in the consultation process. It is organised in sections corresponding to the sections of the draft syllabus. The sections of the draft syllabus are:

- Introduction

- Rationale
- Aims, Objectives, Outcomes and Key Competencies
- Course Structure, Study Requirements, Sample Implementation Models, Overviews, Electives Structure
- Course Content
- Preliminary and HSC Core
- Preliminary and HSC Electives
- Student Assessment and Evaluation
- Glossary.

Section 3 of the consultation report presents information gathered from surveys, oral and written submissions and focus groups. This information relates to aspects identified in the consultation in terms of strengths of the syllabus, concerns about the syllabus, suggested modifications and implementation issues.

The consultation report contains the following appendices:

- A Timeline
- B Review Committee Membership
- C Executive Summaries of Previous Review Committee Reports to Board of Studies
- D Core and Supplementary Project Team Membership
- E Course Candidatures 1984–1997
- F Correspondences between Existing Courses and Draft Syllabus
- G Board Memos in Relation to Changes to Text Lists, Scaling and Examination Specifications
- H Index of Media Clippings Relating to English
- I Survey Instrument
- J Written Submissions – Summary of Respondents
- K Oral Submissions – Summary of Attendances
- L Focus Groups – Summary of Attendances
- M Advice from the English Years 7–12 Syllabus Advisory Committee
- N Data from Survey Instrument.

Consultation Processes

The consultation on the McGaw Green Paper occurred at the same time as the consultation on the *Draft English Stage 6 Syllabus*. The consultation on the draft

syllabus identified important aspects relating to the Board's consultation processes. The fact that many teachers expressed, with some degree of passion, a feeling of frustration with consultation processes indicates that these processes are not always meeting the needs of teachers. While teachers indicated their desire to be heard and to have direct feedback, the consultation also showed that some teachers felt 'surveyed out' and needed more time to consider all the complex issues raised.

A further complicating factor was teachers' expectation that text lists would accompany the draft syllabus document. The absence of this information was a source of frustration for many teachers — a frustration that was exacerbated when working documents from the project team's speculative, experimental thinking on text lists and examination questions found their way into the hands of some teachers.

Notwithstanding these complications, as the consultation process continued there was a marked change in the responses both to the consultation and to the syllabus document itself. This was particularly noticeable in focus groups, which proved to be a valuable opportunity for teachers to work through the document together and to reach some shared understandings of its content and its intent, and to explore the implications for their own schools, classrooms and students.

The consultation indicated the need for further targeted consultations in the next phase of revision, so that all those involved can feel confident that their voices are heard, their opinions valued and their advice incorporated in the final document.

Respondents to the Consultation

A variety of respondents participated in each phase of the consultation. Information about these respondents is documented in the report Appendices J, K, L and N. The written advice from the Syllabus Advisory Committee is contained in the report Appendix M.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument (see report Appendix I) used to elicit responses from teachers in all school sectors and in TAFE colleges provided both quantitative and qualitative data. It included both structured and open-ended questions. It allowed respondents the opportunity to express viewpoints, with a few taking the opportunity to provide more detailed explanations of these viewpoints. Some respondents to the survey

chose not to answer the structured and/or open-ended questions and instead forwarded free response-style papers. These were considered with the written submissions (see report Appendix J). The respondents, mostly classroom teachers with extensive experience in the teaching of English and particularly HSC English, made candid comments on many aspects of the draft syllabus.

A total of 403 surveys was returned — 60% from individuals and 40% from groups. More than 60% were from government schools, and about 60% were from metropolitan schools. About 60% of responses were from co-educational institutions, with 25% from girls' schools and about 10% from boys' schools. While the patterns of respondent schools generally matched the statewide proportion for schools of different types and special features, there were proportionally more respondents in larger metropolitan schools (see report Appendix N). In all, around 1200 people were involved in developing responses.

There was a wide range of responses, indicating divergent viewpoints. Support for the draft syllabus was counterbalanced by a weight of criticisms, some of it compounded by anger. The advice from the Syllabus Advisory Committee to the Review Committee (see report Appendix M) identifies four different types of **critical** respondents to the survey. It describes these as:

- *those complaining about the survey instrument itself;*
- *those protesting in a general way;*
- *those who exhibit misreading of the draft;*
- *those interrogating the document itself.*

Some variation in views corresponds to the different school systems and locations of the responding teacher groups. While these differences may not all be statistically significant, and some of the categories may overlap, there are significant implications for the further development of the draft syllabus. The following indicates some of this information (see also report Appendix N).

- DSE teachers tend to be less positive about aspects of the syllabus than teachers from the Catholic and independent schools.

- Teachers in metropolitan schools tend to be less positive than teachers from regional centres and rural areas.
- Teachers in schools with a high proportion of NESB students tend to be less positive than those in schools with other special features or no particular special features.
- Teachers in schools with smaller enrolments in Years 11 and 12 tend to be more positive.
- English head teachers tend to be less positive than classroom teachers.
- English teachers with more teaching experience tend to be less positive than English teachers with less teaching experience.
- English teachers with more experience of teaching HSC English tend to be less positive than English teachers with less experience teaching HSC English.

These tentative findings indicate a need to include specific groups of teachers in the consultation on the syllabus revisions. In particular, input from teachers of NESB and ESL students is seen to be vital. Similarly, discussions with consultants and others in the DSE are important in gauging responses to revisions, particularly as DSE schools tend to include the larger schools and many of the metropolitan schools. There is also a need to consider the situation of experienced teachers and the teaching practices and resources that they have accumulated over their careers, and to take into account their particular needs, not only in the syllabus revisions, but also in the further development of the support documents and in the eventual delivery and implementation of the syllabus.

Written Submissions

Fifty-eight written submissions were received from organisations and individuals, including academics, representatives from school systems and sectors, professional associations, community organisations, English departments and individual teachers (see report Appendix J).

Some of these submissions were extended responses appended to the surveys (see report Appendix J). Some attached a copy of a document (in circulation at the time) that expresses concern with the consultation process in general, and the consultation on this draft in particular.

Many of the written submissions provide a strongly developed line of argument. Others express more generalised viewpoints. Contrasting perspectives are expressed within these submissions. Some contain little information and advice. Others contain clearly articulated argument, detailed information and specific advice as to ways of resolving perceived problems with the draft.

Oral Submissions

Six oral submissions were received from 14 people, including academics, teachers and representatives from professional associations (see report Appendix K).

These submissions reveal differences in viewpoints between groups. Within the professional associations, for instance, there are different perspectives within and between the three main associations. For instance, the English Teachers' Association of NSW indicates that the full spectrum of views about English exists amongst its members. There are, moreover, major differences of orientation towards English between the other two associations. The English Association, on the one hand, inclines towards a cultural heritage model of English. The Association for Teachers of English to Students of Other Languages, on the other hand, inclines towards a communications approach to English. Both views are accommodated within the draft document, although neither exclusively.

The efficacy of oral submissions is, in part, in providing interested parties with the opportunity to see that their voices are being heard — literally — and in allowing the expanded exploration afforded by dialogue. This points to the need to incorporate this type of activity in the next stage of the revision.

Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions were held (see report appendix L) with school and TAFE teachers, English head teachers, consultants, academics, and community and professional association members. For some groups, the participants were randomly selected; for others, they were self-selected. The following focus groups were assembled:

- representatives from AHISA schools (1)
- representatives from community groups (1)

- English head teachers in the metropolitan area (2)
- TAFE teachers (1)
- teachers, head teachers and principals representing professional associations (1)
- academics (1)
- consultants and interested teachers from rural and metropolitan areas (1)
- teachers in rural areas (2).

Around 170 people were involved (including members of the SAC and the Review Committee).

The focus groups essentially targeted specific audiences, allowing the draft syllabus to be explored by particular groups within the educational community. Within each particular focus group there were different opinions about the document as a whole and about particular aspects of it. The information from these groups is incorporated within Sections 2 and 3 of the consultation report.

Focus groups offer a particular benefit to participants. Having worked through the document, they are better informed about the intent of the document and its ramifications. Such groups will be invaluable as the next phase of revision takes place. In particular, the opportunity to match particular groups with particular aspects of the document revision should ensure that useful and timely advice is provided to the members of the project team.

English Years 7–12 Syllabus Advisory Committee

Members of the English Years 7–12 Syllabus Advisory Committee took advantage of the opportunity to read survey responses, written submissions, transcripts of oral submissions and notes from focus groups. The SAC prepared written advice for the Review Committee based on its readings and observations (see report Appendix M).

The SAC's advice points to the need to consider the weight of argument in the consultation, taking account of the positive features of the document as identified in the consultation as well as the perceived problems, and to ensure that there is further consultation on the draft document as it is revised.

The SAC's advice identifies key aspects for consideration: the nature and scope of English; the diversity of the learner; issues of parity; issues relating to course structure; different ways of working with texts; and specific electives.

In affirming its support for the draft syllabus, the SAC also concurs with the Review Committee's suggestion that a series of 'Round Table Conferences' be held to publicly clarify significant issues in the area of English curriculum.

Findings from the Consultation

The findings from the consultation take into account a divergence of viewpoints about aspects of the syllabus and its projected implementation. These views are frequently contradictory, and reflect the range of competing orientations towards English that the Review Committee noted in previous reports, and which it endeavoured to reconcile in its construction of a 'common ground' (Executive Summary Report, May 1995) for the draft syllabus.

The consultation has generally indicated support for the concepts of change in the draft syllabus. It has also identified some key areas where further consultation and development are needed. Some of the findings of the consultation indicate divergence of viewpoints within the English educational community about aspects of the subject English itself, the directions of the proposed curriculum development, and whether the draft syllabus would meet the needs of diverse learners. This last factor is often interpreted in terms of assessing, examining, scaling and reporting of results.

While there is not complete agreement on any one aspect of the proposed syllabus revision, there are some key areas where a strong sense of support is expressed. These areas of general endorsement include:

- English as a mandatory subject
- literature
- spoken English
- media texts
- creating texts
- three available units in the Preliminary course

- four available units of English
- need for flexibility to cater for diversity.

Differing views about issues associated with each section of the syllabus are expressed in all areas of the consultation data. Even within the confines of a single instrument such as the survey, contradictory opinions are expressed. In the survey instrument, moreover, there is commonly a divergence of opinion between the quantitative data and the qualitative data — a single or group respondent may offer a response on the likert scale accompanied by a contradictory written comment.

Data from Survey Questions 1–6

A summary of findings from the survey, oral and written submissions and focus groups follows. It is organised according to the sections of the syllabus. For each section, the quantitative data is provided, followed by a list of the issues from the qualitative data from the survey and other sources. There is a brief comment on each of the issues, including some quotations from the qualitative data.

1. The **Introduction** is accepted as useful in understanding the concept of the syllabus by about 80% of respondents to the survey question.

Key issues raised in relation to the Introduction are:

- needs and interests of students
- equity perspectives
- place of English.

In general, responses reflect the view that the draft syllabus offers a way of resolving problems of equity while meeting the needs of diversity: *‘A new open approach catering for a wide range of abilities and interests’* (survey). However, there are concerns in some responses that the syllabus *‘will only cater for the middle ground’* (written submission). The place of English as an essential and compulsory discipline is emphasised throughout the consultation: *‘It is vital that English remain a compulsory subject’* (written submission).

