

Society and Culture

2012 Chief Assessor's Report



Government
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SACE
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SOCIETY AND CULTURE

2012 CHIEF ASSESSOR'S REPORT

OVERVIEW

Chief Assessors' reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

It was pleasing to see that the number of students enrolled in Society and Culture has increased since last year, in both 10-credit and 20-credit versions of the subject.

In general, the quality of the work submitted for moderation was excellent and the average mean score of students' school-assessed score varied little from previous years, meaning that the standard of work in this subject has been consistent. This demonstrates that most teachers have understood and applied the performance standards appropriately.

On the whole, moderators were pleased to see that teachers had renewed and structured their tasks to allow students to analyse recent current events in society and to provide evidence against the performance standards. However, in some instances, teachers were still using tasks from an old subject outline requiring students to analyse 'social myths' and 'competing social demands' despite the learning outcomes related to these topics having been removed from the subject outline. Teachers and students are advised to familiarise themselves with the most recent (2013) subject outline, available on the SACE website. Tasks that require students to provide evidence of assessment criteria from a previous subject outline need be adapted or abandoned and replaced with tasks designed to meet the current assessment design criteria and performance standards.

Moderators were pleased to note that more teachers are including task sheets and annotated or highlighted performance standards with students' work. Since the main goal of moderation is to confirm teachers' judgments about students' grades, the inclusion of materials showing how teachers had reached decisions about the students' grades greatly assisted the moderation process. Moderators commented on the difficulty of confirming grades when there was no task sheet and no learning and assessment plan included in the moderation materials. Since judgments about student achievement are made according to the evidence against the specific features from the performance standards, it is important for the moderators to know which specific features have been used by teachers in the assessment of student evidence.

SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 1: Folio

On the whole, moderators noted that the folio tasks were well done, with student work submitted providing solid evidence of the selected specific features of the performance standards. The most successful tasks were those that were selective as to which specific features were included, requiring students to focus on just a few features, rather than covering too many for assessment. The least successful tasks included all the specific features from the performance standards for every task, making it more difficult for students to demonstrate achievement at the highest level. When tasks had a clear well-defined focus, both in the topic and the specific features selected, it was clear that students were more successful in demonstrating their learning in relation to the highest levels of the performance standards.

It was pleasing to see that most students adhered to the word-count in this assessment type.

The most popular topics selected for the folio were, as in previous years: Group 1: Youth Culture, and Cultural Diversity; Group 3: A Question of Rights, and People and Power; with Group 2 topic choices being evenly spread between Social Ethics, Technological Revolutions, and People and the Environment. Some schools seem to have invented their own topic related to 'social myths', something that is not included in the subject outline.

It was clear to moderators that students achieved well when the tasks given were brief, clearly set out, focused on an interesting current issue or social phenomenon, and included only some of the specific features required for the whole assessment type. Tasks leading to less successful student evidence were lengthy (some with up to 4 pages of detailed instructions), contained questions or instructions that did not relate closely to the assessment design criteria, and included all the specific features of the assessment design criteria in every task.

Assessment Type 2: Interaction

This assessment type requires two tasks, a group task and an oral task. In some cases, moderators could not find both these tasks for the nominated student work in the moderation materials; evidence of student work for both tasks must be submitted for moderation purposes.

Moderators appreciated evidence that was submitted in a form which could be used to verify the teachers' judgments against the performance standards. Many teachers and students submitted journals of group work, self and peer assessment, Photo Stories, DVDs, presentation notes, and audience feedback, all of which were very helpful to the moderation team, as it was clear for moderators to see where the students had met the specific features of the performance standards. It was difficult for moderators to confirm teachers' assessment judgments where limited evidence was supplied.

Some of the DVD or CD evidence of social action carried out by students was very impressive. Group social action and evaluation, as well as each individual's contribution, were clearly evident from the materials supplied.

