

DELA Faculty Usage Report 2007

Overview of DELA 2007

The Diagnostic English Language Assessment (DELA) was offered to international and selected local students during Orientation and the first weeks of semester as a means of identifying those in need of additional language support. DELA is for the most part voluntary. Faculties refer students to sit the assessment based on their entry language levels, with a composite score less than 7 on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or equivalent, as the default measure for referral. Provision for testing local non-native English speakers (NNES) has also been made, and students are referred based on a VCE ESL score less than 35. In order to facilitate the referral process, Faculties can use guidelines developed by the Language and Learning Skills Unit (LLSU) to identify students most likely to benefit from sitting DELA (see Appendix A).

The LLSU and the Language Testing Research Centre (LTRC) continue to jointly coordinate the administration of DELA, with the former taking responsibility for promotion, liaison with Faculties, maintenance of the DELA database and dissemination of results, and the latter for test development and validation, invigilation and assessment.

DELA uptake 2007

In 2007, students undertaking the DELA decreased slightly from 786 in 2006 to 724. This is an 8% decrease in usage over 2006 statistics, but remains a robust figure in comparison with the past four years. Nonetheless, student uptake of DELA has never reached its target of 1200 students, for which funding has been made available from Academic Services since 2003.

The Faculties of Economics and Commerce; Engineering; Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences (MDHS); and Law are the highest users of DELA at 27%, 20%, 12% and 10% respectively. One reason for this may be that these faculties (with the exception of Economics and Commerce), have introduced compulsory language testing for students in certain categories.¹ Of the total number of students who sat DELA, 60% were undergraduate and 40% were postgraduate.

Tables 1, 2 and 3 represent the breakdown of students sitting DELA by year, Faculty and cohort respectively.

Table 1: DELA uptake by year

Year:	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003²	2002	2001
Semester 1:	549	593	486	581	346	384	432
Semester 2:	175	193	168	178	208	199	83
Total:	724	786	654	768	554	583	515

¹ Postgraduate students in Engineering may be accepted at .5 below the recommended IELTS if they take up the postgraduate ESL credit subject (DELA required); international students in Law must sit DELA as a condition of enrolment; students in MDHS are referred to sit DELA after screening for language proficiency.

² Statistics for 2003, 2002 and 2001 do not include students from Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences.

Table 2: DELA uptake by Faculty

Faculty	Semester 1	Semester 2	Total
ABP	30	15	45
Arts	55	21	76
Eco/Com	131	68	199
Education	8	0	8
Engineering	112	35	147
LFR	10	0	10
Law	59	17	76
MDHS	86	1	87
Music	1	2	3
Science	44	10	54
SGS	8	6	14
Vet Science	3	0	3
VCA	2	0	2
Total	549	175	724

Table 3: DELA uptake by cohort

Faculty	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	Total
ABP	37	8	45
Arts	57	19	76
Eco/Com	108	91	199
Education	1	7	8
Engineering	56	91	147
LFR	9	1	10
Law	36	40	76
MDHS	78	9	87
Music	2	1	3
Science	49	5	54
SGS	0	14	14
Vet Science	3	0	3
VCA	2	0	2
Total	438	286	724

Student results 2007

Of the 724 students who sat DELA, 500 scored 4 or less on Writing (Form), which is currently used as the default indicator of a student's overall academic language proficiency for success at the tertiary level. On DELA's 6-point scale, a 4 indicates "Academic English needs improvement. Additional language support is probably necessary." (See Appendix B for current band descriptors.) This statistic represents 69% of the tested cohort and demonstrates that the majority of students identified to sit DELA are indeed being appropriately targeted for language assessment and follow-up support.

Monitoring, reporting and support***Automated DELA Assessment Module (ADAM)***

All faculties have access to the online DELA database, ADAM, and can retrieve DELA scores for their students as well as download statistics for monitoring and reporting processes. Students considered at risk, as determined by their DELA results, can be easily identified through ADAM, and appropriately referred for language support. Students are encouraged to return to their Faculties to obtain their results and get advice on support options. However, this model of informing students of their results is problematic if students do not collect their results, which often occurs in this voluntary setting. It also depends on Faculties employing informed advisors for this purpose.

In addition to ADAM, the LLSU can also provide Faculties with the information to monitor students' uptake of language support in the form of workshops, individual tutorials and online courses through its internal database (APPOINTER).

