



Ideas and strategies for managing Extension 2 English

HSC English Extension 2 support document

Ideas and strategies for managing Extension 2 English is a support document compiled under the auspices of the Quality Teacher program (QTP) by English teachers from all sectors: Catholic, Department of Education and Training, and Independent. It is published on the QTP web site: www.qtp.nsw.edu.au and can also be accessed through Curriculum Support's English web site: www.curriculumsupport.nsw.edu.au/english.

It provides, in one document, the mandatory syllabus and assessment requirements of the HSC English Extension 2 course; included are references to relevant sections of the NSW Board of Studies' *Assessment, Certification and Examination (ACE) Manual*. Links have also been made to the *Extension 2 Frequently Asked Questions* section on the Board of Studies web site. *Ideas and strategies for managing Extension 2 English* has been published after extensive consultation with officers from the Board of Studies. It needs to be read in conjunction with the official notices that are published regularly in the *Board Bulletins*. Because it is electronically published (as pdf) it can be readily updated if the course specifications are altered.

The document starts with an ideas and strategies section for teachers and students. This section aims to give practical advice about the syllabus requirements and the aspects teachers and students need to be aware of, including assessment tasks. This section is particularly useful for students in helping them to make informed decisions, not only about the content, but also about the medium and form that might best suit their major work.

The second section looks in some detail at each of the major work options, and gives practical examples of each medium. The third section, the Appendix, includes examples of contracts, assessment tasks and other proformas that are currently in use in schools, which might be of practical help to teachers for their own school community.

Your comments and contributions are encouraged. Please contact kerry.underhill@det.nsw.edu.au or gillian.lovell@det.nsw.edu.au at the Curriculum Support Directorate.

Talking about Stage 6 reporting

Schools are at various stages in developing their Stage 6 reporting processes. As English teachers participate in this process, they can consider the following points, and use the discussion questions to analyse and reflect on what they want reports to achieve and ways of achieving this.

Providing stakeholders with meaningful information about students' achievement of the targeted course outcomes is central to an effective reporting system. Stakeholders include parents, students and other community groups which have a valid need to be informed.

Who are the stakeholders in our school community?

Purpose

Reports serve a range of purposes:

- reporting to parents and students
- reporting on students' achievement of course outcomes
- helping students reflect on their learning
- setting directions for their future learning
- providing for other schools and for employers an honest and accessible description of students' achievement at the end of a course or a student's time in the school.

Does our school's current Stage 6 English reporting system adequately serve these purposes? What other valuable purposes does it serve?

Whole-school approach: commonality and difference

Developing a Stage 6 reporting system is a whole-school responsibility. Teachers from different subject areas work together to evolve a system that accommodates the needs of different subjects while at the same time ensuring consistency and continuity across all subjects.

While subjects might vary in significant and legitimate ways in their approaches to programming and teaching, they share an outcomes-based approach to assessment. This commonality provides a common language and a common perspective. It is essential that all subjects, in reporting on achieved outcomes, attribute the same meanings to the reporting language; for example, if a performance scale describes a student's achievement of outcomes as "consolidating", the word needs to mean the same thing in all subjects.



Within the parameters set by this commonality of language and perspective, schools are also developing ways of accommodating legitimate subject differences in pedagogy and assessment; for example, designing reports in a way that allows some subjects to include a mark as well as a comment.

Schools also need to identify what parents, students and the wider community want to know about students' achievements, providing this within the parameters of the school's mandated curriculum and assessment procedures. On-going dialogue between the school and parents, students and the wider school community helps these groups to articulate their needs and understandings, allowing the school to keep them informed about how the reporting system functions and, what the information contained in the reports means.

What features of the Stage 6 reports are common to all subjects in our school? Are differences between subjects accommodated in any way? How well does the current report suit Stage 6 English?

Clear and specific reporting

An effective reporting system provides accurate information about students' progress and achievement in clear, unambiguous language, without jargon that is accessible to all stakeholders and sensitive to the students' feelings. One related issue here that is preoccupying many schools is how to make the wording of syllabus outcomes accessible to the readers of the reports. Because of the centrality of the outcomes to assessment, connections need to be made between the outcomes on the one hand, and the comments and marks on the other. In deciding how to report on outcomes, schools are having to take into account the importance of reports' being accurate, specific and clear.

The report also needs to make clear the standard by which students' achievements have been assessed and are being reported on. Involving members of the wider school community in trialling the types of comments teachers use on reports is a great help in setting the appropriate register, developing clear, unequivocal language and using vocabulary that communicates well.

Schools can report achievement by comparing the students' achievements against:

- the standards framework of syllabus outcomes, or the students' prior and current learning achievements
- the students' achievement against the achievements of other students.

A report can involve a combination of these. The readers of the report need to know which of these methods is being used and how this shapes the information contained in the report. Depending on the style of report form used, this information as well as information about

the meaning of the grades and marks might be included on the report form, printed on a report folder that holds a student's reports, or provided separately.

