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Community Studies

2015 Chief Assessor’s Report

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## 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.

## School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Contract of Work

Planning and Organisation

Students who achieved well in this assessment type had detailed, well considered contracts which subsequently provided a solid foundation for the year’s work. Carefully scaffolded contracts gave clear structure, supporting students to select and develop a relevant capability and to identify existing numeracy and literacy skills for further development. The best examples of contracts were those where the students broke down tasks into manageable parts allocating appropriate time to undertake each activity. Such contracts provided a checklist for students to sequence their actions and progress. Students who allocated appropriate time for their chosen activity had significantly more opportunities to gather evidence and reflect enabling them to achieve highly against the performance standards.

It was evident that student-selected investigations engaged and challenged students throughout the implementation of the contract. These contracts demonstrated individual planning, exploration and development of their chosen activity with challenging and achievable individual goals. In contrast, where group projects were initiated, students struggled to personalise their specific roles and responsibilities in the contracts.

The range of topics covered each year continues to be imaginative and innovative. Taxidermy, upcycling furniture, translating a book for new mothers, producing a CD, overlaying music and computer graphics, helping at the Men’s Shed, music mentoring, choreographing a dance, teaching AUSLAN and Indigenous language through signing were some examples of the variety of investigations.

Communication and Interaction

Well-organised folios contained evidence of constant and consistent annotation of sources and ongoing reflection thus leading to higher outcomes. Regular and on-going interaction with both the nominated community expert and the Community Studies teacher supported the development of quality student editing and refinement of students’ projects. Ongoing teacher feedback and interaction also prompted students to reflect on the development of their chosen capability, development of literacy, numeracy and time management skills. In many instances, teachers signed off tasks as they were completed, giving a sense of achievement and supporting effective student planning. A final, formal feedback from the expert confirmed the success of the completed project.

Teachers supported students to regularly document their progress on a weekly basis. Students chose to document their evidence and reflection on learning in a variety of ways. Some students overcame the challenges of remoteness and distance by using email, skype or texting to record evidence of continuous communication with their expert. YouTube was also used by students to gain feedback from an extensive audience. Screen shots, Facebook, FaceTime and notes from phone calls were also extensively used to document continuous communication and feedback. The feedback was then used for review and reflection to improve their work. These reflections also highlighted how students identified and solved problems that arose. Successful records of evidence highlighted reflection on progress, skills and knowledge acquisition and the development of the students’ chosen capability. Some teachers provided a *pro forma* with clear headings to accentuate these requirements. Others wrote comments and gave on-going feedback.

In 2015 a significant improvement was seen in the reflection on numeracy and literacy skills and the development of the chosen capability/capabilities. Students who carefully identified their existing skills were better able to project how to extend or further develop and refine these over the course of the investigation. Some highlighted how they used the new knowledge and its usefulness outlining how the knowledge gained informed their decision making and would contribute to learning post school.

Examples of the literacy development included researching and developing specific writing formats including translation of a book from English to another language. Other examples included creating instruction manuals, writing a children’s book or help guides, using concise wording for PowerPoint presentations or posters, creating open or closed interview questions, writing a professional resume or delivering formal speeches. Some students included glossaries of new terms learned. The ability to summarise, analyse, select and justify the use or inclusion of information pertinent to an investigation was shown through the research skills identified.

Examples of numeracy development included measurements and costings in designing and constructing furniture or clothing, converting temperatures from Fahrenheit to Celsius in recipes, scale drawings for sporting fields and symmetry in face painting. Other examples included producing budget broadsheets to run events, calculating time in musical presentations as well as using spatial awareness for choreography and stage management. The use of mathematical skills was also evident in catering tasks to calculate profit margins, meal costings per serve, or comparing costs with take away equivalents. Financial mathematics used in taxation, profit and loss statements was evident in other student activities.

In folios of a high standard, students clearly articulated the development of their chosen capability, showing evidence of how it had impacted on them personally.

In summary, highly successful students demonstrated reflective, ongoing interaction with their community expert, made regular journal entries containing detailed evidence and strong reference to literacy and numeracy skills and a demonstration of how the chosen capability was developed.