Language support options

In 2007, a variety of language support options were available to students, both centrally and faculty-provided. As the central provider of academic and language skills to the University, the LLSU offered a range of language programs, from short courses to adjunct tutorial programs, at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The majority of language support delivered by the LLSU was faculty-based, focussing on the language skills needed in the discourse of the discipline and related to the assessment tasks for which students were responsible. The LLSU also provided individual tutorials and online courses and resources for students in need of language support. In both 2007 and 2006, 58% of the LLSU's individual tutorial service supported NNES students.

Other providers of English language support include the Teaching and Learning Unit (TLU) in the Faculty of Economics and Commerce, the International Student Support Program (ISSP) in MDHS, and the Office of Teaching and Learning in Law (OTLL).

The School of Languages and Linguistics also offers a range of ESL credit subjects that students may select as electives. In addition to the two generic *Advanced English* subjects, two undergraduate and one postgraduate subjects were discipline-specific: *Science Communication*; *Academic English: Economics*; and *Presenting Academic Discourse: Engineering*.

Future issues

Implications of the Melbourne Student Services Model and new Student System

Communication

With the implementation of the Melbourne Student Services Model (MSSM) and the new Student System (SS), the communication of DELA results should become more efficient in several ways. First of all, it is expected that the new student centres will be a focal point for both administrative and academic matters in the life of the student. Student Advisers, who will be located in the student centres, will thus be in a better position to disseminate results and advise on language support options. (In previous years, the voluntary nature of DELA often meant that students have not always returned to their Faculties to collect their results and consequently did not receive information and guidance as to language programs available to them.) DELA advising and referral will however need to be an integral part of training for Student Advisers. Experience at other universities has indicated that the way such a testing program is presented to users may be critical in determining its usefulness.

Secondly, the SS is being developed with the capacity to record DELA results and recommendations – unlike the current system. This means that Student Advisers will have access to all relevant information pertaining to students in one system - as opposed to two (ADAM and Merlin) - making it easier for them to identify and monitor students at risk because of their level of English language skills. The LLSU has been working in consultation with the Student Systems Project team throughout 2007 to ensure that DELA results can easily be uploaded and therefore accessed for monitoring and compliance.

Delivery

In addition, Student Centres will facilitate the structure and delivery of language programs in a more tailored and cohesive manner. Not only will ESL programs target a more localised audience, they will be promoted and delivered at the local level, resulting in greater uptake of students in such programs.

Recommendations of the Task Force on English Language Bridging and Support Programs

Funding

With the recommendations for mandated language testing and support for the New Generation degrees in 2009, it is important to ensure adequate resourcing and infrastructure for the testing process. Under the recommendations, students with less than 7 IELTS or equivalent (undergraduate entry remains at 6.5) will be required to sit DELA, and this will undoubtedly mean an increase in the number of students assessed. The current model provides for 1,200 students – approximately one-third of the international student intake– to sit DELA at a total cost of \$70,000 per year.³ Provision will need to be made in the current agreed funding formula to cater for the expected increase in numbers in 2009.

In addition, if the integrity of the testing system is to be preserved, provision for further development and validation of parallel test versions (not part of the agreed formula) needs to be factored in. Logistics is another area that might need rethinking when testing a significantly larger proportion of the student population in a limited amount of time, and this may involve investigating the feasibility of online assessment. Consultation with the LTRC would be essential as delivering and scoring a test in an online environment are likely to entail changes to its design.

A third area for consideration, as noted in the DELA Faculty Usage Report 2006, is redevelopment of the DELA descriptors to offer more detail about the qualities of language performance at each band level in DELA (see Appendix B for current band descriptors) and more tailored advice about suitable strategies for improving language proficiency (see Appendix C for an extract of current recommendations available). Current descriptors offer very little information to students about their language strengths and weaknesses and how the latter may jeopardize their study outcomes. Producing more fine-grained profiles of performance at each band level and tailoring recommendations to individual profiles would add value to the current reports, giving both students and Faculties better information about language skills and more appropriate strategies for improving them. The LTRC is currently planning a pilot study to explore the feasibility of different reporting options and their relative usefulness for different stakeholders, including students, Faculty advisors and language support staff.

Finally, if the DELA database is to successfully manage a significant increase in students tested, maintain test security as well as report more effectively with enhanced band descriptors, as mentioned above, provision will need to be made to fund future developments.

