**VCE English as an Additional Language**

**Units 1 and 2: 2016–2022
Units 3 and 4: 2017–2023**

School-based assessment report

This report is provided for the first year of implementation of this study and is based on the School-based Assessment Audit and VCAA statistical data.

All official communications regarding the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) English as An Additional Language Study Design are provided in the *VCAA Bulletin*. It is recommended that teachers subscribe to the VCAA Bulletin to receive updated information regarding the study. Schools are required to alert teachers to information in VCAA Bulletins, especially concerning assessment schedules. Important Administrative Dates and assessment schedules are published on the School administration page of the VCAA website.

Unit 3

GENERAL COMMENTS

The evidence presented in the School-based Assessment Audit clearly indicated that schools generally designed assessment tasks that provided appropriate opportunities for students to demonstrate the knowledge and skills required to achieve the three outcomes. The design of tasks also provided students with opportunities to demonstrate their acquisition of the key knowledge and skills and for each Area of Study.

Schools generally allocated sufficient time to prepare students for each task. Typically, Outcome 1 was done towards the end of Term 1, Outcome 3 halfway through Term 2, and Outcome 2 towards the end of Unit 3. This enabled students to develop their persuasive text analysis skills and listening comprehension skills gradually across the Unit. Every school audited provided their students with clear information about dates for outcomes well in advance, in most instances at the very end of 2016 or start of 2017, and then typically two weeks prior to an outcome.

With a few exceptions, the tasks as presented to students were clearly described, without providing undue assistance. There was variation in how tasks were described: some were detailed and expansive, while others were presented very concisely.

In the sample reviewed for the School-based Assessment Audit, assessment criteria given to students were mostly consistent with the elements suggested in the VCAA performance descriptors. Some exemplary examples of criteria sheets and assessment sheets were provided. Many criteria sheets were neatly formatted and easy for students to read; some were simply copies of the performance descriptors from the assessment handbook. Some schools provided only the criteria or performance descriptors to students, while others included explicit advice on how criteria might be met.

Assessment information for students

Using the performance descriptors to assess student responses enables teachers to make ‘on balance’ judgments about the level of student achievement in the elements of the outcome. Adapting the descriptors into a well-presented assessment sheet enables students to comprehend what was required to succeed in the task. In most tasks where adapted assessment sheets were given to students, teachers used a scale to indicate the level of achievement rather than specific marks/weightings. The exceptions to this were the short answer question component for Outcome 2 and the questions for the Listening Comprehension (Outcome 3).

None of the schools audited, particularly those who have EAL students in English classes, used the English assessment descriptors. This is encouraging as there are differences in descriptors and mark allocations.

Specific information

**Unit 3**

Outcome 1

*On completion of this unit the student should be able to produce an analytical interpretation of a selected text, and a creative response to a different selected text.*

Task

The SAC task required students to complete a text response essay or a creative text on a set text. However, if students produced a text response task to achieve an S for Outcome 1, they needed to produce some creative work. Similarly, if their SAC task was a creative piece, they needed to produce some analytical work on a set text as a separate task.

For this outcome, most schools chose to have students write an analytical text response essay. This is understandable, as students will need to write a text response essay in Section B of the examination. The VCAA *Advice for teachers* (which includes advice about designing assessment tasks) invites teachers to develop their own conditions for the task and there was significant variety. Most schools administered the SAC task under examination conditions, with students completing the task in one sitting, and did not allow students to refer to their copies of the text or any other resources during the SAC. However, a few schools allowed the use of the text, a page of notes, or a page of quotes from the text. Most schools gave students a choice of two topics, and in most instances did not give these to students prior to the SAC. However, in a couple of instances, students were shown a number of topics, and told that the two topics on the SAC would be from the range of topics shown.

Generally, students would have been able to demonstrate the key knowledge and skills through these tasks provided the focus of teaching and learning activities had been on these skills. Comments indicated that this was the case with almost every school audited. Most of the essay questions enabled students of various levels of understanding of the key elements of the text studied to demonstrate their acquisition of the key knowledge and skills. In virtually every instance, the essay questions complemented each other, with the emphasis in each of the pairs inviting students to demonstrate their knowledge of different facets of the text. There was little evidence that teachers had merely copied topics from past examination papers or study designs. Virtually every topic was an original topic, or a modified one.

