

Supporting EAL/D learners to meet the HSC minimum standard

Rationale

The HSC minimum standard is part of an effort to improve the literacy and numeracy outcomes for students (NESA). Advice on EAL/D learners meeting the HSC minimum standard will assist schools meet SIP targets and contribute to achieving [Our Plan for NSW Public Education](#) and the [Multicultural Education policy](#).

What is the HSC minimum standard?

Students in NSW need to demonstrate a minimum standard of literacy and numeracy through the HSC minimum standard test to be awarded the Higher School Certificate. This online test comprises three 45 minute assessments in Reading, Numeracy and Writing. Students have multiple opportunities in Years 10, 11 and 12 to sit the test and may sit for the tests up to five years after they first enrol in an HSC course. NESA provides advice on sitting the test after completing Year 12.

EAL/D learners

Over 36% of students in NSW public schools come from a language background other than English (LBOTE). This includes 25% of students across the state who are learning English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D).

EAL/D students can enrol in any year or stage of school, with any level of English language proficiency, and may not have continuous and extended schooling in an English-speaking educational context. EAL/D students may have had diverse educational experiences prior to coming to Australia. Some may have well developed understanding of home language literacy and numeracy and use this knowledge to understand English language literacy and numeracy. Other students will need support to develop literacy and numeracy skills. The HSC minimum standard is particularly challenging for students who begin learning English in stages 5 or 6.

It takes approximately 2 years for an English language learner to master basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) (Cummins, 2000). This is essential everyday social language. For success at school, EAL/D students need to develop cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) to engage in high level, subject-based, critical thinking, and literacy and numeracy practices. Typically, students take 5-7 years to master

the academic language required at school (Cummins, 2000) and up to 12 years for students who may have experienced interrupted schooling, loss or trauma (Thomas and Collier, 1997). Academic language demands increase in the higher stages of school. The HSC minimum standard assumes some control over CALP in all three domains of the test, which not all EAL/D students have mastered by the time they are eligible to attempt the test.

Assessing English language proficiency

EAL/D learners' English language proficiency is assessed using the [ACARA EAL/D Learning Progression \(PDF 398KB\)](#), which describes typical English language proficiency for each of the four phases: Beginning, Emerging, Developing and Consolidating.

Students at the **Beginning** phase are starting to learn English. Students at the **Emerging** phase require explicit English language support to engage with simple texts. Students at the **Developing** phase are starting to engage with the language and content of the curriculum with support, while students at the **Consolidating** phases are increasingly able to engage successfully with the demands of the curriculum.

In 2023, more than 3,500 EAL/D students in years 10, 11 and 12 have been assessed on the **Beginning** or **Emerging** phases of learning English. EAL/D students in the early phases of learning English may not be able to demonstrate their literacy and numeracy skills in the HSC minimum standard test due to their level of English language proficiency.

ACSF level 3 and English language proficiency

NESA has aligned the HSC minimum standards to the [Australian Core Skills Framework](#) (ACSF), and [identified ACSF Level 3](#) as the benchmark for the HSC minimum standard.

The language demands specified in ACSF Level 3 mean that EAL/D students at the **Beginning** and **Emerging** phases are unlikely to have developed the English language proficiency required to achieve the HSC minimum standard. EAL/D students towards the end of the Developing phase and at the Consolidating phase of the EAL/D learning progression should be able to meet the standard, depending on the language and cultural demands of HSC minimum standard questions and their background knowledge.

ACSF level 3 and the ESL Scales

The [ESL Scales \(PDF 522 KB\)](#) is an assessment tool to describe the English language development of EAL/D students in oral interaction, reading and responding, and writing. The granular detail of the ESL Scales can support EAL/D specialist teachers to scaffold the literacy and numeracy skills across key learning areas which are required by EAL/D students to achieve the HSC minimum standard. ACSF level 3 achievement descriptors across all three domains of the HSC minimum standard test map to the higher levels of the ESL Scales.

Online tests and EAL/D students

HSC minimum standard online literacy and numeracy tests can pose particular challenges for EAL/D learners. Test items are presented with little or no context and often assume high levels of cultural knowledge.

English language learners may not be familiar with the various types of questions, how to interpret the writing prompt, including the visual prompt, and the use of visuals in the questions, especially in the numeracy test.