Language Support

With the introduction of compulsory language support in 2009, Faculties will need to determine the kinds of ESL programs that would best meet their needs, for example, ESL credit subjects or ESL adjunct tutorials.⁴ This determination will have an add-on compliance effect within the new SS, as mentioned earlier, in that this new system will have to monitor that students have met their conditions of enrolment. In the new SS, recording a credit subject will be easier than if the support were a series of workshops or individual tutorials. Regardless, ensuring students have access to appropriate language support will continue to be a key feature in meeting students' expectations of the Melbourne Model. As noted in the 2006 Report, international students have high expectations of support services; they are also high users.⁵

In addition, compulsory language support will most likely create an increased demand for language programs in 2009. Faculties will need to liaise closely with the central support providers, such as the LLSU and the School of Languages and Linguistics, as well as their own faculty-based providers, to ensure adequate ESL programs are available and accessible,

³ The current funding model is \$67 per student for the first 600 candidates in a calendar year and \$45 per student thereafter.

⁴ The English Language Steering Committee's paper, *Recommendations from the Steering Committee on integrating language and disciplinary teaching*, outlines the varying kinds of support available at the University, listing their benefits. A copy has been attached.

⁵ International students represented 50% of the LLSU's individual tutorial service in both 2006 and 2007.

depending on the degree structure. For New Generation degree students, who can enrol in an ESL credit subject as part of the breadth component of their degree, this may not be a factor. However, for students in Graduate Schools and teach-out degrees, equitable access will be an issue.

Careful evaluation of available support options will also need to be undertaken to ensure that these are effective in building the English proficiency of NNES students and in enhancing their level of engagement with their academic study.

Conclusion

In 2007, the LLSU and the LTRC continued to collaborate effectively in the administration of DELA. Results indicate that almost 70% of students targeted to sit the assessment fall in the range of those most in need of language support. With the exception of Economics and Commerce, Faculties who require DELA as a condition of enrolment are the highest users of the assessment. Potential issues for 2008-9 include:

- Ensuring adequate DELA training for all Student Advisers and Enquiries Officers in 2008, with the view to improving understanding and usefulness of diagnostic assessment of English learning needs
- Ensuring the new Student System has functionality in recording DELA results and recommendations, as well as in tracking that requirements are met
- Current limitations of DELA: funding model, development and logistics of testing significantly increased numbers
- Meeting increased demand for language support programs under the Melbourne Model: matching - or effectively managing - current resources with expectations and evaluating the effectiveness of support offerings.

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Appendix A

The following checklist can be used in either the group or individual course advice interview with all international students and will help identify students who may benefit from sitting the Diagnostic English Language Assessment (DELA).

Students who will **not** be required to undertake DELA will meet any one of the following categories:

- Satisfactorily completion of at least 5 years of secondary studies in a country where English is the official language, gaining a satisfactory pass (70% or more) in an approved final year English
- Within the last 2 years satisfactorily completed at least the first year of an approved tertiary program taught and assessed in the English language in an institution where English is the language of instruction and assessment
- VCE ESL score of 35 or more
- Foundation EAP score of 75 or more
- IELTS score of 7.0 or more

Appendix B

The 6-point scale for explaining DELA results is as follows:

- 6** Good command of academic English.
- 5** Generally good command of academic English. Would benefit from additional language support.
- 4** Academic English needs improvement. Additional language support is probably necessary.
- 3** Academic English needs considerable improvement. Additional language support is essential.
- 1-2** Academic English is weak. Substantial English language support is required. Student at risk.

Appendix C

Recommendations for students in the Faculty of Arts (recommendations may be different for other faculties).