A few schools chose to assess this outcome with a creative task. These tasks were generally well designed, and enabled students to develop their writing skills, approaching the text from a number of angles and perspectives.

It is critical that for EAL students only one of these two tasks is set as the SAC task. It would not be appropriate, for example, to set both tasks and derive a SAC score from both tasks; or, to set both tasks and record the higher score for the two tasks as the SAC score.

Assessment

Most schools used the VCAA assessment descriptors. Some schools, while marking holistically, designed an assessment rubric. In most instances, this enabled teachers to provide very detailed feedback to students about the quality of their work. Often a scale (without a mark weighting) was given, for example Excellent, Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low, Not Demonstrated.

The suggested word length of the written response is 700 to 800 words. While this is not mandated, most schools audited asked students to write an essay of this length. Asking students to write essays that require a minimum length that is substantially longer than this essay may be daunting for weaker EAL students. Similarly, mandating essays whose maximum length is substantially shorter may inhibit stronger students from developing a sustained, sophisticated, and well-articulated analysis.

Most schools chose to have students complete this task in one sitting. The challenge with them completing this outcome over more than one sitting – for example, a period to plan a response, followed by two periods on the following day in which to write the response – is that even if a planning sheet is taken up at the end of the first period, a student may receive undue assistance (for example from a tutor) between the two sittings.

Most schools gave students a reasonable amount of time for students to plan and write their text response essay, with 90 minutes being a time frame many schools provided. This is a reasonable time allocation, as students are expected to write 700 to 800 words, and at this stage of the year students are still developing skills in writing under timed conditions. A few schools opted for 70 minutes, which is the suggested time for the end of year examination. However, one school provided students with only 60 minutes. Not only is this a shorter time frame than at the end of year examination, but average to weaker students would struggle at this point in the year to develop a response of an appropriate length in this time frame.

Outcome 2

*On completion of this unit the student should be able to analyse and compare the use of argument and persuasive language in texts that present a point of view on an issue currently debated in the media.*

Task

This task required students to analyse and compare the argument and persuasive language and visuals in two or three media texts that have been published since 1 September 2016. While the analysis of persuasive language has been an integral aspect of the EAL course for a number of years, prior to the current study design, it has not been a SAC task. Furthermore, in this Area of Study students now need to analyse how authors construct and utilise their argument to persuade their respective audiences, not merely analyse how the language positions the intended audience.

The outcome consists of two tasks. Firstly, students need to demonstrate their comprehension of the main points of the text by completing short answer questions and note form summaries. Secondly, they need to write a sustained analysis of how authors of two or three texts use argument and language to attempt to persuade their readers.

Most schools used texts from the Australian media. It was interesting to note the breadth of issues schools chose from euthanasia, to taxes on foods containing sugar drinks. Typically, the resource material for the outcome tasks consisted of a longer text, such as a feature article, followed either by some shorter texts written in response to the text, such as blog or other online comments, or letters to the editor, written in response to the text or about the same issue. Online versions of newspapers enabled teachers to select a text such as a feature article, together with comments in response. In some instances, the third text was a cartoon that appeared in a publication as a separate text. If providing students with this option, it needs to be clear to them that this is another text, and is not part of one of the two written texts.

The challenge in this task is in identifying an issue that would be accessible to students, and in finding texts that utilise an argument strategy that students can identify and analyse, and contain sufficient examples of persuasive language that students can confidentially analyse and make some comparisons. One useful means of obtaining suitable texts is for teachers to scan newspapers and other media sources regularly, compiling folders of possible resource material. They can then select the most appropriate texts for their students for the outcome task, using some of the other texts as practice material. As the outcome requires students to analyse media texts, using simulated but non-authentic media texts, written for example by the teacher, is not appropriate. Most schools were able to find texts that were accessible.