Recognising that students who are at the **Beginning** or **Emerging** phase are unlikely to achieve the minimum standard, schools should help students decide when to take each test. EAL/D students may choose not to sit the online test until they have developed adequate English language proficiency. Parents and caregivers should be involved in discussions about test readiness.

There are many opportunities for students to meet the minimum standard. Students can sit the tests four times each year in years 10, 11 and 12, and up to five years after they first enrol in an HSC course. NESA provides [advice](#) on sitting the test after completing school.

Students are still able to receive an ATAR and accept university offers without meeting the HSC minimum standard.

It is important to remember that EAL/D students who do not meet age-related benchmarks when assessed against literacy and numeracy standards may not be 'underperforming' but achieving at levels commensurate with their phase of English language learning.

What can schools do?

- Use the EAL/D Learning Progression to identify students' level of English language proficiency to inform test readiness and guide the development of scaffolded teaching and learning programs with explicit focus on literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum.
- Assess EAL/D students' test readiness by administering the practice Reading test prior to administering the Reading test. Test data indicates the Reading test has the highest achievement rate for EAL/D learners. Numeracy is the domain with the next highest achievement rate, followed by Writing, which EAL/D students find the most challenging.
- Use the links to the ESL Scales in the English EAL/D and English Standard stage 6 syllabuses to plan a pathway of learning to support students to meet both syllabus outcomes and the minimum literacy and numeracy standard across subjects.

- Use interpreters and the department's [translated fact sheet](#) and [translated letters](#) about the HSC minimum standard to communicate with parents who do not speak, read or write English well.
- Encourage teachers to familiarise themselves with the literacy and numeracy demands of the HSC minimum standard and explicitly teach these skills in the context of achieving syllabus outcomes. A range of [advice](#) and [professional learning](#) is available.
- Explore the resources on the department's [HSC minimum standard EAL/D page](#).
- Investigate a case management approach to Stage 6 EAL/D students who are still developing their English language proficiency to achieve the HSC minimum standard. See: [Teacher resources](#)
- Refer to the [Procedural Flowcharts](#) to support student test readiness.
- Access information from [NESA HSC minimum standard webpage](#).
- Explore further resources about teaching and learning strategies which support EAL/D learners such as the [EAL/D enhanced teaching and learning cycle](#), [What works best: EAL/D](#) and the [EAL/D Advice for Schools \(PDF 5528.27 KB\)](#).

NESA information

NESA administers the HSC minimum standard.

[NESA HSC minimum standard - ACE](#) provides current, easily accessible information to principals, teachers, parents and students about the rules and procedures set by NESA for secondary education in New South Wales

Full information about the tests, sample tests, practice tests, and the procedures to sit the test/s once students have graduated from high school:

- [NESA HSC minimum standard resources for students, parents and schools](#)
- [HSC minimum standard demonstration tests](#)
- [NESA Schools Online](#) (principals grant access to school-based staff).

Contact

For more information and to provide feedback on this resource, please contact the [EAL/D education advisors](#) or email: EALD.Education@det.nsw.edu.au.

Timeframe for use

The document should be read when planning the implementation of the HSC minimum standard test for Year 10, 11 and 12 EAL/D learners. The document can also be used in consultations with parents or guardians of EAL/D learners.

Intended audience

DELs, EAL/D Education Leaders, school leaders, EAL/D specialist teachers, HSC minimum standard coordinators, classroom teachers

Instructions for use

The document can be used to inform discussions about EAL/D learners' readiness to sit the HSC minimum standard test, and to inform discussions about the implementation of the HSC minimum standard test for EAL/D learners.

Evidence base

Resource is underpinned by CESE's [English as an additional language \(EAL/D\) effective practices report](#) and the [EAL/D Learning Progression](#) and [ESL Scales](#) as determiners in planning effective learning support. This document aligns with Multicultural Education policy statements and [Multicultural Plan 2019-2022 \(PDF 1804 KB\)](#) targets.

Alignment to system priorities and/or needs: Resource will assist EAL/D learners to achieve equity in outcomes in the HSC minimum standard.

Alignment to School Excellence Framework: Learning domain: Curriculum

Consulted with: Multicultural Education and Literacy and Numeracy

Reviewed by: EAL/D Education coordinator, Multicultural Education.

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