2. The **Rationale** is accepted as providing a clear statement about English, and explaining why the syllabus exists in this form, by approximately 75% of respondents to the survey question.

Key issues raised in relation to the Rationale are:

- need for syllabus revision
- definition of subject English
- philosophy underpinning the Rationale
- nature of texts
- range of texts
- mode
- language system
- creating and critiquing.

The responses to the Rationale of the draft syllabus reflect the divergence of views about the nature of the subject. There is a perception that the current senior English courses culturally privilege a particular group of students, and are philosophically and pedagogically narrow. The more inclusive definition of English in the draft syllabus, acknowledging theoretical and technological change and allowing for a range of texts and approaches to reading texts, is therefore welcomed: *‘Anyone who has followed “English” developments over the last two decades will see this syllabus as a reflection of what is going on in the field’* (survey). On the other hand, those who see the subject as essentially a study of literature believe that the definition of the subject proposed by the draft syllabus is too broad. They express strong concerns about the perceived displacement of literature as the central focus of study. This perception of the draft is often linked with the notion of declining standards. Another view suggests that there is a need for the syllabus to identify explicitly how developments in theory and technology are reflected in the various parts of the course.

There is a strong endorsement of the inclusion of film, media and electronic texts and the need for critical analysis of their proliferating products: *‘Interesting electives, opportunities for student choice, including film and multimedia’* (survey). Another view is concerned that such study will detract from the study of literature. The study of texts in both spoken and written modes is generally endorsed and the emphasis on the study of the language system is acknowledged as necessary to the subject. The opportunity for students to gain familiarity with texts used for a variety of purposes and audiences beyond the literary is welcomed, particularly because it is seen as redressing the imbalance between language and literature: *‘We applaud the shift in emphasis from a narrow literature-based model to one where language is focused’* (written submission). There is particular support for emphasis on the spoken mode. Some suggest that the term ‘mode’ should also include the visual. The study of

English in the document is generally seen as providing opportunities for a variety of approaches to teaching and learning.

The document is far more inclusive than any of its predecessors, allowing for a much wider range of student literacy and language development levels. (Written submission)

However, while *'the balance of critical and creative orientations is seen as addressing the need to allow students to show skills in both these areas'* (written submission), their *'equal status'* (survey) is questioned in some responses.

3. There is a varying degree of support for the **Aims, Objectives, Outcomes** and **Key Competencies** as outlining expectations about student learning and providing clear guidance for teaching and assessing. The lowest degree of support in the survey question (50%) is for the Outcomes, while more than 80% of respondents to the survey question agree that the Aims and Objectives clearly outline what students are expected to attain.

Key issues raised in relation to the Aims, Objectives, Outcomes and Key Competencies are:

- scope of the Aims and Objectives
- links between the Aims, Objectives and Outcomes
- assessing outcomes
- direction for teachers
- Key Competencies.

The Aims of the syllabus are generally seen as *'really clear [and] valid for the standard of student'* (survey). A concern is expressed that there is *'little integration between Objectives, Outcomes, Key Competencies and Assessment'* (survey), and that the developmental sequence through Years 7–12 needs to be clarified. Another view sees the outcomes as helpful in defining the knowledge, skills and pedagogical approaches, while a contrary view suggests they are not specific enough: *'The generic description of course outcomes is too broad to serve any real purpose'* (written submission).

The apparent narrowing of outcomes in the HSC year is seen as a problem. The relationship between outcomes-based assessment and the HSC examination structure

is queried, as is accessibility of the full range of outcomes. There is a view that outcomes do not relate to the summative assessment and normative reporting of the HSC: *'How can outcomes and an exam that tests skills be compatible?'* (survey). Some responses suggest that support material would need to show teachers how to use these outcomes for assessing: *'The outcomes state the ideals English teachers have always aspired to. Translating them into fact is the difficulty'* (survey). The draft syllabus is seen by some respondents as an impetus to refine understanding about the relationships between outcomes, content, pedagogy and assessment, particularly if support material is supplied.

While some responses welcome the inclusion of Key Competencies, others claim that they have not been integrated into the body of the document. Still others seem unaware of the place and purpose of the Key Competencies. There are some concerns that the presence of the Key Competencies *'reflect[s] the degree to which the subject English has been redefined'* (survey) away from a literary focus that values *'empathy'* and *'originality'* (survey).

4. The sections relating to **Course Structure, Study Requirements, Sample Implementation Models, Overview — Preliminary Course, Overview — HSC Course and Electives Structure** are accepted by about 70% of respondents to the survey question as providing clear outlines of course requirements in terms of content and structure.

Key issues raised in relation to Course Structure, Study Requirements, Sample Implementation Models, Overview — Preliminary Course, Overview — HSC Course and Electives Structure are:

- modular structure
- number of units
- horizontal structure.

The modular structure is widely appreciated for its flexibility and choice, *'allowing for specialisation and catering for individual school and student needs and interest'* (written submission). On the other hand, there is a view that it is impossible for *'one course to meet the demands [of the diverse candidature]'* (survey).

The proposed increase in number of units in both the Preliminary and HSC year is greeted with enthusiasm. There is, however, some scepticism about whether many

students, particularly boys, will be interested in attempting an increased number of units in English.

The horizontal structure is given a mixed response. While some believe that this will produce falling standards, others see it as a *'strength as students who enjoy English can do more without [necessarily] struggling with content'* (written submission). Some assert that the modular structure is intrinsically hierarchical and that this hierarchy ought to be explicitly acknowledged.

5. The sections relating to the **Preliminary Course Content** and the **HSC Course Content** are judged by more than 50% of survey respondents as not providing adequate guidance about the extent and depth of treatment required, and not meeting the needs of the full range of students.

The key issues raised in relation to Preliminary Course Content and HSC Course Content are:

- content
- link between Preliminary and HSC courses
- workload.

The negative response to the survey question reflects uncertainties as to what constitutes 'content' in an English syllabus. Many comments commend the proposed content of the draft syllabus. Others criticise the content for failing to address the needs of students: *'A broader achievement of competency is recommended ... but a higher standard of competency is not encouraged overtly'* (survey). This view is at variance with much of the qualitative data in the consultation, where there is a general recognition that the expanded view of English provides course content that caters for *'a diverse range of student interest'* (written submission). Written and oral submissions and focus groups endorse the course content for its provision of subject integrity, for achieving a solution to the intellectual or mark bias attached to certain courses, and for integrating language, literature and pedagogy into the syllabus content. There is also a view that the content of the draft syllabus has not taken sufficient account of developments in understandings about language and pedagogy, is still too traditionally text based and, therefore, does not signify any *'genuine change'* (survey) to the courses currently studied.

There is a divergence of opinion about the links between Preliminary and HSC courses. One view is that the different emphasis in the two courses counteracts

repetition and allows for the fact that learning in English is not linear and ‘*an individual will take that progression [through the Preliminary and HSC courses] in different ways*’ (oral submission). Another view holds that ‘*students have no guarantee that there will be a unified coherent path to the HSC that matches their needs and abilities*’ (survey). Some responses suggest that there is a lack of developmental sequencing between the courses, and that there needs to be more emphasis on ‘creating’ in the Preliminary course.

There appears to be difficulty in gauging the length of time needed to teach the syllabus effectively or the depth of treatment of subject matter required. The respondents who raise the issue of workload range from those who believe that the workload is ‘*unrealistic even for the better students*’ (survey) to those who believe that the ‘*draft syllabus would fail to challenge most of the students ... since it allows students to opt for a path of mediocrity*’ (written submission).

6. The **Preliminary Core** and **HSC Core** are both accepted by about 70% of respondents to the survey question as providing clear outlines of the scope of work to be covered.

Key issues raised in relation to the Preliminary Core and HSC Core are:

- core as ‘common experience’
- mandatory aspects of the core
- literature
- factual and film/video texts.

Attitudes to the notion of a core are shaped by particular interpretations of ‘common experience’. Those who define the term broadly believe that the core does address the needs of a diverse candidature while ensuring subject integrity: ‘*The proposed senior English syllabus addresses this incredible diversity in ingenious ways*’ (written submission). A narrower definition of the term ‘core’ leads to the conclusion that a core cannot ‘*meet the needs of all students*’ (written submission). This view is usually connected with concerns about assessment, examination, scaling and reporting.

There is a view that the mandatory aspects of the core could work against teachers’ ‘*freedom to create courses suitable to their own students*’ (written submission). This view suggests that the core should be open-ended so as to allow professional judgement by teachers as to course content. Another view is that the ‘focus’ in the

core in both courses is helpful in indicating appropriate content and pedagogy. Considerable concern is expressed about the mandating of Aboriginal texts. Some suggest it is ‘tokenism’, while others think the inclusion of Aboriginal texts acknowledges the significant contribution this would make to cultural understandings: *‘Many students are unaware of the traditions and legacy of Aboriginal culture and their exposure to it in a range of subjects including English can only help cultural understanding’* (written submission).

There is a diversity of opinion about the amount of literature in the core. One view asserts that the range of texts available to students develops critical understanding and *‘allows a more complex picture of literature’* (oral submission) to emerge. However, concerns are expressed that literature is being *‘debased’* (survey), particularly given the optional nature of the study of poetry and drama and the suggestion that all texts need not be studied in their entirety.

*Concern at the reduced emphasis on literary study.
Students may complete their HSC without any study of poetry, or alternatively drama. It is possible that the only novel that would be read would be the ‘novella’ of the core.*
(Written submission)

There is also concern that the thematic study of literary texts is not as valuable as a more traditional approach. Similarly, questions are asked about why texts in translation should be studied.

The inclusion of film/video and factual texts is generally seen as *‘a forward step’* (written submission). There is, however, a view that the broadening of the range of texts for study to include media diminishes the potential for rigour in the syllabus.

7. The **Preliminary Electives** and **HSC Electives** are accepted by about 65% of respondents to the survey question as outlining the scope of work to be covered.

Key issues in relation to the Preliminary Electives and HSC Electives are:

- extent of choice
- distinction between groups of electives
- parity of electives
- major work
- individual electives.

The responses to the range and structure of electives reflect the diversity of opinion and practice. While some responses endorse the extent of choice as *'enabling students to choose courses of study to suit their interests, needs and levels of ability'* (written submission), others believe that there is too much choice and that this can only result in uncertainty. There is also the view that the scope of individual electives is *'far too restrictive'* (survey) and should be broadened.

There is further divergence of opinion on the need for, and nature of, the organising principles of the electives. While some see the distinctions between close textual and contextual study and creating and critiquing as a strength of the draft syllabus — because they encourage different approaches to both process and product and *'provide both a deeper and broader understanding of the subject'* (written submission) — others see the distinctions as *'artificial and a curious distinction!'* (written submission).

Responses addressing the notion of parity of electives reflect society's diverse values about the relative worth of certain courses of study against others. There is a perception that *'an elective area such as media texts, for example, should certainly never be seen as less rigorous than, say, a literature elective'* (written submission). This position argues that the potential for rigour can be realised using a variety of texts to exemplify different kinds of textual production. There is also a view that there are *'soft options'* and that the assertion of parity only enforces mediocrity as students select *'the perceived easier electives to gain higher marks'* (survey). Furthermore, there are those who perceive that equity problems are intensified by the need for a final external examination.