Students’ presentations varied in delivery. The majority of students presented to peers, or at an expo. Several students used public exhibitions to show art, drama or music based productions, involving the community. A smaller number of students presented their work online or as a multimodal presentation. Highly achieving, organised students invited their community expert to their presentations. These students also included proof of their planning and completion of the presentation through; speech preparation, booking and setting up of a presentation space, notes as well as a story board or PowerPoint video recording of the presentation. By including presentation feedback sheets, students’ highlighted observations from the community contact and their audience. Students provided evidence in multi-modal format in their submission of work. An increased use of USB devices have been used to store and access student work. Where a multimodal submission is chosen, the format needs to be in a program approved by the SACE Board and the content checked by teachers to ensure they have been successfully saved before packaging the students’ work.

Fulfilment of Contract of Work

Most teachers included a print out of the performance standards in students’ folios. This is particularly helpful to students throughout the year as it indicates the level of achievement gained in each area and justifies the overall grade decision.

Students were clearly aware of highlighting the requirement for practical action in their school or wider community through service, fund-raising, constructing, coaching and a range of other innovations. Many then became more aware of the personal benefits gained by this involvement and how it could enhance their future skills or employment opportunities. Where changes were made to the contract, most students clearly indicated this on their contract and outlined the reasons for such changes in their record of evidence.

Sources students selected to gain skills, knowledge or background information varied widely and were a combination of primary and secondary sources. YouTube, for example, provided current information while instructional videos provided many students with the knowledge to understand processes needed to complete their chosen activity. Highly successful students often included screen shots with their analysis. The inclusion of large amounts of photocopied material in the folio has the potential to indicate extensive research but the relevant information needed to be clearly annotated with reflective evidence. More successful students documented what was learnt and how the information was used. Student learning was accentuated in many ways, including sticky notes, highlighting and thoroughly annotating useful sources.

Well-organised folios illustrated the constant, consistent annotation of sources and reflection thus leading to higher outcomes. The inclusion of many photographs tells a visual story which, when annotated with reflective observations gave greater depth and context.

## External Assessment

Assessment Type 2: Reflection

Following the introduction of a 200-word unmarked synopsis in 2014, students were more effectively able to place their investigation achievements into context. If using work from another subject, students could choose to write briefly explaining the link from their past subject to their new learning. Reflections have a prescribed SACE word count so it is essential that students focus on addressing the performance standards in the reflection. In particular, fully reflecting upon their chosen capability, their new learning, and providing evidence when further developing literacy and numeracy skills (1,000 words for a 20-credit subject, 500 words for a 10-credit or the equivalent for multi-modal).

Where students either placed their summary section in a box or added the word count at the conclusion, they clearly delineated the completion of that section prior to the commencement of writing the marked reflection. With the vast majority of students word-processing their work, most automatically added their word count at the end of the formal reflection.

Scaffolding is a useful strategy to support students in structuring their reflection; however it is essential that questions and sentence prompts are aligned to the current SACE performance standards. By their nature, open-ended questions provide maximum scope allowing students to accentuate their new learning and skill development. A depth of reflection is needed for students to demonstrate a high level of learning and personal achievement.

Reflections were also enhanced when explicit examples were provided by students. Similarly, those who focused on one capability and specific skill development were, in general more able to describe their acquisition of new learning in depth and were better able to discuss challenges encountered and action taken to overcome problems. Consequently this demonstrated an insightful understanding of the relevant performance standards.

Literacy, numeracy and new skills were reflected upon by students, who then provided clear examples to support and expand their new learning and attainment providing evidence of achievement in a higher grade band. For example, literacy and numeracy skills were developed by one student through researching articles, collecting, collating and analysing data on alcohol consumption in Australia.

Similarly, students who included explicit examples of how a new skill, or their selected capability has been developed, showed insight and subsequent understanding of their chosen capability. For example, a student faced with unforeseen problems in relocating existing paving, identified the need to learn how to screed and inlay pavers within a pre-existing pattern. Numeracy skills were therefore essential and specifically developed by the student, who calculated the number of square metres needed to be paved, the specific size and number of pavers required and the total cost of this purchase. This student was able to describe a great sense of self-achievement, reflecting with confidence on the new mathematical and paving skills gained and their relevance to future potential employment opportunities.

Each student is expected to have their own individually developed and negotiated contract of work. When a small group task is designed by students, each individual is required to write their own contract, listing their specific role and responsibilities, outlining their new skills to be developed and choosing their own capability. The basic focus of their subsequent reflection is then on their personal learning, individual skill, literacy and numeracy development.

Strong reflections demonstrated clearly where a teacher supported the student to refine the scope of reflection upon their learning and provided relevant feedback. This supported students differentiating between recounting information about tasks undertaken and reflecting upon their new learning, skills, and capabilities. Good practice also provided evidence of student negotiation with the teacher, and provided evidence of development of in-depth reflection of the selected capability and the application to the student’s chosen community activity. Where relevant, photographs were used to some extent to enrich student reflections.