In some instances, schools prepared students for this task through a detailed study of a specific current issue, such as euthanasia, that involved them analysing a range of texts presenting a point of view on this issue. They then analysed two or three unseen texts on this issue in the outcome task. This approach enabled students to have a detailed understanding of the main arguments for and against the chosen issue, together with the language choices and argumentative strategies authors would use in relation to this issue. Other schools chose to explore texts dealing with a range of issues when undertaking preparatory or practice tasks, which enabled students to see a range of argumentative strategies used across a breadth of issues prior to completing the outcome task.

Analysing two or more texts is typically challenging for EAL students. Some schools indicated that they prepared students by having them develop skills in analysing a single text initially; then, in analysing two or three texts.

Many schools provided a list of proposed short answer questions, together with the expected answers. In most instances the questions were clear, well-written, and were an appropriate means of assessing student comprehension. Some schools asked students to write a note form summary similar to the note form summaries students had to complete in the examination for the previous study design. While this is an authentic means of assessing student comprehension of a text, students would need to be aware that they would not be doing this task in this year’s examination. Hence, given the time it takes to teach this task, teachers may choose to assess students’ ability to write notes by having them write dot point answers to some of the questions they set.

It was of concern to note that a couple of schools proposed using commercially produced material for this task. Even if the material is modified by the school, there is still the very real danger that students may have seen this material previously, for example in working through it with a tutor. In one instance, a school proposed using the sample examination on the VCAA website. Not only is there the likelihood that students may have previously seen this text, but it is also a single text, and has not been published in the Australian media since September of 2017.

As with Outcome 1, most schools used the VCAA assessment descriptors. A few schools designed their own based on the VCAA descriptors, and most of these enabled the schools to provide very detailed and specific feedback to students. Most schools provided students with sufficient time in which to complete this task. In some instances, students were provided with reading time, followed by writing time. Other schools did not provide separate reading time, but instead provided a time for students to annotate the texts before commencing their written analysis.

While most schools audited completed this task in one sitting, more schools completed this task in two stages than was the case in Outcome 1. In some instances, the short answer questions were answered in the first session, and the analysis written in the second session. In some instances, students were given class time to annotate the texts. These texts were then taken up by the teacher and redistributed the following day when they wrote up the analysis. A couple of schools allowed students to take the texts home. While this gave students extra time to read carefully and annotate the texts, it also enabled the possibility of students receiving undue assistance from tutors not only in identifying arguments and language to analyse, but also advice on how to write up the task. In most instances schools provided students with an adequate amount of time in which to complete this task, particularly given the fact that students are expected to read a range of texts, answer short answer questions, and write an analysis of 700 to 800 words.

Outcome 3

*On completion of this unit the student should be able to comprehend a spoken text.*

Task

This task required students to demonstrate that they can understand an aural text. The task description gives teachers and schools considerable latitude in choosing a spoken text, and in designing a series of short answer questions through which students could demonstrate the key knowledge and skills for this area of study. A number of schools provided copies of their SAC task. The oral texts were generally well-chosen, and the questions thoughtfully and carefully designed. This of itself is no mean achievement as this is a completely new Area of Study for the course. There was the sense that many teachers and schools had used the sample listening comprehension task in the sample examination as a guide when they designed an assessment task. Some schools had two shorter texts (as did the sample examination task); whereas others had a longer text. In some instances, schools used a portion of a longer text. ABC Radio National programs proved to be a popular source of resource material for this task. Typically, the text or texts were played through twice with a pause in between the first and second playing of each text. The time allocated to complete this task was generally adequate. In every instance, this task was completed in one sitting, typically in a time period of between 40 minutes and one hour.

Moderation

Schools with more than one class of students enrolled in English must have moderation procedures in place. These include: teacher discussion of assessment criteria/performance descriptors, benchmarking and cross-marking. Virtually every school provided details about how the Outcome tasks were to be moderated. Even in schools where there is only one EAL class, teachers have some form of moderation of the SACs in place. This is conducted either internally, for example a colleague in the English department looks over some or all of the pieces of student work, or externally for example a teacher from another school may look over samples of high, medium and low range responses, to establish and/or confirm assessment benchmarks.