While the fourth unit is generally welcomed in principle, some responses express concern about it being in the form of a major work, particularly given the problems of monitoring and assessment: *'It is very important that a fourth unit is being introduced'* focus group: academic). There are suggestions that the fourth unit should be done by coursework, since *'not all students are suited to a major work'* (survey).

There are many comments about the nature and value of individual electives: the Genre Studies elective is very well received and is seen as exciting and challenging; Cultural and Linguistic Studies is welcomed as an inclusion but there is a view that some details need reconsideration; the range of views on the Electronic and Print

Media electives reflect the differences in the community in regard to the relative value of these kinds of texts.

I just think that it is terrific that Electronic and Print Media texts have been included. That's where lots of the kids already do much of their learning and it's very important for them especially if we can develop a sense of how to critique it. (Focus group: professional association)

The Vocational Texts elective is seen as valuable in principle and offering other interesting possibilities for study. Some responses suggest that valuable opportunities are being lost by not enabling students to undertake a major work of a vocational kind that might involve authentic vocational tasks.

8. The **Student Assessment** section is accepted by about 60% of respondents to the survey as providing adequate information about assessment tools and strategies, and adequate guidance for developing assessment programs.

Key issues raised in relation to Student Assessment are:

- objectives, outcomes and assessment
- standards for assessment
- school-based assessment
- HSC examination
- equitable moderation
- implications for tertiary study.

Many of the issues associated with this section arise from the perceived need for documents additional to the syllabus, particularly a specimen examination paper and a prescribed text list.

There is support for the Assessment Guidelines in the draft syllabus and the diversity of assessment is seen as catering for a range of student needs and abilities, but there is also a fear that teachers who diversify the assessment of students in the HSC year will disadvantage them in preparation for a formal examination. There is also a *'concern that individual schools ... would have great difficulty in using the core to moderate between electives that differed greatly in their assessment tasks'* (written submission).

There is considerable discomfort with outcomes, as they are not considered *'compatible with marks'* (survey) and there is a view that their implementation will involve *'more teacher time assessing different types of assignments'* (survey). The establishing of standards for assessment is a concern for some respondents, particularly in the Creating electives and the Major Work, where the problem is seen as further complicated by the possibility of plagiarism. There is a view that forms of assessment need to be broadened beyond pen and paper examinations to enable appropriate assessment of Creating and Media electives: *'Is an exam a creative writing task?'* (survey).

The relationship of syllabus to examination is of concern. There is a sense that the HSC examination will drive and distort the intention of the syllabus, as it has in the past. This is borne out by the frequent requests for specimen papers: *'Sample examination papers would have given teachers a better idea of the implications of the syllabus'* (survey). There is also a concern that there are inherent difficulties in equitably examining a syllabus with such diverse elements.

Uncertainty is expressed about the possibility of equitable moderation: *'How will parity be assured?'* (survey). This uncertainty has arisen from the perception that the draft syllabus will result in streaming students into particular electives so that a hierarchy will be created through a mark-gaining exercise: *'[It] is ludicrous to think this will be taught to mixed ability groups'* (survey). Some responses also express the fear that moderation across the entire candidature will prove too demoralising for students who have preconceptions about academic failure: *'We will have our work cut out in advising students as to which electives they should do!'* (survey).

Some responses consider the implications for tertiary study. There is a view that, given the compulsory status of English, a broader course will meet *'the needs of students other than the very small percent who go on to study English at university'* (focus group: academic). A contrary view is that the amount of literature in the draft syllabus will be deemed unacceptable as preparation for entry into English faculties in universities. The suggestion that universities may regard some electives as prerequisites for entry into particular courses is raised as an equity issue, as the opportunity for a range of electives would vary among schools.

The need for more specificity is the common link in many of the responses to the Assessment section, especially in relation to the HSC course. There is a fear that there are too many elements to assess, and that school-based assessment will be too

complex and cause an increased workload for teachers: *'Anyone who could possibly assess such a diverse and unequally weighted number of electives should either be sainted or committed'* (survey).

9. The **Evaluation** section is accepted by about 75% of respondents to the survey question as providing adequate advice for evaluating teaching programs.

The key issue raised in relation to Evaluation is:

- directions for course evaluation.

While a majority of responses indicate that adequate advice for evaluating programs has been provided, there are requests for more details on possible processes: *'The evaluation provides questions to ask, which are fine — but this is not advice on the process'* (survey).

10. The **Glossary** is accepted by about 80% of respondents to the survey as clarifying the terminology used to describe the structure and components of the syllabus and the terminology that relates to the study of the subject.

The key issues raised in relation to the Glossary are:

- need for glossary
- glossary definitions.

The responses that address this issue see the inclusion of a glossary as helpful and a way of clarifying the confusion about terminology: *'An excellent facility'* (survey), or as confirmation that the draft syllabus is too 'jargonised': *'More work for teachers — new jargon'* (survey). Some query the nature of some definitions: *'Many terms still confusing for oldies'* (survey).

Timeline for Introduction

In responding to the draft syllabus, teachers have brought with them the collective memory of past changes hurriedly implemented without significant consultation. At the time of the consultation it was understood that the timeline for implementation of the (modified) draft syllabus was extremely short — Preliminary course implementation in 1997 and HSC in 1998. Under these circumstances, concerns are expressed about inadequate time *'to allow for thorough preparation of materials and adequate in-servicing'* (survey).

The time to implement is too short. The film unit alone will require considerable outlay. I welcome the introduction of this unit but more consideration must be given to resourcing this and other sections of the course to avoid many students from being disadvantaged. (Written submission)

Perhaps the time frame [for implementation] could be extended for another year to enable resourcing and professional development to meet its needs well. (Written submission)

This pressure of time inclines teachers to evaluate the document as units of work to be delivered in 1997 and examined in 1998.

Specific guidelines are needed to translate this vision into a reality. We need concrete models of types of texts we are familiar with to provide links between the known and the unknown. (Survey)

The initial stages of the consultation elicited strong responses from teachers. These responses indicated considerable scepticism about the Board’s consultation processes and the apparent speed with which the proposed changes had been developed and were planned for implementation. A belief that the draft syllabus was immutable was expressed, along with a sense of futility in responding, as it would all be ‘handed down’ from above. Some teachers also expressed the feeling of being ‘*surveyed out*’ (survey).

There is anecdotal evidence of an unwillingness to read the document and a sense of not ‘*trusting the Board to develop the syllabus nor the DSE to implement it*’ (focus group: AHISA). There appears to be a belief that the process of development has not involved teachers. The lack of feedback to schools in the early part of the process appears to have reinforced this belief, as did the appearance in some quarters of a ‘black market text list’.

The difficult context of schools at the time of the survey, a belief that HSC number-crunching at the end of the process renders syllabus documents inert, and memories of the introduction of General English 2 Unit and English K–6 have resulted in many sceptical survey responses. There is even a suggestion that if the respondents press hard enough, the DSE will delay its implementation for another year.

The extension of the timeline for consultation and eventual implementation is providing time and space for teachers to come to terms with the content of the draft syllabus. There is considerable anecdotal evidence to suggest that teachers are now reading the document more closely, and are beginning to experiment with implementing both the structure and the content of the Preliminary course. Initial feedback confirms some of the views expressed in the consultation about the strengths of this draft syllabus, and is providing valuable information to assist in further revision and refinement.

An English department with the information about structure, content, outcomes and assessment could develop exciting programs, confident that they are within the bounds of the syllabus. (Survey)

The choices are so varied. So many different options to choose from. That’s the strength of the syllabus. (Survey)

I believe it gives direction without being too prescriptive in terms of classroom content. (Survey)

Data from Survey Questions 7–10

The consultation responses contain a divergence of opinions and issues raised by the *Draft English Stage 6 Syllabus*. This section of the Executive Summary documents these various viewpoints under the following headings:

- Strengths of the Draft Syllabus Identified in the Consultation
- Concerns about the Draft Syllabus Identified in the Consultation
- Modifications to the Draft Syllabus Suggested in the Consultation
- Implementation Issues Signalled in the Consultation.

Strengths of the Draft Syllabus Identified in the Consultation

Several aspects of the draft document are identified as its strengths. These include:

- maintenance of the subject integrity of English along with changes capable of revitalising the subject and its teaching, giving it relevance to contemporary uses of English and including specifically Australian content

I think this draft document offers senior teachers an opportunity to reinvigorate their approach to teaching senior English. (Survey)

- provision for the broad range of the candidature, scope for students with varied interests and abilities and opportunity for rewarding students for a range of achievements in English, as well as provision of a structure that allows choice, diversity and flexibility and has internal logic and consistency and a balance between prescription and choice

... I am delighted to see such diverse elective choices available to students with varying interests and abilities. (Survey)

- inclusion of film, electronic and print media texts, factual and vocational texts, emphasis on speaking and listening, the study of language and different ways of approaching texts, as well as an equal emphasis on creating and critiquing

I also like the recognition that English means more than the study of the Western literary canon. A SMH editorial recently argued for our young people to become literate in the area of film and image, as much as they are in print. I commend the syllabus writers for including visual literacy as a requirement of the course. I further think that the greater emphasis on oracy is very important, given the fact that we need to negotiate in many areas of our lives through the 'oral' medium. (Survey)

- provision for three units in the Preliminary course, three and four units in the HSC course; better preparation for tertiary studies in both English and in other faculties; provision for essential language skills for the workforce; and potential to overcome scaling problems.

An excellent syllabus which will allow teachers to stop teaching from the exams and examiners' reports. This chance to update the syllabus is vital. Students must not continue to play the present numbers game. The current bandaid system for moderation between general and related must be replaced with a more educationally sound system. (Survey)

These aspects are discussed in Sections 2 and 3 of the consultation report.

Strengths in the draft syllabus have been identified by:

- professional associations

The course is stimulating, relevant, rigorous and enjoyable; the document is wide ranging in scope and broadens the base of subject English. It acknowledges and provides credibility to aspects of English that have meaning and value to all groups of students. (Oral submission: English Teachers' Association)

- systems

... the Department is in agreement with the stance that the Board is taking with this particular syllabus. (Oral submission: Department of School Education)

The philosophy and structure of the draft syllabus are strongly supported. It is an innovative, forward-looking syllabus which teachers believe will overcome many of the problems in the present course in English. (Written submission: Catholic Education Office)

- teachers

It provides an up-to-date approach to the subject, but enables retention of the classics, if desired. This flexibility is beneficial to the range of students we are being required to teach. (Survey: teacher)

It is certainly very challenging to us teachers. This syllabus is in line with recent work in the field. The present syllabuses just aren't. (Focus group: head teacher)

- academics

It is the best thing that has happened to us for years. (Focus group: academic)

This enables us to redefine English in a wonderful way. The core concept is integral to this approach which moves across the range of English. (Focus group: academic)

- the English Years 7–12 Syllabus Advisory Committee.