Rec Code	Degree Type	Recommendation
A	U	Your academic writing needs intensive work. You should discuss English as a Second Language options with your course advisor and Dr Neomy Storch from the School of Languages and Linguistics (email: neomys@unimelb.edu.au).
A	P	Your academic writing needs intensive work. You should discuss English as a Second Language options with your course advisor and Dr Neomy Storch from the School of Languages and Linguistics (email: neomys@unimelb.edu.au).
B	U	Your academic writing needs considerable improvement. You should enrol in Academic English 1 (175-120) in Semester 1 and Academic English 2 (175-121) in Semester 2. You may need to make changes to your timetable so that these subjects can be included in your schedule. Please discuss this with your course advisors.
B	P	Your academic writing needs considerable improvement. You should enrol in Presenting Academic Discourse (175-501) General stream. You may need to make changes to your timetable so that this subject can be included in your schedule. Please discuss this with your course advisors.
C	U	Your academic writing needs considerable improvement. You should enrol in Academic English 1 (175-120). You may need to make changes to your timetable so that this subject can be included in your schedule. Please discuss this with your course advisors.
C	P	Your academic writing needs considerable improvement. You should enrol in Presenting Academic Discourse (175-501) General stream. You may need to make changes to your timetable so that this subject can be included in your schedule. Please discuss this with your course advisors.
D	U	Your academic writing needs considerable improvement. You should enrol in Academic English 1 (175-120). You may need to make changes to your timetable so that this subject can be included in your schedule. Please discuss this with your course advisors.
D	P	Your academic writing needs considerable improvement. You should enrol in Presenting Academic Discourse (175-501) General stream. You may need to make changes to your timetable so that this subject can be included in your schedule. Please discuss this with your course advisors.
E	U	Your academic writing needs considerable improvement. You should enrol in Academic English 1 (175-120). You may need to make changes to your timetable so that this subject can be included in your schedule. Please discuss this with your course advisors.
E	P	Your academic writing needs considerable improvement. You should enrol in Presenting Academic Discourse (175-501) General stream. You may need to make changes to your timetable so that this subject can be included in your schedule. Please discuss this with your course advisors.
F	U	Your academic writing needs considerable improvement. You should enrol in Academic English 1 (175-120). You may need to make changes to your timetable so that this subject can be included in your schedule. Please discuss this with your course advisors.
F	P	Your academic writing needs considerable improvement. You should enrol in Presenting Academic Discourse (175-501) General stream. You may need to make changes to your timetable so that this subject can be included in your schedule. Please discuss this with your course advisors.
G	U	Your academic writing needs considerable improvement. You should enrol in Academic English 2 (175-121). You may need to make changes to your timetable so that this subject can be included in your schedule. Please discuss this with your course advisors.
G	P	Your academic writing needs considerable improvement. You should enrol in Presenting Academic Discourse (175-501) General stream. You may need to make changes to your timetable so that this subject can be included in your schedule. Please discuss this with your course advisors.
H	U	Your academic writing needs considerable improvement. You should enrol in Academic English 2 (175-121). You may need to make changes to your timetable so that this subject can be included in your schedule. Please discuss this with your course advisors.
H	P	Your academic writing needs considerable improvement. You should enrol in Presenting Academic Discourse (175-501) General stream. You may need to make changes to your timetable so that this subject can be included in your schedule. Please discuss this with your course advisors.
I	U	Your academic writing needs considerable improvement. You should enrol in Academic English 2 (175-121). You may need to make changes to your timetable so that this subject can be included in your schedule. Please discuss this with your course advisors.
I	P	Your academic writing needs considerable improvement. You should enrol in Presenting Academic Discourse (175-501) General stream. You may need to make changes to your timetable so that this subject can be included in your schedule. Please discuss this with your course advisors.

J	U	You have a good command of written academic English. If you wish to develop your academic language and communication abilities further, you may enrol in any of the following credit subjects: Project -Based Communication Skills (175-134), Business & Management Writing (175-210), Technical Writing (175-211), Managing Work & Projects (175-300).
J	P	You have a good command of written academic English.
K	U	Your Listening for academic purposes needs considerable improvement. You should enrol in Academic English 2 (175-121). You may need to make changes to your timetable so that this subject can be included in your schedule. Please discuss this with your course advisors. You should also attend workshops on effective oral communication skills.
K	P	Your Listening for academic purposes needs considerable improvement. You should enrol in Presenting Academic Discourse (175-501) General stream. You may need to make changes to your timetable so that this subject can be included in your schedule. Please discuss this with your course advisors. You should also attend relevant workshops on effective oral communication skills.
L	U	Your Reading for academic purposes needs considerable improvement. You should attend short courses and workshops on academic vocabulary and critical reading and thinking, in addition to individual tutorials.
L	P	Your Reading for academic purposes needs considerable improvement. You should enrol in Presenting Academic Discourse (175-501) General stream. You may need to make changes to your timetable so that this subject can be included in your schedule. Please discuss this with your course advisors. You should attend additional short courses and workshops on critical thinking, reading and writing.