Some of the more interesting and effective social actions included:

- organising a charity fun run
- collecting books for an overseas village school
- making and giving food hampers to a local charity
- writing to and lobbying politicians about Australia's treatment of asylum seekers
- participating in Slum Survivor run by TEAR Australia
- participating in the Migration Museum's refugee simulation activity
- setting up a bullying-awareness website
- initiating and publicising a school recycling program
- organising a peace walk with junior secondary students.

Less effective social actions — leading to limited opportunity for students to achieve at the higher levels of the performance standards — included activities such as putting up a poster in the classroom, presenting a PowerPoint to the student's own class, talking to the student's own class, or making a pamphlet.

Moderators were pleased that they could access evidence of an oral presentation from most students. Cue-card notes, DVDs, or CDs were the most common forms of evidence provided. It was also noted that most CDs and DVDs were provided in the correct format and could be easily opened and viewed.

Teachers are reassured that there are formal procedures laid down for the moderation process and student work must be viewed by pairs of moderators working together, with the aim of confirming teacher judgments. The student work samples are vital, therefore, in allowing moderation decisions. Where evidence is missing, unreadable due to poor photocopying, or too brief to show learning against the specific features, moderators are unable to support teacher judgments. For example, PowerPoint slides consisting of downloaded material from the Internet (with no student notes) do not provide evidence of the student's own learning. Even when such sources are properly referenced, they do not, in themselves, provide evidence of student learning if the words are taken almost verbatim from websites. There must be evidence of the student's own authorship or voice in all work submitted.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 3: Investigation

As in previous years, the most successful investigations:

- followed the structure recommended in the current subject outline
- focused on a controversial current social issue
- used expert primary sources, as well as secondary sources
- were consistently well referenced.

Markers commented that where teachers had provided extensive scaffolding for the whole class, it may have helped some students to be successful, but it generally limited students' ability to provide evidence at the higher levels of the performance standards. This was especially true when students had been advised to include surveys of their peers as the only primary evidence used.

The range of investigation topics selected was vast, including some recurring popular choices such as hoon driving, the raising of the driving age, childhood obesity, body image, euthanasia, capital punishment, video-game violence and cyber-bullying. Some of these perennially-chosen topics are neither contemporary nor relevant to Australian society (e.g. capital punishment) and as such should not be undertaken by students. Such topics led to successful investigations only when students had devised a well-focused and narrow guiding question that led to analysis, rather than a generally narrative 'project', full of information but with little or no evidence of learning in relation to the specific features of the performance standards.

Local topics or topics newly in public debate and the media led to the most successful and most interesting investigations. Examples of such investigations were based on issues such as:

- the carbon tax
- the sale of mining rights to overseas countries
- scepticism about global warming
- media invasion of privacy
- the impact on students of the NAPLAN tests
- refugee workers
- Australia's offshore detention policy
- bikie gang violence in South Australia
- legalisation of same-sex marriage
- energy drinks
- compulsory organ or blood donation
- immunisation of young children
- motorbike riding on sand dunes
- the portrayal of asylum seekers in the media
- the popularity and health risks of solariums
- the effectiveness of Adelaide's Social Inclusion Unit
- the shortage of rural doctors
- effects of wind turbines on health
- use of mobile phones while driving
- surrogacy and infertility
- proposed marine parks
- the role of the Paralympics in Australian society
- harassment in the defence force.

Where students had successfully investigated these topics, they had been guided by well-refined and carefully devised guiding questions or hypotheses. Students also used focus questions around which to structure their discussion and analysis. The most successful investigations were structured around three or four relevant and interesting focus questions that linked not only to the hypothesis or overall guiding question but also to the assessment design criteria for this assessment component. In each focusing question, the evidence presented demonstrated excellent use of expert primary sources together with sound up-to-date secondary sources as a basis for analysis and discussion.