The current syllabus documents and course structure do not have the necessary breadth and depth of focus to accommodate ongoing developments. The teaching of senior English cannot be improved by tinkering here and there. This urgent project is underway and the momentum for change must be maintained. (Report: Appendix M)

Concerns about the Draft Syllabus Identified in the Consultation

A range of concerns are identified in this draft document. These include:

- breadth of the definition of English in the draft syllabus and capacity of the draft syllabus to meet the diverse needs, interests and abilities of the full range of students

... we can't treat as one the minds of 70 000 students. ESL students should not have the same course as others, otherwise they are consigned to the bottom. (Focus group: head teachers)

- apparent displacement of literature as the central concern of English and a perceived loss of subject integrity and deterioration of standards

There seems to be no clear idea of the philosophy of the subject, English. What is the point of the study of English? English here just seems to be an attempt to include as many elements of different perspectives of what English might or could include as possible. What is happening to, what is the position of, literature in this new syllabus? (Survey: teacher)

- generality of the outcomes, their lack of integration with other aspects of the draft syllabus and their incompatibility with the normative assessment processes of the HSC

The experience of the past indicates that the content and format of the exam will have an undue impact upon the course content and pedagogy. More specification is needed in order to ensure that the assessment of student outcomes does not detract from the spirit of the syllabus and that the selection of course content or elective/option combinations does not reflect where the best marks are rather than what is most appropriate for the student. (Written submission: school)

- insufficient opportunities for excellence through a horizontal structure and capacity of the core to offer a common experience that will meet the needs and abilities of all students

Concerns re the 3 Unit and 4 Unit courses. Why is the 3 Unit course only an extension of the 2 Unit course with no associated development in degree of difficulty? (Written submission: school)

- mandatory nature of the study of Aboriginal texts and Aboriginal English

There is also much concern at this school over the concept of a mandatory study. This will have to be clarified, as well as the suggestion that a study of Aboriginal English will also be made mandatory. Familiarity with Aboriginal English is desirable but there are concerns over the mandatory nature of this ... (Written submission: school)

- complexity and possible inequity of moderating a range of electives against the core

The vexed question of weighting cannot be ignored. It is assumed that the elective structure ... will be moderated by the core unit. This attempt at creating equity places far too much emphasis on the core as the pivotal assessment point, given its weighting as one unit. A better balance would be to give the core a greater weighting so that assessment comparability between the electives would be more reliable. (Written submission: school)

- lack of support material, text lists and examination specifications; and difficulties of implementation, particularly timetabling, resourcing and professional development.

The success of the syllabus is in some ways dependent on prescribed texts and topics which are unknown at this stage. (Survey: school)

I need in-services, practical examples of work units and the assessment/examination practices. (Survey: school)

These concerns are discussed in Sections 2 and 3 of the consultation report.

Concerns are expressed by a range of respondents, including head teachers, teachers and academics.

In endeavouring to cater for all students, we risk catering for only a few. (Survey: teacher)

This draft syllabus would fail to challenge most of the students currently enrolled in Years 11 and 12 since it allows students to opt for a path of mediocrity. (Focus group: head teacher)

My major objection to the draft syllabus is its lack of precision in many places. The effect of this is that it is difficult for a reader to grasp exactly what is being proposed and I believe that it would also be difficult for a classroom teacher to know what was required to be implemented. (Written submission)

Modifications to the Draft Syllabus Suggested in the Consultation

The responses to the consultation offered a full range of suggestions from the complete rewriting of the draft syllabus to strong endorsement of the document as it stands. Some responses suggest that the current courses should be retained.

I would like to see the entire thing scrapped. (Survey)

Our most experienced teacher thinks it is a 'fine document' and it would be hard to better! (Survey)

Don't mess around with what we've already got. (Survey)

A range of modifications is suggested in general terms, as well as changes to specific aspects of the document. Some of the suggested modifications to particular parts of

the document include requests for further clarification and explication, or to specific course details.

I congratulate the Board on developing a new approach to senior English. I have concerns about retaining the academic challenge for talented English students in this syllabus. The Major Work needs to be clearly outlined and developed to show how it might extend the students.

(Survey)

There were modifications suggested by implication, as well as requests for change without specific directions.

The core and elective structure of this proposed syllabus is, as a 'structure', innovative. It enables students who are not strong in literature the chance to excel in other elective strands. However, the creation of a 'common core' has disadvantaged students by (i) forcing talented literature students to study other areas and (ii) forcing formerly contemporary students to compete against talented students.

(Survey)

The draft syllabus is clearly set out and is an interesting variation on the teaching of English. I wonder that it seems to be trying to cater too much to too many competing interests. The break into close textual and contextual seems artificial and could be better combined. (Survey)

There are also clear recommendations for specific modifications to the document. These include changes to:

- the terminology

Terminology of the document needs greater definition.

(Written submission: school)

- the format

A more simple format. Too many choices and subsections.
(Survey)

This is a very significant development and will see English develop in an exciting and relevant way into the next century ... Organisational frameworks in the prelim and HSC courses can be simplified with a more consistent application of terms and definitions. (Survey)

- the structure of the course

Change the balance of core and electives. Core should take up no more than 1/3 of the course. (Survey)

The division between close textual study and contextual study is artificial, as the teaching of literature usually focuses on an integration of these two areas. Therefore, we believe this breakdown is unnecessary. (Written submission: school)

I also feel that the 3 Unit course should be adjusted so that each student must study 2 critiquing and 2 creative [electives], as creativity is traditionally seen as 'soft'.
(Survey)

We perceive a problem with the available pathways through the course. Students attempting 4 Unit or the multimedia elective will need to be identified early and directed into electives in the Preliminary course which will prepare them adequately for HSC. This narrows Preliminary options. Solution may be to stretch this course over Years 10–12.
(Survey)

- the content of the core and electives

Overall response is positive! It was difficult to appreciate some of the text work in this syllabus in the absence of prescribed lists. I would be concerned to see poetry

replaced in Prelim core by the study only of song lyrics.
(Survey)

The core does not demand a study of all three aspects of literature ... There should be a compulsory study of all these aspects in the core. (Written submission: school)

The study of report, recount, explanation and instruction procedure need not be arbitrarily limited to the Preliminary course. (Written submission: school)

We believe there is a need to recognise the intellectual rigour and amount of work done in the current 3 Unit course by awarding it similar recognition to the other 4 Unit subjects ... a study of Film/Video Texts could be included in all courses to recognise the importance of studying visual text. (Written submission: English faculty)

Course work should be an option for 4 Unit students and the 4th unit should be freed from the restriction of corequisite study. (Survey)

- the assessment and examination.

Outcomes sections could be modified to have clearer assessment focus. (Survey)

Listening is arguably the key skill in management — a greater emphasis could be placed on it by extending the current listening exam to all candidates. (Survey)

A clear statement about the use of ‘the core’ for moderating purposes — if this is the case — needs to be made. (Survey)

Standards-based assessment incorporated into syllabus! (Survey)

There are many suggestions about assessment and examination, including a view that the whole notion of a pen and paper examination needs reviewing.

I would like to see the journals, portfolios etc listed in the writing component of the assessments section to be examinable. (Survey)

... with such a change to the actual syllabus, surely this merits a change in the way students are finally examined. (Survey)

Implementation Issues Signalled in the Consultation

A range of issues relating to delivery and implementation is identified through the consultation. These include:

- nature and function of a syllabus document and support documents

There are many requests for support documents to assist teachers in interpreting the intent and scope of the syllabus.

A syllabus is only part of the picture. (Survey)

The success of the syllabus is in some ways dependent on prescribed texts and topics. (Survey)

Others express the view that the draft syllabus provides sufficient information for developing teaching programs *'as each section is generally clearly outlined with considerable detail'* (survey).

- nature of English teachers' practice and professional development

Teachers' responses to the survey attest to a passion for their subject and a high level of commitment to, and professionalism in, its effective teaching. While some view the draft syllabus as supporting and revitalising this practice, others view it as a threat.

The breadth of topics is good because a number of teachers have personal specialities and they will be able to offer their expertise to the students. (Focus group: head teacher)

... we were not trained for this as teachers, and the short time span for implementation cynically assumes that somehow we will be forced to comply. (Survey: teacher)

- resourcing and timetabling

There is general acceptance of the need for support documents and professional development programs to ensure that teachers are able to implement the full range of opportunities made available by the draft syllabus.

The support document needs to provide work samples and a standards framework. (Focus group: consultant)

There is support for the changes in this syllabus but also recognition that retraining may be needed. (Focus group: consultant)

Questions and issues about the resourcing of the draft syllabus centre on staffing and the provision of human resources. Some fear that the draft syllabus will be an opportunity for some principals who *'delight in allocating staffing to senior courses*

on the basis of total numbers' (written submission) to maximise class sizes, thereby restricting the potential for flexibility.

The resourcing of hardware is the main area of concern, particularly in relation to electronic media: *'The idea of having to "fight for" computer time and other resources to put this syllabus into practice'* (survey) is of particular concern to many teachers.

Timetabling difficulties and the complexity of attitudes to the place of English in the curriculum structure of the school are also of concern, although there is also a view that these problems can be solved.

Well we've looked at the timetabling. We offered the 3 Unit as a 1 Unit additional course and we believe the timetabling issues can be solved. (Focus group: head teacher)

- pressure of public examination

Concerns are expressed about the HSC examination and these concerns are translated into professional development needs.

No matter how much we pretend it otherwise, the HSC is a written exam and students and teachers need to know what to expect. (urvey)

While the syllabus is praised for its *'avoidance of exam-driven thinking'* (survey), there is an assertion that in a context with an external examination of such weight and consequence as the HSC, the examination papers will provide the real directions for teachers.

The reality is that all of what we teach is judged by an exam that is then handed to universities for scaling. (Survey)

After having my fingers burnt implementing the spirit of the 2 Unit General syllabus the first year it was examined, I want to see how this syllabus will be examined. (Survey)

- timeline for implementation.

It is helpful that the date for implementation has been postponed from 1998. (Survey)

We'd need to do a huge amount of work to prepare for this. (Survey)

These implementation issues are discussed in Sections 2 and 3 of the consultation report.

Data from Additional Comments

The final survey question offered respondents the opportunity to make further comments. Many respondents availed themselves of this opportunity and provided wide-ranging viewpoints. It was not uncommon to find comments which acknowledged that, despite the concerns expressed, the draft syllabus was welcomed.

We were generally pleased with the new direction this proposed change will give. As with many changes, the full implications are not realised until you have experienced the new circumstances for some time. At this stage we have no negative thoughts, but wait for the supplementary material to be distributed. (Survey)

The unknown is always confronting. Overall we support the direction of the syllabus ... (Survey)

Key Competencies is of concern — using technology ... on the whole I feel that it is a great challenge but one that ensures English remains relevant, vibrant and purposeful. (Survey)

This syllabus is challenging and inspiring. It offers plenty of scope ... We will need time to build up resources, especially those of us in small schools with low budgets. (Survey)

It would be fair to say that apart from the general concerns listed throughout our response, we are excited about the potential of the syllabus. (Survey)

Implications of Consultation Findings

The results of this consultation can now be used to inform the development of the senior English syllabuses in the light of the McGaw recommendations.

The consultation on the draft syllabus, in concert with the consultation on the McGaw Green Paper, has provided the Board with many perspectives that will be valuable in the ongoing syllabus development process. In considering the implications for future syllabuses following the publication of the White Paper, it is important to take into account those aspects of the consultation which provide direction for the syllabus structure and content, assessment and examination, and implementation of the completed syllabus.

