English Language Proficiency Framework

Navitas Professional Institute

Document

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Version Control

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01 April 2013	Establishment of English Language Proficiency Standards and Strategy - ACAP	May 2015
16 September 2013	Establishment of English Language Proficiency Standards and Strategy - NCPS	September 2015
20 July 2015	Revised, college policy alignment and retitled from Strategy and Standards to Framework	August 2020
25 January 2016	Minor template technical amendments	August 2020

English Language Proficiency Framework

English language proficiency (ELP) remains a priority at Navitas Professional Institute (NPI). An ELP strategy was developed in 2013 and has been updated in 2015 with a focus on facilitating an NPI-wide approach to developing students' language proficiency. It follows on from the *English language proficiency in the higher education sector* report prepared for the NPI Learning and Teaching Committee in 2014 (Baxter, 2014).

The strategy was established in response to the regulatory frameworks administered by Tertiary Education Quality Standards Authority (TEQSA), which require higher education institutions to provide for appropriate development of ELP, as well as VET sector imperatives for ensuring students have adequate literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills prior to enrollment (DET, 2015) . VET providers must also integrate LLN support in courses to assist student development.

A strategic and context-specific approach to ELP will enable NPI to meet these requirements. It will also help to ensure that students are able to participate effectively in their studies and graduate with adequate English language skills. It is important to stress that the intention is to address the language needs of *all* NPI students; hence, this strategy applies to both international and domestic students, and to both native and non-native speakers of English.

1.   Institutional Context

NPI is a large multi-college business comprising the Australian College of Applied Psychology (ACAP), Health Skills Australia (HSA), Australian TESOL Training Centre (ATTC) and Navitas College of Public Safety (NCPS). Within this context, NPI is dual-sector (i.e. offering both higher education and VET courses) with campuses nationally, and the cohort includes a high percentage of online students. Hence, this framework provides a cohesive and consistent approach to ELP, with emphasis on cross-institutional dialogue. In addition, NPI has international aspirations and an imperative to improving retention, so the ELP strategy is closely aligned with these initiatives.

2.   Conceptualising ELP

TEQSA (2013, p. 7) defines ELP as the following:

> *English language proficiency (ELP)* refers to language proficiency (the ability to communicate in the English language) and academic language proficiency (the ability to participate in a course of study delivered in English and to achieve expected learning outcomes without requiring significant English language support, and gain entry into the labour market or a further course of study).

ELP can be also be conceptualised as "three distinct but overlapping and interactive competencies: general language proficiency, academic literacy and professional communication skills" (Murray & Hicks, 2014, p. 4).

> *General language proficiency*: "a general communicative competence in language that enables its users to express and understand meaning accurately, fluently and appropriately according to context" (Murray & Hicks, 2014, p. 4) and "a language user's control of the formal and functional properties of language" (Murray, 2010, p. 58).

> *Academic literacy*: "the capacity to undertake study and research, and to communicate findings and knowledge, in a manner appropriate to the particular disciplinary conventions and scholarly standards expected at university level" (UWA, 2005, as cited in Murray, 2010, p. 58).

> *Professional communication skills*: "skills and strategies students require to communicate in an academic context, according to the particular demands of their discipline and those of the profession into which they eventually hope to enter" (Murray, 2013, p. 303).

In a VET context, ELP sits within the context of the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) where language, literacy and numeracy skills are recognised as integral to all contexts in which individuals work, learn and communicate.

(Note that within this framework, English language 'competence' and English language 'proficiency' are used to mean the ability to use English in context. Competence/proficiency are not used solely to mean achievement of a particular score on a point in time assessment or test).

3. Key principles

The ELP strategy is underpinned by the following key principles that are informed by research, best practice and national standards:

3.1 Students' language proficiency is a core component of academic success and is developmental

Language proficiency acquisition should be seen as an important and ongoing aspect of a degree or program. All students need practice in developing discipline-specific and tertiary-level language skills (IEAA, 2013) and need time to learn "the ways of thinking and using language which exist in the academy" (Hyland, 2009, p. 1). Therefore, building language competence involves several stages, including a focus on testing at entry, in-course experience throughout the whole program, and exit competency standards. It is important students are aware as to why ongoing English language development is important and what their responsibilities are. It is also important students are aware that they will be assessed on their ELP as part of their course, and that they will be helped to develop their skills.

3.2 ELP development requires an institution-wide approach

A whole institution approach to ELP development is the key to responding appropriately and systematically to students' English language needs. ELP development cannot be the responsibility of individuals working in isolation. Instead, the ideal arrangement involves collaboration and cooperation between departments and staff (IEAA, 2013), and studies have shown that successful language and literacy practices are the result of ongoing partnerships between academic literacy specialists and discipline staff. The ELP strategy is also strongly linked to other institution-wide initiatives, such as the retention strategy and the international student strategy.

3.3 Institutional policy is supportive of ELP strategies

Institutional policy needs to support the strategy by positioning language development as a core (not marginal) learning and teaching issue. Students' language proficiency is the subject of continuous assessment and monitoring so that they graduate with the required level of ELP. While the ELP strategy reflects many of the current NPI Learning and Teaching Principles, a commitment to ELP development should be explicitly included as one of these key principles. In addition, the ELP strategy requires college commitment to providing appropriate resources. Implementation of the strategy will be most effective if it is adequately resourced and adjustments to workload are made to accommodate effective implementation.

3.4 Approaches to ELP development are tailored

A one-size-fits-all approach to ELP development is not ideal, as language and discipline content are inseparable. Instead, support for ELP development is contextualised and appropriate to each School. Each School is responsible for ELP planning, development and for ensuring that students graduate with the required level of ELP, with guidance from Student Learning Support. This will help ensure there is discipline-specific, systematic ELP development in each course, and that there is clarity and consensus in setting assessment standards for English language competence within courses.