Good local topics included:

- the building of a fast food outlet restaurant in the Barossa Valley
- a new hospital for the Barossa Valley
- the importance of public transport to residents in the Playford Council area
- the introduction of the 'basics card' in a local council area
- the complex work of the police force in a specific council area

- the banning of smoking in a local playground
- safety and security in a regional shopping centre
- the impact of building a new large supermarket in a semi-rural urban area
- the increase in number of home births in a specific council area
- the upgrading of the Parks Community Centre
- street preaching in Rundle Mall
- truancy in two local schools
- the introduction of parking fees at Tea Tree Plaza
- the effects of a mining project in Yorke Peninsula
- the threatened closure of the Cadell ferry.

Local issues gave rise to in-depth analysis and discussion (showing sound knowledge and understanding of the issue) because local people had vested interests in the issues chosen and were willing to be interviewed by students. It is refreshing to see the subject continue to have such relevance in local communities where there are always new issues in the local media to be explored.

Investigations that relied on surveys of peers really limited the level of students' knowledge, understanding, and analysis of their investigation topic, as most teenagers are unable to provide any reliable information in their survey responses about issues such as IVF, surrogacy, the death penalty, or abortion, or indeed most other topics or issues. Students mistakenly used their surveys as authoritative sources in support of their investigation, making statements like: 'My surveys showed that 52% of respondents agreed and therefore my hypothesis is proved correct'. Students need to be aware of, and state, the limitations of any primary or secondary sources used in the investigation. Many students presented descriptions of their survey results question by question, adding very little to the evidence of their learning in accordance with the specific features of the performance standards.

Markers commented that most students had at least attempted to use both secondary and primary sources. Many students demonstrated awareness of different methods of obtaining information or data from a range of reliable sources and were able to use the information gained to analyse, support or critique their guiding question or hypothesis. Students who used focusing questions to structure their investigation were able to provide relevant evidence from their sources related to each focus question.

Students are reminded that it is essential to draft and edit their investigation to ensure that it is effective in communicating their ideas, knowledge, analysis, and conclusions.

In summary, the most successful investigations:

- had clearly worded guiding questions
- focused on a 'new' contemporary issue or topic
- structured the analysis and discussion around focus questions
- followed the investigation structure recommended in the subject outline
- adhered to the word-limit
- used expert primary sources, as well as secondary sources
- used primary sources beyond the student's immediate school community
- provided evidence of multiple perspectives on the issue and positioned these within a contemporary context
- explicitly addressed the reasons for social change in relation to the topic
- evaluated the sources in terms of reliability and bias

- explained the relevant expertise of the primary sources
- used a consistent referencing system
- contained a succinct conclusion summarising the findings and addressing the limitations of the study.

OPERATIONAL ADVICE

Use of Learning and Assessment Plan Addendum

Moderators were pleased to see that many teachers used the addendum to the learning and assessment plan effectively to explain amendments to the course.

Many bags did not have a learning and assessment plan included. Teachers are reminded that they are required to include a learning and assessment plan and full set of tasks in the bags with their student work.

Packaging and Presentation of Materials

Moderators were very grateful to those teachers who took care packaging their materials in accordance with the SACE Board's advice.

Poorly Presented Work

Markers also commented that students could have been disadvantaged where markers could not read graphs that had been poorly photocopied on black and white, making it impossible to determine what the graph actually meant.

Where students had included their surveys only as appendices and not included any analysis in the main text of their investigation report, these appendices could not be read by markers and therefore did not contribute to the students' overall grade.

Students and teachers are reminded that where a topic does not lend itself to surveys, then it is little use carrying out surveys just for the sake of including a primary source. In many cases, students would be well advised to find experts to interview who would provide them with much better material to analyse.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The overall quality of student responses across all assessment components was excellent and it was clear to markers and moderators that most students had engaged with the course and enjoyed many aspects of the topics studied.

Teachers who have participated in marking and/or moderation commented on the benefits of the experience and the professional development they gained. All teachers are strongly encouraged to register their interest in joining one of the assessment panels for this subject. The quality of the subject will only be as strong as its teacher base and we are proud of the continued professionalism of Society and Culture's teacher cohort.

Chief Assessor
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