The consultation has indicated how highly the respondents value the need for flexibility, in order to cater for the diverse needs of students, and the provision for students to take more English, either because they need to do so or because they have a particular interest and aptitude in the subject. There is a need to take into account the core or common area of an English syllabus, and what is to be the content of such a core. There is also a need to consider the specialist areas allowed for in the draft syllabus.

In terms of content, it is important that the place and value of literature within the subject of English be taken into account. Moreover, the range of literature, as well as the range of other texts, must be considered in future English syllabus development. The equal emphasis for spoken and written texts, and for the production or creation of texts and the reception or interpretation of texts, also needs to be taken into account. The study of language conventions as they apply to the range of texts to be encountered by students is a further factor needing consideration.

Similarly, there is a need to consider the information supplied to the Review Committee in relation to assessment and examination. In particular, support for standards-referenced assessment and broader-based assessment should be noted, along with support for examinations that extend beyond pen-and-paper, timed, written examinations.

It is also important to take note of the points made about implementation issues such as the need for support documents, professional development activities and appropriate human and physical resources to enable teachers to implement the syllabus in a professional manner.

The English educational community has provided a great deal of excellent information which will be used to find a way forward when the White Paper is published.

Recommendations

- *That the Board endorse the Report on the Draft English Stage 6 Syllabus Consultation and that the Executive Summary be distributed to all secondary schools, TAFE colleges, universities and other respondents.*
- *That the information supplied to the Board of Studies through the extensive consultative process be used to inform the development of future senior English syllabuses.*
- *That a copy of the complete report be made available upon request.*

Extracts from
**Senior English Review Committee - Report on the Draft English
Stage 6 Syllabus Consultation - June 1997.**

The following extracts have been taken from the report to illustrate aspects of the response to the Draft English Stage 6 Syllabus which relate directly to the three issues addressed by the Forum.

- | | |
|---|------|
| 1. The Nature of English at Stage 6 | p.1 |
| 2. The Students - Their Needs, Interests and Expectations | p.14 |
| 3. The Nature of the Courses in Stage 6 English | p.19 |

1. The Nature of English at Stage 6

2.2.2 Issues

The very nature of the subject is under constant discussion by both academics and teachers. The wider community also has a view of the subject. As a consequence, opinions about what should constitute the appropriate areas of study for students, and even the emphasis due to agreed areas of study, are divergent.

- **Need for Syllabus Revision**

There are divergent views even on the need for, and direction of, change in English Stage 6. The draft syllabus is seen as addressing '*most of the difficulties in the teaching of senior English which have become increasingly apparent in recent years*' (written submission 36, p 1). This view regards the existing 2 Unit Related and 2 Unit General courses as philosophically and pedagogically narrow. They are described as:

offering choices, but mostly within the confines of literary analysis ... [The draft syllabus will] open English up to a far wider range of interests, and ... breathe fresh air into the arid mechanics of the tired old system. It will clearly prepare students more comprehensively for the study of English at tertiary level, but far more importantly, will enable them to interact effectively within the rich and increasingly complex social and professional contexts requiring mastery of English. (Written submission 41, pp 1-2)

There is a perception that the current senior English courses culturally privilege a particular group of students because of the particular literature-based model of the courses.

The emphasis in all courses in the present structure (although less so in Contemporary) remains a literary one, a form which has relevance for a very small percentage of the candidature who go on to study Literature at tertiary level. (Written submission 39, p 1)

There is, moreover, a recognition that the subject English needs to be accessible and relevant to the various ways in which the English language is used in contemporary Australian society and that teaching and learning in the subject will be revitalised by the possibilities offered in the draft syllabus.

Changes are welcome, especially [the] focus on the use of English. The draft expands the resources and uses of English section of the current syllabus — this is needed. Introduces study of film — at last! Makes study of English more accessible (less discriminatory) to a larger number of students. (Survey 158)

This draft document offers senior teachers an opportunity to reinvigorate their approach to teaching senior English. This opportunity for fresh material, a review of resources and increased status of English will be widely welcomed by those in the profession who have been concerned at the developing predictability and stagnation of HSC English over recent years. (Survey 2)

However, some do not see the need for change at all, or propose a minimal adjustment to the status quo to provide the opportunity for interested students to take up to four units of English in a hierarchical model and to give English parity with Mathematics and Science.

The current syllabus had finally got it right in addressing needs of students. So, 'if it ain't broke don't fix it'. (Written submission 18, p 3)

I support

Make 2UR=3 units

Make 3U= 4 units
(with some adjustment of texts and numbers of texts etc).
(Survey 200)

- **Definition of the Subject English**

An important key to understanding the range of positions taken on the draft syllabus lies in beliefs about the way in which the subject English can be defined. While the draft syllabus describes the ‘subject English as it is today’ (p 6), it is, also, seen as literary studies and/or linguistic studies or alternatively as a more expanded and continually expanding body of knowledge embracing the theoretical and technological developments of the second half of the twentieth century. In responses to the consultation the definitions of the subject are closely interrelated with models of curriculum, pedagogical approaches and ideological positions. Some consultation responses provide a definition of the subject English. The English Teachers’ Association, for example, offers as its definition of the subject English a model that firmly connects the subject with the curriculum model.

The subject English incorporates the teaching of literature and all other types of spoken, written and visual texts as well as the cultural understandings associated with the English language. The ETA strongly believes that all these are integral to and inseparable from the delivery of the curriculum. (Written submission 47, p 2)

Another view of the subject can be summarised thus: that there is a single core of knowledge (literature) that forms the integrity of the subject, and that the integrity of the subject is compromised without such literary study as its main focus, that the central role of English is the transmission of English cultural heritage.

The study of literature is at the heart of the study of English.
(Oral submission 5 transcript, p 1)

Students may have an English course that contains virtually no literature. This diminishes the intellectual component and the status of literature within our society. It also does not expose literature as an option in students’ lives/experience. (Survey 183)

Some who hold this view see the draft syllabus as inappropriately taking the study of English into fields such as Linguistics, Computer Studies, Journalism and Cultural Studies.

There is the consensus agreeing with the tradition of Western education founded by the Greek Enlightenment, that the fittest training to form the young mind for any task is study of a society's cultural classics. (Written submission 6, p 1)

There is also a questioning of the appropriateness to the subject of certain aspects of the draft syllabus. For example, the place of visual texts and visual communication is debated in the following interchange.

The availability of film and media is just great.

I've always been concerned about the inclusion of film in English, because it is a language of semiotics.

But we've got the tools there so why not include it.

I'm just a separatist, that's all. (TAFE focus group notes, p 4)

A broad view of the nature and scope of English embraces a wider definition incorporating several approaches and perspectives, including the study of literature, cultural heritage and visual and technologically generated texts. The School of Teaching and Curriculum Studies at the University of Sydney, for instance, offers the view that the description of the subject given in the Rationale of the draft syllabus recognises that the field of the subject is expanding and

.... acknowledges the centrality of the subject for all students, not just those with literary talent or reading interests. It also addresses current concerns, such as the importance of spoken text and the need for an understanding of the conventions governing the creation of texts. (Written submission 36, p 1)

There is a recognition that a number of paradigms underpin the ways in which English is taught, such as the ‘personal growth model’ (on which the current 7–10 syllabus is based), the ‘cultural heritage model’ (on which the current 2 Unit Related and 2 Unit General courses are based), the ‘communication studies model’ (on which the 2 Unit Contemporary course is partly based), the ‘critical literacy model’, the ‘cultural studies model’ and so on. The eclectic nature of the draft syllabus is seen as one of its strengths.

So the overall strengths of the document that I'd like to address are the facts that it looks at the five models which are commonly accepted in the international world for the teaching of English and which are outlined in the Cox Report ... and it seems to us that the greatest strength of this document is its eclectic nature, that people can choose according to the needs of the students to find a course which is valid, which is towards their interests and we feel that we'd like to strongly support that. (Oral submission 3 transcript, p 27)

That view takes account of current academic understanding about how texts are spoken and heard, written and read and how language is taught and acquired.

Anyone who has followed ‘English’ developments over the last two decades will see this syllabus as a reflection of what is going on in the field. The syllabus reflects developments in the discipline. (Survey 181)

The draft syllabus is seen as allowing for the importance of maintaining traditional approaches and is seen as providing an ‘*up-to-date approach to the subject, [which] ... enables retention of the classics, if desired*’ (Survey 5). This view, emphasising both continuity and change, acknowledges the document’s attempt to

examine very closely and comprehensively the role of language in the life of the Australian culture. Its claim to be up to date is justified; it reflects accurately and succinctly the range of approaches to text which are now encompassed in the subject area English, it acknowledges the traditions of

English teaching in New South Wales but does not unduly favour any one approach or set of texts. (Oral submission 2 transcript, p 16)

- **Philosophy Underpinning the Draft Syllabus**

There are responses that support the theoretical foundations and the inclusive philosophical basis of the draft syllabus outlined in the Rationale.

We like the Rationale ... and we welcome the inclusion of new approaches to looking at texts and language which have arisen out of recent developments in theories related to subject English. (Written submission 31, p 1)

In this time of change, eclecticism is probably the only practical way to go. While the document allows for a cultural heritage model of teaching English it still opens the door to recent possibilities as well. My concern is that the syllabus does not go far enough in leading teachers from traditional positions to those more appropriate to the plural society we inhabit. This is particularly so in the Preliminary course, where the contextual study downplays its potential for rigorous postmodern critique. (Written submission 19, p 3)

However, the eclectic nature of the draft syllabus is criticised in some responses for its perceived lack of clarity and cohesion in the statement of its philosophical underpinnings.

There seems to be no clear idea of the philosophy of the subject English. What is the point of the study of English? English here just seems to be an attempt to include as many elements of different perspectives of what English might or could include as possible. (Survey 140)

The draft syllabus itself does not make explicit connections with the previous syllabus documents (2/3 Unit Related, 2 Unit General, 2 Unit Contemporary), and the consequences of this omission for its general community acceptance are noted.

Introduction and Rationale need to have their antecedents more closely, clearly and strongly articulated. You must recognise that many teachers have not been brought up with or kept pace with the developments. They need to know and understand more about the underpinnings put as simply as possible. (Survey 338)

Concerns are also expressed in the consultation material that while the draft syllabus refers in the Rationale to ‘*the study of English as it is today*’, the syllabus does not appear to acknowledge overtly or explicitly how developments in critical and literary theory, cultural studies and communications theory and pedagogy, as mentioned in the Rationale, have formed the underpinnings of its components. This criticism asserts that the draft syllabus does not explicitly identify which theories of language and literature are driving the syllabus, where these paradigms are to be found in the content of the syllabus, or how these paradigms are related to the teaching practices outlined in the work units of the core and electives.