3.5 ELP approaches are data driven

Collection and reporting of data in relation to the appropriateness of entry requirements, the formative assessment of the needs of students early in the course, and the nature and outcomes of ELP activities are imperative. An evidence-based approach is necessary to meet Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training standards.

3.6 ELP approaches develop students' general communicative competence, context-specific academic literacy and professional communication skills

As well as ensuring students have basic functional literacy, ELP approaches also aim to develop students' academic literacy and professional communication skills. Developing students' competency at these three levels is achieved by strategically embedding ELP within the curriculum. This will allow language and literacy skills to be continually recycled and re-presented in contexts where students can see how they relate directly to the demands of the course and/or profession. This approach encourages application, not just possession, of skills, and involves activities such as modelling texts, scaffolding assignments, providing opportunities for practice and subsequently providing feedback to students, which helps them fine-tune their understanding and application of language and literacy practices.

4. Notes

The strategy is sponsored by the Dean Academic and managed through Student Learning Support.

5. Definitions

Academic staff / teaching staff refers to permanent and casual employees engaged in teaching and assessment of courses at the institution.

Institution (the)/College (the) means the Navitas Professional Institute and its colleges (see registration information below).

International student/ Overseas student means a student required to hold a student visa for study in Australia.

Unit means a unit of study in a higher education course or a unit of study, subject, module and/or unit of competency in a vocational education and training course.

6. Review

This policy is reviewed at a minimum of every 5 years by the policy owner (or designate) to ensure alignment to appropriate strategic direction and its continued relevance to Navitas' current and planned operations.

The next scheduled review of this document is listed in the Version Control section on Page 1.

7. Records

Records in association with this policy will be kept in accordance with the institution's Records Management Policy and Records Retention and Disposal Schedule. Confidential files related to the implementation of the policy must be maintained according to relevant privacy processes.

8. References

Baxter, D. (2014). *English language proficiency in the higher education sector*. Report prepared for NPI Learning and Teaching Committee.

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International Education Association Australia. (2013). *A quick guide to developing English language skills*. Retrieved June 8, 2015 from http://www.ieaa.org.au/documents/item/128

Murray, N. (2010). Conceptualising the English language needs of first year university students. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education, 1*(1), 55-64.

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Murray, N. & Hicks, M. (2014). An institutional approach to English language proficiency. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 1-18.

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Registration information

The Navitas Professional Institute is a group of colleges in the Navitas Professional and English Programs (PEP) Division of Navitas Limited the colleges being the Australian College of Applied Psychology (ACAP), Navitas College of Public Safety (NCPS), Health Skills Australia (HSA), and the Australian TESOL Training Centre (ATTC) with respect to ATTC's 39296QLD Graduate Certificate in TESOL and 39297QLD Graduate Diploma in TESOL courses. Navitas Professional Institute Pty Ltd (NPI Pty Ltd), ABN 94 057 495 299, National CRICOS Provider Code 01328A, TEQSA HE Provider Registration Code 12009, RTO 0500. Health Skills Australia Pty Ltd ABN 53 123 479 201, RTO 21646.

Appendix 1

Suggested strategic foci

Specific areas of action for ELP development in 2015-2016 could include the following (subject to consultation and funding):

1. Using a pre-enrollment ELP assessment
Sourcing and/or developing tools for assessing ELP prior to admission will help to ensure students have the language skills necessary to start their course; that is, the assessments are a marker of threshold ability for reading and writing and do not indicate graduate-level competence in English. This involves updating the VET entry assessment to align with the Australian Core Skills Framework Descriptors. For the HE sector of NPI, this involves investigating the feasibility of using an online literacy assessment, possibly developed by ACER. Pre-enrollment assessments will also help to refine the set standards for admission, and the data collected at admission can be used to track progress.

2. Using a post-entry language assessment to identify at-risk students and offer targeted support
Schools will be encouraged to identify students requiring English language support early in their studies through an embedded English language diagnostic task.This involves identifying an existing and/or developing a suitable task to diagnose language development needs. The task will not be not overly demanding and is embedded in discipline specific tasks. Students will receive feedback on their language skills as part of assessment to help them identify areas of strength and weakness and take responsibility for improving their English language skills. Students are referred to Student Learning Support when they need more support than can be offered within the program.

3. Embedding English language development in courses and units
Schools will be encouraged to design units with embedded learning activities that focus on language and writing skills. Assessments throughout a degree or program will also be designed to offer increasing levels of ELP challenge, both in terms of general writing skills as well as use of academic English and discipline-specific terminology and conventions. Including writing and language criteria in assessments will highlight the expectation that language proficiency will be monitored as students' progress through the course. This will also assist in identifying students in need of English language development.

4. Providing support and professional development for staff
Opportunities for professional development and support for disciplinary staff who wish to support the English language proficiency of their students will be offered. A staff guide for developing students' ELP will also be created, as discipline staff may not feel they sufficient explicit knowledge of English grammar to be in a position to identify and address students' proficiency issues. Tailor-made resources will also be created and made available to discipline staff to use in class with their students.

5. Upskilling Student Learning Support staff.
SLS staff will be encouraged to take up opportunities for professional development, including undertaking the Certificate in English Language Teaching for Adults (CELTA) offered by ATTC. This will enhance the expertise of the team to ensure that SLS activities such as one-on-one consultations, feedback on assignments, workshops, online resources, and provision of support and advice to academic staff are of a high quality.