Unit 4

GENERAL COMMENTS

The evidence presented in the audit clearly indicated that schools generally designed assessment tasks that provided appropriate opportunities for students to demonstrate the knowledge and skills required to achieve the three outcomes. The design of tasks also provided students with opportunities to demonstrate their acquisition of the key knowledge and skills and for each Area of Study.

Schools generally allocated sufficient time to prepare students for each task. Typically, Outcome 2 was done in the middle of Term 3, and Outcome 1 towards the end of Term 3. A few schools undertook Outcome 2 at the very end of Term 2. This meant that students at these schools were probably undertaking some preparation for this task during Unit 3, which may have had an impact on the teaching and learning activities associated with Unit 3. A couple of schools completed one of the outcomes in week 1 of Term 4. This may have presented challenges for consolidation of key knowledge and skills students needed to demonstrate in the examination. One particular challenge for EAL classes, and for EAL students within mainstream classes, is that whilst many of the key knowledge and skills would facilitate student performance in the examination, unlike the Unit 3 Outcomes, neither of the two outcome tasks in Unit 4 directly correspond to those they undertake in the end of year examination. The fact that most schools had completed the two SAC tasks by the end of Term 3 indicates that they did so to allow for sufficient time for examination preparation. It is critical that assessment timelines given to students and other stakeholders, such as parents and school leaders, be carefully reviewed prior to dissemination.

The schools audited provided their students with clear information about dates for outcomes well in advance, in most instances at the very end of 2016 or start of 2017, and then typically two weeks prior to an outcome. With a few exceptions, the tasks as presented to students were clearly described, without providing them undue assistance. There was variation in how tasks were described: some were detailed and expansive, while others were presented very concisely.

In the sample reviewed for the School-based Assessment Audit, assessment criteria given to students were mostly consistent with the elements suggested in the VCAA performance descriptors. Some exemplary examples of criteria sheets and assessment sheets were provided. Many criteria sheets were neatly formatted and easy for students to read; some were simply copies of the performance descriptors from the assessment handbook. Some schools provided only the criteria or performance descriptors to students, while others included explicit advice on how criteria might be met.

Using the performance descriptors to assess student responses enables teachers to make ‘on balance’ judgments about level of student achievement in the elements of the outcome. Adapting the descriptors into a well-presented assessment sheet enables students to comprehend what was required to succeed in the task. In most tasks where adapted assessment sheets were given to students, teachers used a scale to indicate the level of achievement rather than specific marks/weightings.

All of the schools audited, including those who have EAL students in English classes, used the EAL assessment descriptors.

Specific information

Unit 4

Outcome 1: Reading and comparing texts

*On completion of this unit the student should be able to produce a detailed comparison which analyses how two selected texts present ideas, issues and themes.*

This task required students to read and compare two texts in an extended written response. Most schools undertook this task following considerable preliminary work. Most schools adhered to the suggested word length for EAL students of 800–1000 words, which is shorter than the suggested length for English students of 900 to 1200 words. Pieces of writing that are substantially shorter than the suggested minimum length may not allow students to explore ideas and themes in the two texts in sufficient detail. Similarly, expecting a word length significantly longer than the suggested length may create a task that is too onerous for many EAL students. Most schools allowed students between 90 minutes to two hours to complete this task. In many instances, it was completed in a single sitting; however, given timetabling constraints, many schools had students complete this task in two separate sittings (for example, in two separate 55 minute periods). When schools opt for this option, it is important that they consider carefully as part of their planning what they will do with the script books in between the two separate periods so as to minimise the risk of students receiving undue assistance – for example from tutors – in between the two writing sessions. In virtually every instance, the school collected the script books and re-distributed them at the start of the second period.