The syllabus does not appear to acknowledge developments in critical and literary theory, cultural studies and communications theory, as mentioned in the Rationale. The link between the Rationale and the content of the syllabus needs to be explicated. There is a need to explain how to approach the study within the courses giving an indication of the frameworks for each of the approaches. (Written submission 49, p 2)

The syllabus did not give any clear indication of what model or approach it was taking ... [and this] was a matter that warranted clarification. (Head teachers’ focus group A notes, p 2)

Some points raised [in the Rationale] need elaboration; for example, in what ways does or should the syllabus embrace recent developments in critical, literary, linguistic, communications and cultural studies theory? We are concerned that while this aspect of the Rationale is implicitly integrated in the literature electives of the Preliminary course, it is NOT present at all in the HSC course (except for the Cultural and Linguistic Studies elective). (Written submission 31, p 1)

- **Nature of Texts**

Particular attitudes and beliefs about the nature and integrity of the subject English inform and determine attitudes to the nature of texts and appropriate approaches to the study of texts. One view of English maintains the notion of an existing, unchanging hierarchy of texts, and argues that the study of English should only focus on those texts highly positioned on this hierarchy. From this position the draft is criticised for not allowing sufficient *'appreciation of English as a humanising communication with the great writers of the past and present'* (survey 3). This notion assumes the existence of an identifiable and generally accepted 'canon' of English literature representing the finest expressions of human ideals, feelings and experience, and expresses concern that there are insufficient opportunities for the study of this assumed 'canon' in the draft syllabus. Therefore the draft syllabus is seen to *'downgrade the value of literature in senior English'* (survey 230) and to diminish academic rigour. This is sometimes expressed as dismay about the essential merit and significance of the subject.

English seems to be turning into a subject without true standards and values. (Survey 97)

It is difficult to see how replacing literature with editorials, interviews, reviews, public speech, advertising, film brochures and posters constitutes academic rigour. (Survey 86)

All students need to encounter all genres of literature, past and present, especially those students for whom access to quality literature is not part of their everyday experience. (Written submission 3, p 1)

However, another position, reflected particularly in the written submissions, is that there is sufficient choice in the draft syllabus model to allow for extensive and intensive study of canonical texts, certainly as much as exists at present. To test the validity of these concerns about literary studies, the English Teachers' Association created a range of possible programs based on the requirements of the draft syllabus.

Concern has been raised that there is inadequate provision for the study of the 'canon'... [the] English Teachers' Association has drafted a course with purely canonical content which can be accommodated by the syllabus framework. What this reveals is that teachers need the time to work through this process. (Written submission 47, p 10)

Other responses question the assumption that the study of canonical texts in themselves inherently guarantees rigour.

A direct relationship between literary quality and the capacity to study such a text with rigour is problematic. Rigour is available in the study of many different kinds of texts. There is an enormous amount of highly respected work in academic circles which would not exist if you could do rigorous work only on high literature texts. Besides, this is not a syllabus in literature but in English. (Academics' focus group notes, p 4)

- **Range of Texts**

Just as there are divergent opinions on the nature of texts, so too the views on the range of texts that constitutes sufficient study for the subject English provide further contradictions. There is an objection that an inclusive view of texts reflects ‘*a dedication to raising the status of mediocre texts and a gross and unhealthy addiction to political correctness*’ (survey 81), and this is accompanied by a fear that teaching these texts will erode the time available for the study of literary texts. This concern often tends to be expressed in relation to media texts in the core.

The core is unbalanced. More time should be spent on literary study and less on video/film etc, as this should be covered in junior years and Preliminary year! (Survey 108)

The inclusion of media texts for study both in the core and electives is, however, welcomed by many respondents, and this is accompanied by strong endorsement of the recognition of film and media studies, and the need for critical appreciation of their proliferating products. This view has been stated in relation to electronic texts as well.

Interesting electives; opportunities for student choice, including film and multi-media, is also good. (Survey 245)

I think to give with one hand millions of dollars to connect the school to the Internet and to say ... that we shouldn't be learning how to

appreciate and analyse the products that are on the Internet and the media is ludicrous. (Oral submission 3 transcript, p 29)

There is also a perception that the Factual Texts and/or Vocational Texts nominated in both the core and the electives are already covered adequately in Years 7–10 and that students will be bored with ‘*getting more of the same*’ (survey 363). A comparable view allows that if they must be included, they should be only located in the Preliminary course. An opposite view is that such texts are essential for study in order to prepare students for their future in the workplace and that

[t]here are some students for whom that vocational focus, that workplace focus, will be a very interesting and challenging one ... something that can lead you into literature rather than the other way around, because they do become interested and involved in the texts they’re working with ... (Oral submission 2 transcript, p 22)

The opportunity for students to gain familiarity with texts for a variety of purposes and audiences that go beyond the literary to the social and functional is welcomed by respondents, and is seen as an opportunity to prepare all students with a ‘breadth of literacies’.

There is a view that science is a refuge from literacy. But it is vital for science students to be able to read and write fluently and those in the workplace are expressing a similar view to ours about the lack of skills in the area. (Academic focus group notes, p 2)

Another argument in support of the broader range of text types offered is that this assists in redressing the imbalance between language and literature. The ‘*explicit teaching of factual texts*’ has been endorsed for enabling students to be ‘*more effective analysts and users of language*’ (written submission 37, p 7). Respondents express approval of the inclusion of a wide range of texts, of the different ways of working with texts, emphasis on the spoken as well as on the written mode, and emphasis on writing for different purposes, not merely the ‘academic’.

The syllabus presents a view of subject English which is far more relevant to society’s view of text than the current literary-based syllabus. (Survey 390)

However, the very idea of different text types is called into question by some who challenge the division of text types into discrete, definable categories both as a practice *per se*, and in terms of its helpfulness in achieving educational outcomes.

You also have factual texts separated from literary texts. It leaves students without any idea of how the text itself is written about. These [factual] genres are useful for students writing about literary texts. Even at post-graduate level we often gripe about the lack of a really good sense of the structures basic to the different genres. (Academic focus group notes, p 5)

The distinction between Factual Texts and Electronic Print Media Texts or Multimedia Texts may be increasingly hard to sustain, since they will overlap.

(Written submission 54, p 2)

- **Mode**

The focus on the study of texts in both spoken and written modes is generally accepted as it ‘addresses current concerns such as the importance of spoken text’ (written submission 36, p 1). The draft syllabus is praised as being

responsive to the changing needs of the community [by providing] a broad facility with English as the communicative basis for social integration. (Academic, written submission 35, p 4)

Concerns about the recognition of mode as a key element in the selection and study of a range of texts centres only on its definition. There is a view that ‘mode’ needs to be defined more broadly and explicitly, with the ‘visual’ (survey 160) and ‘listening’ (survey 232) as distinct elements.

- **Language System**

The study of the language system is acknowledged as necessary to the subject and, according to some views, as the heart of an English syllabus.

The document is far more inclusive than any of its predecessors, allowing for a much wider range of student literacy and language development levels.

We applaud the shift in emphasis from a narrow literature-based model to one where language is focused, with extensive and diverse application. Formerly, the syllabus tended to privilege most able students who studied all literature elements and least able students were left with minimal, less satisfying or status-rendering, alternatives. (Written submission 45, p 1)

The concerns raised over this component of the Rationale are not focused on its inclusion and emphasis but rather on the generality of its definition.

This syllabus has yet to enunciate directly and in detail a theoretical position on ... the nature of language learning (where are the students in this draft?). (Written submission 30, p 2)

There seems to be no overall language philosophy/system behind the syllabus (beyond vague references to grammar and even more general references in the key competencies section). (Survey 374)

Do I really have to teach nouns and verbs again? Please, no. (Survey 236)

- **Creating and Critiquing**

The provision for both the creating and critiquing of texts is welcomed in general terms.

... the balance of critical and creative orientations in HSC courses addresses the need to allow students to show skill in both these areas, and provides greater continuity with the current 7–10 syllabus. (Written submission 8, p 1)

However, it is suggested that this approach needs to be made more explicit in the document as a whole.

The Rationale uses creating and critiquing of texts as an organising and controlling principle. This approach to the

activities of students learning English should inform, in a coherent way, the whole syllabus. However, the document itself does not proceed to clarify this beyond the Rationale itself. (Oral submission 1 notes, p 1)

Concerns are raised as to whether the division between creating and critiquing is theoretically sound, and whether the relative weight given to each of these aspects is appropriate.

Rationale — arbitrary division of creating and critiquing. (Survey 350)

No adequate explanation is given to explain why critiquing and creating, for example, are given equal status. (Survey 229)

These issues are taken up in more detail under the section dealing with HSC electives.

2.3 Aims, Objectives, Outcomes and Key Competencies (Draft syllabus pp 7–10)

The Aims of the draft syllabus indicate the overall purpose of the syllabus and its long-term goals. The draft syllabus expresses its aims as *‘to enable students to develop proficiency in, understand and value English as a means of creative and analytic thinking, of interacting, of expressing feelings, of articulating and challenging ideas and attitudes and of acquiring and communicating social and cultural knowledge’* (p 7). The Aims provide a general indication of the capacities that the draft syllabus means to encourage in students.

The Objectives of the draft syllabus relate to the Aims and to the Outcomes, which define them specifically. The Objectives provide direction for the teaching and learning process, reflecting the values and attitudes, knowledge, understandings and skills fundamental to the course.

The Outcomes statements describe students’ attainments in each of the Preliminary and HSC courses of the syllabus. The outcomes are organised in terms of values and attitudes, skills and knowledge and understandings. Distinct outcomes are identified for the core and electives in each course.

The Key Competencies identify those seven competencies that students are able to develop in meeting the aims, objectives and outcomes of the draft syllabus.

2. The Students - Their Needs, Interests and Expectations

2.1.2 Issues

The key issues raised in relation to the content of the draft syllabus Introduction include:

- ¥ needs and interests of students
- ¥ equity perspectives
- ¥ place of English.

Despite the endorsement of the Introduction provided by the survey responses, there are concerns related to the diversity of the student body. These concerns centre on the nature of the learner and the needs of the full range of students. Students particularly mentioned are those who currently form the candidature of Contemporary English 2 Unit. Issues relating to gender, geographical isolation, disadvantaged students and schools, gifted and talented students and minority groups are raised in the consultation responses.

- **Needs and Interests of Students**

That the *Draft English Stage 6 Syllabus* attempts to address the diverse needs, interests and expectations of learners is generally recognised and approved by respondents.

It was felt that the draft syllabus had the potential to develop a more 'rounded' student. (Written submission 28, p 1)

It is viewed as a way of resolving problems of equity while meeting the needs of diversity and is seen as being able to '*extend better students and cater for [the] less able*' (survey 141). There is recognition that this has been achieved through a structure that allows students to choose their own paths and to develop particular interests and talents.

A new open approach catering for a wide range of abilities and interests. (Survey 284)

The multiplicity of current senior syllabuses does not provide ... so much opportunity to pursue individual concerns. (Written submission 36, p 1)

In addition, there is a view that the syllabus offers much to interest boys because of its expanded view of text and the opportunities offered to use technology. It is suggested that the flexibility and range of choice will allow for boys' interest in the subject to be rekindled.

All boys should particularly welcome the opportunities for study of English through vocational texts, electronic/print media and multimedia. Lots of students are excited by this but boys greet such study with great enthusiasm. (Survey 2)

As the English coordinator at a comprehensive boys' school (albeit an independent one), I have long desired a syllabus with sufficient flexibility to engage all our students rather than just a handful ... and I believe that the draft syllabus does promise this. (Written submission 1, p 1)

Another perceived advantage is that the inclusion of Aboriginal English in the core may assist *'in improving the retention rate [of Aboriginal students] to the State average of some 70%'*. Oral submission 1 transcript, p 6)

However, not all respondents believe that the draft syllabus would facilitate these changes and some would like further explanation of what the syllabus takes to be the nature of the learner and the learning experiences.