Where the report uses a mark, it must be made clear on the report what the mark means, particularly how marks are linked to teaching and learning programs and to syllabus outcomes. Descriptive comments should refer specifically to the syllabus outcomes, helping the reader to make the link between what a student should have learnt and what that student has learnt. If using performance scales, the report should explain the scales, and the scales should use terms that connect students' performance with the outcomes.

Terms such as "poor", "average" or "outstanding" convey judgements about performance that imply a comparison with other students and should be used with care. Words like "beginning", "developing", "consolidating", "achieved" and "working beyond" provide a judgement of where the student is in relation to the outcome concerned.

NSW Department of Education and Training. (2000)
Assessment and Reporting Issues 7–12,
Bulletin 6: "Reporting: Focus on Stage 6".

How do we present outcomes in our Stage 6 reports? Which form of comparison do we use? Does the report form make this clear? Is the language of the report free of unexplained jargon and equivocation?

Efficient systems

An efficient reporting system supports teachers' efforts in producing accurate and informative reports.

- time-efficient
- uses available resources in a sensible, accessible way
- technology used, is bug-free and reliable
- helps rather than confounds teachers
- produces a report that is attractive and accessible.

Once a workable reporting system is in place, it can be adjusted when syllabuses and assessment requirements change, or when ways of improving the reports are identified. The school should build on what has gone before rather than going back and starting from the beginning. One simple strategy to assist teachers is to be consistent across Stages 4, 5 and 6 in the number of grades in the assessment range: three-point (A, B, C) or four-point (A, B, C, D or A, B, C, U) or five-point.

Schools have already developed Stages 4 and 5 outcomes-based reporting processes. That experience can now be applied to Stage 6. This is occurring, for example, at Chester Hill High School and Randwick Girls High School where the Stage 6 reports are evolving from the experience of planning and the trials of Stage 5 reports. As this process goes on, schools are finding where there



are similarities and differences in the reporting requirements.

Continuity such as this is also of great help to parents and other readers of the reports. Once they master the necessary *report-decoding* and *report-interpreting* skills for Year 7, they can then confidently approach their children's reports throughout their high school years.

What continuity is there in our school's reporting system across Stages 4, 5 and 6? What are the variables? What is the reason for these variables?

Attractive, accessible reports

A report is well received and responded to when it is well designed and well presented, user friendly and presenting a positive image of the school. The Stage 6 English course teaches students how meaning is conveyed through image. The same principles apply in school reports. Within the resources available in the school, it is possible to show in the report's format and presentation that a school is making a special effort to communicate with parents and community in a way that is both lively and professional.

At Chester Hill High, Stages 4 and 5 English assessment and evaluation sheets are colour coded, each year's sheets printed on a different coloured paper. These are filed in the classroom where they are always accessible to staff and students. The semester report, which evolves from these sheets, is sent home in a folder with the school's crest and name on the cover, and its mission statement, and explanation of grades inside. This system is currently being modified for Stage 6.

What image does our school report project?

The recently released *Assessment and Reporting Issues 7–12 Bulletin 6* provides an overview of the elements of effective reporting and includes various annotated sample reporting formats. The bulletin should prove a useful document for cross-KLA meetings when considering the issues involved in reporting.

Stage 6 syllabus implementation

Gil Lovell has been at the centre of the implementation of the Stage 6 English syllabus through the LIG training and development days and as a support visitor to districts and schools, providing English teachers with advice and guidance. In this article, Gil responds to some of the questions most frequently asked of her during her travels. These questions relate particularly to "the four approaches" and to assessment.

Gil is at present coordinating school-based projects designed to support Stage 6 English and funded through the Quality Teacher Program (QTP). The projects will increase understanding about effective teaching and learning practice in English across Years 7–12, and the learning will be shared with all NSW schools through the English LIG training and development in 2002.

Changing

Dear, dear! how queer everything is to-day! And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I've been changed in the night! Let me think: was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is, Who in the world am I? Ah, that's the great puzzle!

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,
Lewis Carroll

I think that everyone teaching Stage 6 English feels a little like Alice at the moment. We seem to have plunged into change like Alice down the rabbit hole, and we are now confronted with a fascinating array of doors of all sizes and strange creatures and characters. Our previous existence seems a world away.

On the whole, teachers across the state are finding that teaching Stage 6 English is more interesting and more student-centred than with previous syllabuses. The range of texts and the inclusion of viewing and representing as language modes have opened English to those students who may have found previous syllabuses too narrowly focused on literary texts and writing. Some English faculties have found in their students a fund of valuable expertise about the Internet, multimedia texts and film.

The Extension course in the preliminary year, "Texts, culture and value", has stimulated teachers and students to devise units of work which are new and fresh, and which offer students much more scope for independent inquiry. These include units on the intertextual links between *Cinderella* and *Persuasion*, or *Little Red Riding Hood* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and contemporary film and representations of the city from Charles Baudelaire in the nineteenth century, through Edgar Allan Poe, Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot to films such as *Metropolis* and *City of Angels*. I am hoping that teachers are recording their programs and keeping careful notes on their class activities because the material they are producing should be published.

Teachers are also appreciating the opportunity for students to undertake four units of English in the HSC year; students have chosen from the full range of options and some fascinating Major Works are under