

# English Teachers Association of Western Australia (ETAWA)

## Response to the National Curriculum English Framing Paper

2 February 2009

Members of Executive and Council determined that the following questions would reflect the needs and concerns of its teaching membership and guide ETA's response to the National Framing Paper. These responses reflect the views of the Council and those members who responded by 30 January 2009. This draft response paper will be posted on the ETA website until 17 February, with the invitation to members to add further feedback and comments.

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### **1. Does the Framing Paper broadly describe the work that you are doing as an English teacher?**

Broadly speaking, the Framing Paper more appropriately describes the 'territory' of what constitutes English teaching. It does describe the work English teachers are doing in WA, although not necessarily articulated or categorised into the three elements listed in the paper: Language, Literature and Literacy.

What will be important will be how the three elements are to be linked and how these links are likely to be articulated. We strongly support the view that these elements must be interlinked and interrelated.

WA teachers of English are used to the categories of the Western Australian Curriculum Framework, i.e. Listening & Speaking, Viewing, Reading and Writing. These categories have been used as organisers for the Kindergarten to Year 10 syllabus in English and the Curriculum Council's Years 11 and 12 English syllabuses.

There seems to be more emphasis on literary texts than what we might have expected. The definition of 'literary' texts seems to vary in emphasis, depending on where in the Framing Paper the term is discussed. The language in the elaboration of element 2 seems to focus more explicitly on the more 'traditional' notion of literature and literary texts.

ETAWA acknowledges the place and importance of literary texts but favours a breadth of text types including everyday, non-fiction and media texts (such as television programs, news and current affairs, film and documentary). English teachers should be able to select from a broad range of texts. There is strong preference for a descriptive rather than prescriptive approach to text selection and use. What will be extremely important is not to crowd the curriculum with too many text types and to achieve a balance between 'traditional' literary texts and other text types. In senior schooling (years 10 -12) ETAWA favours more specialised, separate courses such as English and Literature, to accommodate the different needs of students.

What will also 'drive' the structure of the curriculum is how students are to be assessed. This has been the case with the introduction of new senior school courses in WA during the last five years.

ETAWA supports the need for a broad statement relating to professional development of teachers. This statement might not appear within a curriculum document but as support material.

**2. Does this document broadly describe the things that students should be learning about English?**

ETAWA believes that the Framing Paper does describe the things students should be learning. We do not believe that all teachers have the expertise and confidence to explicitly address some of these elements (e.g. grammar) without additional professional support.

**3. Are the things that you value about English acknowledged in this document?**

There is insufficient attention in the Framing Paper to the part played by subject English in developing the personal, social and cultural identity of the student. We believe that more attention needs to be given to the reasons why students of the 21<sup>st</sup> century should do subject English.

**4. Are there things which this Framing Paper identifies which you are not doing?**

There is no shared understanding of the language of grammar, as English teachers at present 'embed' language conventions within their teaching of writing. We have some doubts that grammar is being explicitly taught throughout the state as a method to improve students' written or oral expression. There is, in our view, little explicit teaching of English at the word and sentence level. One of the problems we have identified is the likely variation in understanding about what grammar means and how and why to teach it in the English classroom.

English teachers are concerned about their ability to teach grammar. Again, professional learning for teachers will be fundamental and central. There must be a centralised approach, in so far as the National Curriculum Authority has signalled that support will be determined at state and territory level.

ETAWA does not endorse the adoption of just one grammar teaching methodology.

**5. What support do you think must be given to ensure that the elements of the National Curriculum are effectively taught?**

Teachers need an opportunity to discuss curriculum materials. The resistance and opposition to curriculum changes introduced into WA in the last five years have indicated what happens when teachers have insufficient support and time to discuss and embed changes into their practice. It is important that English teachers are given the opportunity to be fully engaged in, see the value of and familiarise themselves with the changes required.

To facilitate the implementation of the new national curriculum, there needs to be an 'audit' of what teachers are currently doing effectively and how this links to the national curriculum. ETAWA supports a more staged implementation of any major curriculum changes.

There also needs to be authentic and contextualised purpose for the teaching grammar. In any approach to the teaching of grammar, a balanced approach must be taken. We accept the view of the Framing Paper that we are not teaching grammar for its own sake. .

With reduced university entrance scores there is an increase in the number of teachers with proportionately lower literacy skills. This is sure to have a pronounced impact on the capacity of the workforce to implement some aspects of a national curriculum effectively.

6. ***How will we know if we are effectively teaching the elements of the National Curriculum?***

The National Curriculum must be detailed in addressing the area of assessment. Assessment needs to focus on students' skills, understandings and knowledge. There is great potential for the National Curriculum implementation process to be compromised if there is too much focus on the place, nature and function of assessment.

ETAWA acknowledges that there must be system-level testing of student achievement, but this must be balanced with opportunities for professional conversations, sharing of work, and moderation processes amongst English teachers so valuable evidence of the effectiveness of a curriculum can be provided. Neither the national testing program nor Year 12 external examination results should drive the curriculum and assessment.

Professional associations must play a central role in supporting teachers. ETAWA is well placed to support vitally important networks between and amongst teachers.

7. ***Does the Framing Paper provide enough information about flexible approaches to teaching?***

The Framing Paper does not provide enough information about flexible teaching, although it does clearly advocate such an approach. There is insufficient guidance on the range of pedagogies available. ETAWA would seek more articulation of what 'flexibility' (page 7) actually means. This will be particularly the case with the language section and what approaches will need to be taken to the teaching of grammar.

By its nature, we acknowledge that the Framing Paper lacks specific direction in pedagogy though this is to be expected.

Any approach to flexibility runs the risk, on the one hand, of being too general and on the other of being too prescriptive.

8. ***Does the document provide enough information about the roles of assessment?***

The Framing Paper deals with assessment in broad terms, but does not provide sufficient detail. Assessment must be broad-reaching, formative, incidental, progressive and balanced.

The roles of assessment should be to indicate to teachers, students and parents what students understand and can do. It should inform teaching and learning by describing what students understand and can do and what they need to do next to improve.

If there is a disproportionate focus on the role and results of NAPLAN, this will narrow the focus of an English curriculum. On its own, no national testing regime can be an accurate method of assessment. This also applies to university entrance examinations. ETAWA is concerned that accountability is determined largely on test results rather than the broader forms of assessment used by teachers in classrooms over a period of time.

Assessment (page 18) does address related issues but only at a generic level. What will be at issue for English teachers will be the measures of accountability and how results are 'treated'.

**9. Please add any other comments you would like to make about the document that will inform the ETA response?**

Of key importance will be how explicit or implicit the curriculum document will be.

The document does not pay sufficient, explicit attention to text types which lie outside more commonly accepted ones. There must be provision for range and variety of text types. This needs to be very clearly articulated. We accept the term 'literary' texts but note that it is problematic.

There needs to be adequate provision for the teaching and assessment of oral/spoken English – including decoding meaning, interaction, and negotiating roles. The English curriculum needs to articulate how these are to be addressed.

Teachers must be adequately equipped with professional development/learning and adequate physical resources to help students produce multi-modal texts.

The language and texts that are described and proposed for use in the Framing Paper must be seen to connect with students' lives in relevant and meaningful ways if the national curriculum is to achieve one of its important objectives of preparing its citizens with the critical skills to take their place in a 21<sup>st</sup> century democracy.