The notion that a course that allows all students to have a common experience of the subject English is, unfortunately, idealistic but unrealistic. The range of abilities and interests among the HSC students acknowledged in the Introduction, as well as a range of

resources and interests in the home environment, will limit the possibility of all students having the desired common experience.

(Survey 253)

This change in the way the syllabus 'sees' students is important to the success of the syllabus in meeting the evolving demands on students and needs to be clearly articulated for teachers. (Oral submission 1 notes, p 1)

There is some opinion that the syllabus '*will only cater to the middle ground*' (head teacher, written submission 18, p 1) and that both ends of the academic range will suffer. Another view warns of lack of academic rigour, and suggests that '*the results must surely affect the more gifted students adversely*' (survey 97). In contrast, it is suggested that because the draft syllabus seems to have been '*designed for the more academically inclined or capable*' (survey 20), it contains too much for the less interested or less able student.

Concern is expressed for the current group of Contemporary English 2 Unit students, and a fear that '*there is too much content for students needing support in English*' (survey 332). The perceived loss of the Contemporary English 2 Unit course is a cause of regret, particularly among some teachers of NESB students who believe that students with different cultural backgrounds and only recent acquaintance with western pedagogies in English classrooms will be substantially disadvantaged.

In addition, concern is expressed that geographically isolated students may be disadvantaged because certain electives in the draft syllabus '*assume access to resources, eg galleries, libraries, media corporations*' (survey 230).

Remote and isolated schools don't have the resources to offer electives such as the media/ film units, nor do we have access to cinemas. (Survey 330)

- **Equity Perspectives**

The dot point list of equity perspectives in the Introduction to the draft syllabus arouses concerns that the draft syllabus is being driven by a need to be 'politically correct'. A majority of respondents seem to be unaware that the list itself is standard to all Board of Studies syllabuses and therefore take it to have

some particular significance for English. This is linked by some to the mandating of Aboriginal texts and Aboriginal English. Some responses also point out that nowhere in the draft syllabus itself does the document show specifically how it takes into account such issues as ‘gender equity’. The mention of ‘environmental issues’ confuses others and leads, perhaps, to the assumption that the content of the syllabus might cross over into other Key Learning Areas. It is suggested that there will be

problems with students selecting areas of study which cross over with their other subjects, eg Society and Culture, Drama, Computer Studies, General Studies, Geography, History etc. (Survey 23)

A different opinion is that the list of perspectives is not ‘politically correct’ enough, since it does not include students with disabilities. Others suggest that the emphasis on Aboriginal English and Aboriginal literature has not been balanced by an equal emphasis on multicultural perspectives.

Students with disabilities are presumably a larger group than either the group of students who have English as a second language or Aboriginal students, both of which are explicitly taken into account. Regardless of statistical significance, the needs of students with disabilities must be explicitly recognised if equity is to be achieved. (Written submission 55, p 1)

I wonder why the priority of Aboriginal English and Aboriginal perspectives is so high at the end of the Introduction. Should it not take its place equally with other influences and strands of our cultural development? (Survey 101)

- **Place of English**

The place of English in the curriculum as an essential and compulsory discipline is emphasised throughout the consultation.

It is vital that English remain a compulsory subject within the NSW curriculum. The ETA in its response to the McGaw HSC review has stipulated any future English courses must fully address the challenges of social, geographical and gender displacement through the development of an appropriate curriculum for the learner, adequate resourcing and effective training of teaching personnel. (Written submission 47, p 2)

The form in which the ‘essential and compulsory discipline’ is made available to particular groups of the candidature, however, is the subject of debate.

... we’ve [ATESOL] supported an ESL HSC course for quite a long time along the lines of the Victorian one ... You set fairly limited criteria for entry into the course and you examine that as a language, a communication course in one sense, and that may be more appropriate to the needs of those students. (Oral submission 5 transcript, p 50)

3. *The Nature of the Courses in Stage 6 English*

2.5.2 Issues Regarding Course Content

The key issues raised in relation to the Course Content include:

- ¥ content
- ¥ link between Preliminary and HSC courses
- ¥ workload.

The consultation raises many comments about the Course Content.The issues with regard to course content as a whole centre on the appropriateness of the course to the changing nature of the discipline of teaching English and to the changing composition of the candidature. Another concern is teacher and student workload.

- **Content**

Despite the response to the survey question above, many comments commend the proposed content of the draft syllabus. The survey response may reflect some uncertainties as to what constitutes ‘content’ in an English syllabus. Those who believe content to be synonymous with ‘text list’ might find insufficient evidence of this in the draft syllabus.

Despite the quantitative data, there is a general recognition that *‘the expanded view of English provides course content which caters for a diverse range of student interests’* (school system, written submission 49, p 2). The Course Content is endorsed for its provision of subject integrity, for achieving a solution to the intellectual or mark bias attached to certain courses, and for integrating language, literature and pedagogy into the syllabus content.

The new syllabus can solve the problem of the artificial division of English syllabuses into those based on language skills with no literary study and others based on the study of literary texts. (Oral submission 1 notes, p 1)

The syllabus encompasses text analysis of a broad range of texts (spoken and written) and study of the language system. The inclusion of film and other non-print material is timely. We consider that the range of material for study is

appropriate — for instance, the study of literary, factual and media texts as part of the core. (Written submission 24, p 1)

The structure of knowledge of the proposed syllabus is very positive. It's a strong feature of it: it offers options for study; it provides an appropriate range of text types; the text categories of the core give valuable opportunities. (Academic focus group notes, p 1)

The course will take away the stigma associated with the Contemporary course and the elitism of the Related course. It includes a broad range of possibilities for catering to all students while maintaining its connection to everyday experience with the core units. (Survey 286)

The distinction between topic/text and the work unit is very good. That's something that hasn't occurred previously in senior syllabuses and it does acknowledge the role of pedagogy in teaching students to respond to texts. (Oral submission 2 transcript, p 16)

There is a view that the content of the draft syllabus has not taken enough account of developments in understandings about language and pedagogy, is therefore still too traditionally text based and does not signify any real change to the courses currently being taught in schools.

There needs to be more emphasis on process and practice in the way in which the content of the electives is framed. There needs to be a greater recognition that language is dynamic and needs to be framed as part of a process within a range of contexts. This is not evident in the use of the concept of 'texts'. (Written submission 51, p 1)

Sounds dry and boring: nothing new or exciting — just the same old stuff trotted out under new labels. (Survey 236)

There is a lot more than the syllabus allows in our understanding of English, especially in the area of

language. It is heavily tilted towards literature in the electives. It is monocultural. English language is wider than that. (Professional associations' focus group notes, p 3)

The HSC course does NOT take account of recent developments in critical, literacy etc theory — this is a problem and the opportunity for genuine change offered by the drafting of this syllabus is not being taken full advantage of. (Written submission 31, p 2)

I think that this syllabus is the same as the existing syllabi, but in a different structure. Contemporary students will end up in particular electives, Related students will be slotted into the more complex electives ... etc, ie there is no profound change, nothing of any significance is new. What about some genuine change, instead of a new structure? (Survey 240)

A view that emerges primarily in the surveys is that the content of the draft syllabus fails to address the needs of students and the requirements for the effective teaching of the subject area of English.

In trying to cover too much, the risk is that the syllabus encourages artificial treatment of a range of texts — types and forms. In endeavouring to cater for all students we risk catering for only a few. A broader achievement of competency is recommended here, but a higher standard of competency is not encouraged overtly. (Survey 98)

The entire syllabus needs to be rewritten; it lacks clear scope and sequence, its pedagogical base is ill defined. Please start again. One syllabus can never serve the needs of a broad candidature. Specific problems:

- ¥ *lack of continuity between Preliminary and HSC courses*
- ¥ *electives are at best random, fragmented and lacking coherence*
- ¥ *system encourages mediocrity rather than personal excellence*
- ¥ *media — teachers lack adequate training — media in any case is a component of all syllabi and should not be the responsibility of*

English (also, some teachers, a small percentage, may have expertise which clearly would disadvantage the bulk of candidates). (Survey 120)

- **Link Between Preliminary and HSC Courses**

One view about the progression from Preliminary to HSC course sees the different emphases in the two courses as important in counteracting the current tendency for the Preliminary year to provide a practice run for the HSC examination. Furthermore, this view holds that learning in English is not necessarily linear but follows individualised patterns for different students and can often take the form of accretive enrichment.

I think it attempts to build on what is developed; the core in the Preliminary is then built on and expanded in the Year 12. English isn't the kind of subject that can proceed like Mathematics. You revisit and broaden continually and I think it allows every opportunity to do that, so that probably an individual will take that progression in different ways. You're not mandating a particular kind of jumping ...

*... what is nice about the Preliminary course is the fact that it's different from the HSC course — I think that's one of its strengths. Now they just do a rehash of what they're going to do the following year. They will actually give the students skills that they can build on into the next year.
(Oral submission 3 transcript, p 32)*

Others express concern about the nature of the connection between the Preliminary and the HSC courses and suggest that there appears to be a lack of developmental sequencing between these courses (survey 156), particularly in relation to the perceived lack of emphasis on creating in the Preliminary course, and that '*while the choice appears spectacular, students have no guarantee that there will be a unified, coherent path to the HSC that matches their needs/abilities*' (survey 183). Specific areas of the draft syllabus are identified as particular problems in this regard.

The creating and critiquing emphasis given to the HSC needs to be introduced in the Preliminary ... They need to

be able to deconstruct in order to construct. (Professional associations' focus group notes, p 12)

The link between literature in the Preliminary and the HSC needs to be clearer. (Professional associations' focus group notes, p 10)

There is nothing in the Preliminary course to prepare students for the difficulties in creating electronic and multimedia texts. (Survey 332)

Students electing to do a fourth unit may not have done the best Preliminary work in preparation for it. How would you ensure that they were well prepared? It isn't clear in the syllabus. (Head teachers' focus group A notes, p 3)

There is also a view that the sequencing of electives could pose problems for students undertaking a fourth unit, given the need for a corequisite elective.

There is a serious limitation on the 4 Unit sequencing. If it is an extension of an elective, it restricts the teaching sequence. That elective would need to be taught in Term 4, Year 11 for maximum benefit. What if the students want to extend from different electives, as the spirit of the syllabus would encourage, particularly if some wish to do critiquing and others creating? (Survey 327)

- **Workload**

There is a division of views on the teacher and student workload implied by the Course Content. There appears to be difficulty in gauging the length of time needed to teach the syllabus effectively or the expected depth of treatment of subject matter. There is also concern about the complications for accelerants and Pathways students. The range of interpretations and the number of questions asked about this aspect of the course is in part a result of the perceived need for support materials and uncertainties about content.

The course can and in most cases does enable all students to benefit from the core and elective content. (Survey 365)

I think that the core is too shallow and too brief. For many at my school we would whip through that ... (Professional associations' focus group notes, p 8)

All students need to be challenged if they are to achieve personal excellence. This draft syllabus would fail to challenge most of the students currently enrolled in Years 11 and 12 since it allows students to opt for a path of mediocrity. (Written submission 3, p 3)

Some of the courses imply a university-level performance. Is this what is meant? How deeply are teachers expected to delve into these areas, considering the breadth of the course and the indicative time available? (Survey 393)

This is unrealistic even for the better students. Just after the reduction of literary pieces from seven to five for the HSC because the time factor and reading load was too great for students studying four or so other subjects — we see an increased reading load for the average student. (Survey 129)

Group B electives seem to have far more content in them than Group A, yet they have been allocated the same number of indicative hours. (Survey 374)

There is concern that there is too much content for low-ability students and some special needs groups to complete the content requirements.