Trade subjects embedded into Community Studies hampered student’s scope for an individual reflection and achievement against the performance standards. SACE provides additional subjects to better incorporate this need. Similarly, in a small number of instances where the reflection was set as an examination, the consequent draft quality responses lacked reflection and achieved significantly lower results.

The majority of students were able to reflect upon the value of the community activity to themselves, although some struggled when trying to reflect upon the benefit to the wider community. The relocation of a large propagation shed to new grounds, which benefited a local community gardening club and also substantially benefited the wider rural community, is an example of a community activity where ‘value to others’ was demonstrated in-depth.

Similarly, the teaching of ICT skills in an aged care facility, also clearly illustrated the value to the residents who were then able to set up the Wii sports games independently. Responsible use of social media was also used to make a Facebook page allowing customers and a new, wider cyber community to access an extended family run business online, with no financial outlay.

Students who excelled provided explicit and insightful evidence supporting the value of the community activity to self and others. They focused on community groups and organisations providing a service, including constructing a webpage to develop public awareness or helping to raise funds to support services to a community organisation.

Students are encouraged to use multimodal presentations to illustrate their learning, but need to ensure the media has been tested and checked at school, to comply with programs outlined in the SACE Board’s *Submission of Electronic Files* guidelines. Audio recordings, like all submissions are expected to be drafted and rehearsed by students before undertaking final recording to ensure correct time limits of 3-minutes/ 6-minutes are observed. Prolonged pauses, teacher prompting, and questions detract from the acquisition of a higher level of student achievement.

## Operational Advice

School assessment tasks are set and marked by teachers. Teachers’ assessment decisions are reviewed by moderators. Teacher grades/marks should therefore be evident on all student school assessment work. This is also particularly helpful to students throughout the year as it indicates the level of achievement gained in each area of the Performance Standards and justifies the overall grade decision.

Submission of work in individual, soft-covered folders is enhanced where the student had clear divisions for each section and had checked that all tasks were in the order mentioned in their contract. Students clearly labelled their folders with both their names and SACE numbers, making for ease of identification. For the externally marked reflection, most students were aware of de-identifying their work and their school.

Inclusion of the Assessment Group Planner is essential for moderation as it provides detail about the student, their individual learning needs and subsequent tailoring of a challenging but achievable contract of work. It highlights the specific, ongoing strategies employed by the teacher to support that student. Rather than stating broadly that a student is NEP, a specific comment that the student ‘requires reading-age appropriate material and support to refine the selection of internet sources’ gives crucial detail about the depth and complexity of a contract.

## General Comments

As has been the trend for some years, most students (95.6%) studied the 20-credit option with the remainder undertaking a 10-credit choice. The 20-credit selection provides students with the opportunity to reflect in greater detail about their learning, skills and capability development as the activity by its nature involves more student time and participation. Over half the students submitted work in the following areas: Work and the Community (24%), Health, Recreation and the Community (19%) and Art and the Community (17%). It was evident that successful students based their investigation on a specific area of personal interest. School interest-driven programs which stipulated external goals achieved less successful outcomes and minimal learning opportunities for students to reflect on personal growth.

It is evident that many teachers are making regular use of the support materials provided on the SACE Board minisite to assist students in planning and organising their Community Studies. Similarly, the attendance at clarifying forums has enabled teachers new to the subject to confidently present the requirements in their schools. Each year new teachers become involved in the assessment panels, gaining valuable experience and ideas to implement in their future classes.

From 2016, an additional option for Community Studies at Stage 2 will be offered.

Community Studies B provides an additional programming option for schools, and enables students to be taught simultaneously with students studying another Board-accredited Stage 2 subject. For example, a school may plan that in some of their classes (e.g. Physical Education or Biology) that students will be able to study a Community Studies B version of the subject from the beginning of the year.

Community Studies B also offers students who have enrolled in a particular Board-accredited subject but are finding the subject challenging, the opportunity to remain in the original subject class, while approaching their learning in that subject area in a different way.

Students will be able to enrol in a 10-credit or a 20-credit subject, in up to the following three fields of study:

* Humanities and the Community
* STEM and the Community
* Interdisciplinary Learning and the Community.

Specific information and exemplar materials for the new enrolment option are available on the Community Studies minisite. Implementation workshops will be offered early in 2016.

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