Most schools offered students a choice of two topics. In most instances, these topics explored different aspects of the two texts. In virtually every instance, students were not advised of the topic(s) prior to commencing the SAC task. One particular challenge for this outcome was in designing essay topics for students that were accessible, enabling them to demonstrate their knowledge of the two texts and the skills in writing a comparative essay; without being predictable. In most instances, the topics provided enabled students to achieve this. However, in some instances topics were similar to those publicly available in various study guides. As these publications are readily accessible, there is the potential for students to undertake preparatory work with tutors or by themselves using such topics. Schools are therefore reminded that when designing topics, they should scan such publications, ensuring that their questions differ from those in general circulation.

Outcome 2: Presenting argument

*On completion of this unit the student should be able to construct a sustained and reasoned point of view on an issue currently debated in the media.*

This outcome required students to complete two tasks. Task One was a detailed statement of intention, in which students were encouraged to identify details about their oral presentation such as their issue, contention, intended audience, purpose, main points, how the argument was structured, and language choices made to persuade their intended audience. Typically, the statement of intention was completed in a single period, and then collected by the teacher.

Task Two was the delivery of the speech. This was assessed either in class with students presenting the speech before their peers, or, some instances, schools opted to have students present their presentation individually before the assessors. A few schools allowed students to use presentation software. While this option enables some students the opportunity to reinforce their argument with displays of dot points, and other elements such as facts, figures, statistics, and images, it adds another dimension to the assessment, specifically how well constructed and integrated the presentation is with the student’s speech.

The submissions indicated that schools considered the arrangements to assess oral presentations fairly, and that the assessment rubrics were applied consistently across the cohort. In most instances students were assessed by two assessors who listened to the presentation before conferring to decide upon a final mark either after each presentation. Where presentations were delivered before an entire class, and after the students had left the room – of the cohort of students who had presented. In some instances – particularly when there was only one teacher present – schools recorded the presentations using voice recording software. Another assessor would then listen to the recordings and conference the results with the first teacher. In a couple of instances schools used external assessors (for example, retired teachers) to assess the cohort.

This task provided schools and students with a wide scope of topics to explore. All schools audited were aware of the requirement that the issue had to have been in the media since 1 September 2016. In many instances schools presented students with an issue, or a choice of a few issues on which they were to present their oral presentation; in other instances, schools left the choice of the issue to the students. A wide range of issues were covered, with the issues of euthanasia and same sex marriage being chosen by many schools and students. The audit submissions suggested that most of the issues explored were issues within Australia, with newspapers being the major source students used. Other media, particularly radio, seem to be underutilised by students. Similarly, the audit submissions suggested that comparatively few students used English language media sources from overseas, which the study design now allows for (with the removal of the reference that the issue needed to have appeared in the *Australian* media).

Most schools used the suggested time limit of three to five minutes as suggested in the VCE English/EAL Study Design. A couple of schools allowed students to speak for slightly longer time frames; such as five to six minutes on the basis that they believed this time frame was needed, particularly for stronger candidates to develop and argue a sustained point of view.

A considerable number of schools allowed students to undertake preparation for the oral presentation itself outside the classroom. Schools adopted approaches to ensure that students were not receiving undue assistance. These typically involved students submitting detailed plans, and copies of drafts for teachers to cite. In many instances some of the drafting had to be completed in class. Furthermore, schools also cross-referenced drafts against other written work (for example outcomes for Unit 3) that was completed in class under exam conditions. If in doubt, students were questioned about the content, for example, the meanings of words in their speech draft with which teachers surmised that they may have been unfamiliar. Another strategy adopted by some schools was not to allow students to have a copy of their speech to refer to when they presented it; instead, insisting that they memorise the speech, and use cue cards. Allowing students time to research and draft their oral outside of class time provides students greater opportunities to research an issue more fully; and refine their drafts. However, teachers need to be conscious of the real possibility that students could be receiving undue assistance, and adopt strategies to minimise the risk of this.

The submissions by schools indicated that they were conscious of the requirements of the reaccredited study design, had taken reasonable steps to implement them, and had designed a range of sound tasks for the two outcomes that enabled students to demonstrate the key knowledge and skills for each Area of Study. There was a sense that there were fewer uncertainties about the requirements, and problems with designing appropriate tasks for the Unit 4 outcomes amongst the schools audited than there had been amongst those schools audited for Unit 3.