More options required for slower students. (Survey 131)

There appears to be a mountain of work to cover in the Preliminary and HSC course for our current Contemporary students. Our clientele at this level often lack the skills and motivation to cope with so much content. (Survey 357)

The breadth of the core also suggests problems for our students who require extensive modelling and joint construction of text types before any measure of success in individual construction can be achieved. Student-centred strategies which ensure success for our students — small group work, creative visualisation mind maps and structured overviews, for example — are extremely time consuming. The time allocated to the delivery of the core would be insufficient for the language needs of our students. The delivery of the core alone without any electives would provide our students with a full and challenging course in English. (Written submission 2, p 2)

If you're an NESB student you are already dealing with it all in another language. If I had enough time and they had enough time then maybe some of this could be fun and could be liberating. (Professional associations' focus group notes, p 10)

These concerns also apply to the workload entailed in the Major Work.

The type of student who does English at high levels may be doing a Major Work in other courses. How are they going to cope with all that work? (Head teachers' focus group B notes, p 8)

2.6.2 Issues

The issues that specifically relate to the course content of the core are:

- core as 'common experience'
- mandatory aspects of the core
- literature
- factual and film/video texts.

The core in each course attracted a great deal of comment as it forms the heart of the draft syllabus. It is intended to provide all candidates with a common experience of English, can for all students, entail up to 50% of their experience of English and

carries the weight of moderating the elective components of the courses. While much discussion about the core relates to its function as a moderator for the course, this issue is taken up in Section 2.8 of this report.

- **Core as ‘Common Experience’**

Attitudes towards the core are shaped in part by views of what is meant by ‘common experience’. There is a view that a core cannot offer a ‘common experience’ of English unless the same texts are studied by all students. This view also proposes that the prescribed texts for the core should have ‘parity of difficulty’ to prevent students from choosing ‘easier’ texts to maximise marks. From these positions the inevitable conclusion is that *‘one syllabus can never meet the needs of all students in the senior school’* (written submission 3, p 1).

For those who define ‘common experience’ more broadly — that is, in terms of values and attitudes, skills, and knowledge and understandings outcomes — the core does address the needs of a diverse candidature while ensuring subject integrity.

The proposed senior English syllabus addresses this incredible diversity in ingenious ways; the development of a core of commonly expected skills is a strong basis from which to argue that academic integrity is maintained.

(Written submission 35, p 2)

The diverse interpretation of the nature of ‘common experience’ is related to the criticism that

the processes expected and the implications of the core are not clearly set out for easy recognition ... [and so] the text selected for the work units will determine the breadth and depth if they become objects of conventional study. This may prevent the use of syllabus elements, text, mode and language system as the pedagogical basis of work in the core. The consequence could be to undermine the intentions for rigorous language study. (Written submission 57, p 9)

The core's structure and content are not explicit enough for teachers to identify outcomes for their ability groups.

(Written submission 47, p 7)

- **Mandatory Aspects of the Core**

While many respondents believe that there is a number of curriculum advantages to a modular structure *'especially in giving teachers the freedom to create courses suitable to their own students'* (written submission 30, p 4), the mandating of the core is an issue. Those who see the core as having a curricular function rather than a moderating one maintain that while there is *'no need for a core in the HSC program ... [it is] welcome in the Preliminary course'* (written submission 7, p 1).

It's a curriculum issue. Do you really need a core in both years? Does its content have to be so strictly mandated? Does it have to be used as a moderating device? (Academic focus group notes, p 3)

One view sees the focus in both courses as helpful for indicating appropriate content and pedagogy for the implementation of the core courses. Indeed there is criticism that the focus is not given sufficient prominence and therefore the opportunity to clarify ways of structuring learning experiences that will assist in achieving the outcomes is lost.

The focus in both the Preliminary core and the HSC core should be brought up to the head of that section because it guides thinking in terms of creating and critiquing, about the outcome of that section ... it actually gives you the headline focus. (Oral submission transcript 1, p 7)

Another view is that the core should be open-ended so as to allow professional judgement by teachers as to what course content is most pertinent to the needs and interests of their students. The mandatory aspects of the core are seen as working against the freedom of teachers to create courses appropriate for their students. There are objections to the particular focuses identified for the core courses, and questions are posed about the need for such focuses at all.

Current senior syllabuses do not mandate one set focus for the life of a syllabus. (Written submission 30, p 3)

The mandating of Aboriginal texts as part of the core in both Preliminary and HSC courses is questioned as ‘tokenism’ and as being driven by considerations of ‘political correctness’.

Several schools, while presently teaching Aboriginal texts and finding the study immensely worthwhile, would nonetheless prefer that it be optional rather than mandatory. Other independent schools are uncertain whether a sufficiently significant body of Aboriginal literature exists to make the demand anything more than a token requirement. (Written submission 20, p 3)

Those who endorse the inclusion of Aboriginal texts acknowledge the significant contribution this aspect of the core will make towards cultural understanding.

The last twenty years has seen the recognition of the importance of indigenous cultures throughout the world ... The study of English is a study of the culture and language and it would be remiss if one aspect of that cultural context was ignored ... Many students are unaware of the traditions and legacy of Aboriginal culture and their exposure to it in a range of subjects including English can only help cultural understanding. (Written submission 56, pp 2–3)

The Department of School Education strongly supports the inclusion of Aboriginal texts and Aboriginal English and recommends that the syllabus provide more explicit information about how teachers can implement these requirements. We further recommend that the syllabus writers consult widely with Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal educators. (Written submission 57, p 5)

Concerns are expressed about the effective implementation of this aspect of the syllabus. These centre around such questions as what constitutes Aboriginal literature

and Aboriginal English and whether teachers are able to teach this aspect of the syllabus to achieve the desired outcomes.

It would be very positive from the community view and very powerful for rural communities. About Aboriginal literature, it raises the question of the origin of the text. I see that some of the material is from Aboriginal people, some from white. (Academic focus group notes, p 8)

Non-indigenous teachers might not be able to teach this because they do not have a strong and/or appropriate Aboriginal perspective. There is a danger that Aboriginal elements will be ignored [unless mandated] but this would be a lesser evil than having it done badly. (Consultants' focus group notes, p 3)

The compulsion of study of Aboriginal English and texts is of concern. If we choose to do this, then well and good, but the whole idea of the new syllabus is flexibility, not compulsion. (Survey 104)

Are they [Aboriginal texts] distinct from Australian texts? (Survey 140)

What is 'Aboriginal English? No one has formally or even informally studied the way Aborigines speak/write English. How can we guide students in such a study? (Survey 26)

Aboriginal English is an example of the influence of culture. The study of Aboriginal English as such may not be appropriate, but needs to be integrated into the study of Australian English. (Written submission 54, p 4)

- **Literature**

The issue of the amount of literature in the core is raised in many responses. One view asserts that there are advantages in exposing students to as wide a range of texts, opinions and approaches as possible in order to develop critical understanding.

It seems to me that literature is still there and perhaps in a more substantial way in terms of the historical and socio-cultural context that is being given ... It is a more complex picture of literature that is emerging and one that will ultimately be more valuable as far as students and their participation in the reading of literature beyond their school years is concerned. (Oral submission transcript 2, p 19)

There is concern that since literature forms only one third of the mandated study, it is being 'debased'. This concern is heightened by the optional nature of the study of poetry and drama in the core. Some responses present the argument that students need an awareness of the three broad literary genres of novel, poetry and drama so that they develop cultural knowledge. The study of a novella (as well as the very definition of the genre) and the study of extracts or segments is seen as contributing to a decline in standards.

The study of novel, poetry and drama should be part of the core for all students to gain an appreciation of literature. (Survey 354)

I continue to bemoan the decline of literature in this syllabus. Even the prescription of a novella in the HSC is a diminution of the requirements of the Preliminary course. Under the present system, most Contemporary English students can cope with at least two novels. (Survey 143)

There is a range of concerns related to the study of texts. Questions are asked as to why texts in translation should be studied and claims made that literary texts should always be studied in their entirety. Another perspective raised is that the thematic study of literary texts is not as valuable as the study of a particular literary text. This concern appears to emanate for a variety of reasons, including disillusionment with the Topic Area in the current 2 Unit General course. It manifests itself in the claim that thematic study 'is already far too difficult a concept. Students don't handle it well in the HSC' (survey 226). There is also a contradictory claim that 'issues have more to them than themes. That's my experience. Kids like to grapple with an issue. Theme is much more junior school stuff' (professional associations' focus group notes, p 14). Another view asserts that 'tying literature to a set theme ... is boring,

restrictive and distorts the reading process. People read the whole text, not just one aspect that has been set down for them’ (survey 86).

- **Factual and Film/Video Texts**

There is a view that sees the inclusion of film/video and factual texts as ‘*a forward step*’ (written submission 31, p 1).

‘Film/Video’: The positioning is interesting. It articulates a new direction from the privileged position of literary texts to the more diverse kinds of interpretation of experience.
(Academic focus group notes, p 6)

Film/television and the print media are finally given the emphasis they have long deserved. (Survey 15)

Visual competence has always been important but in the modern age where children are bombarded with deliberate visual communication from the moment of consciousness it is more essential than ever that children be instructed in visual competence and that this be considered a key competence. As it stands, [the draft] syllabus does allow for elective elements that are predominantly visual but we believe that there should be a deliberate and separate focus on this from the outset. (Written submission 58, p 1)

I work in Western Sydney at a busy and growing school. Factual Texts will meet the needs of a very broad proportion of the population with more flexibility than Contemporary does at present. We do have to work out the relationship with Year 10 but the students can certainly be extended in this area via Factual Texts. (Head teachers’ focus group notes, p 4)

The ‘factual text’ work unit in Preliminary gives teachers a specific set of outcomes in this area and a specific type of text to examine which makes it manageable for Year 11 students and provides a foundation to move on to higher

order skills of argument and critical thinking in Year 12.
(Survey 173)

Some who hold this position express the concern that the description in the syllabus needs to be more explicit so that clear development from the 7–10 syllabus is evident.

The way it is set out here it looks as if it would suit someone working with Year 7s, maybe Year 10. There needs to be a careful check on what is done in this area in earlier years.
(Professional associations' focus group notes, p 12)

Some responses, while welcoming the inclusion of factual and film/video texts, believe that they *'should be proportionally less than Literary Texts study in order to ensure that students have this experience. Literature, traditional or contemporary, should be recognised as an undeniable core of our subject'* (written submission 8, p 2).

Another view sees that the broadening of the range of texts for study diminishes the potential for rigour in the syllabus. This position often assumes that the only model of language implicit in the study of factual texts in the Preliminary and HSC courses is the 'functional approach' and that all students in NSW have been exposed to this model in their junior years.

The content of [the factual text] work unit, both Preliminary and HSC, is redundant. The text types set for study would have been covered thoroughly in the junior school. The English K–6 syllabus and the Literacy across KLAs 7/8 program ensure that all students will be thoroughly versed in the functional approach to language. (Written submission 3, p 2)