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Workplace Practices

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.

In 2015 there appeared to be a better understanding by teachers of the Workplace Practices subject outline and therefore better student performance overall. A good understanding of the subject outline and reading of the Chief Assessor’s report provide a sound basis for teachers to best assist their students in achieving success in this subject. It was evident in 2015 that teachers are increasingly using Workplace Practices to add context and depth to students’ career or vocational learning; this allows students to better explore their work choices and future learning while at school and to make the most of their opportunities.

## School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Folio

For this assessment type, students undertaking the 20-credit subject are expected to complete assessments designed to address the Industry and Work Knowledge area of study (Topics 1 to 5) described in the subject outline. It is important to note that for the 10-credit subject, students must undertake at least one folio assessment task and it must come from Topic 5: Negotiated Topics.

Students provide evidence of their learning in relation to the assessment design criteria of:

* knowledge and understanding
* investigation and analysis
* reflection and evaluation.

Folio tasks were, once again, generally well suited to the student groups they were designed for. It was also pleasing to see tasks designed or adapted using the subject operational information or exemplar material from the Workplace Practices minisite. It is important to note that when folio tasks were designed to assess every specific feature of all three of the assessment design criteria, students had difficulty achieving to a high standard as there was not sufficient evidence of comprehensive engagement with all of the specific features. Similarly, it is also important to note that the subject outline does not require the application assessment design criterion to be assessed in the folio.

Other important points to note are that students are not advantaged by completing more folio tasks than necessary (that is, more than three folio tasks for a 20‑credit subject), and that word-count is not a criterion against which students should be assessed. At times, word-limits were observed to limit students’ opportunities to achieve well against performance standards. Similarly, overly scaffolded tasks with multiple steps may disadvantage students who do not complete every step.

Where schools designed their suite of folio tasks to encourage reflection and self-evaluation in more than one task, students were able to perform at a consistently higher standard. It is therefore recommended to incorporate the reflection and evaluation assessment design criterion in more than one task, although it does not need to be addressed in every task.

For example, some schools designed a Finding Employment folio task asking students to create a brochure, or to produce only a résumé and cover letter. These instances often limited the students’ ability to address the criteria at a satisfactory standard or higher, as they were merely paraphrasing information without addressing the reflection and evaluation criterion or showing analysis of their knowledge and information. This also reflects the importance of allowing students to do more than merely regurgitate factual information or complete simple tasks. This is also true for similar tasks undertaken for the Industrial Relations topic.

Overall, students performed better when asked to interact with, analyse, question, and reflect on the information that they discover in relation to the world of work. This is also true of tasks that allowed for students to extend and show their understanding, and investigation and analysis, where they were able to perform to a higher standard.

Many schools chose to do Negotiated Topics which, when well-designed, enabled students to address issues and concepts most relevant to them and their industries.

Finally, when providing evidence of student learning to moderators, it is essential that teachers include evidence of their assessment decisions. This can include work with comments, shaded performance standards, and overall comments with a final assessment decision. Where no teacher interaction with the work was evident, it was often difficult for moderators to confirm the assessment decisions.

Assessment Type 2: Performance

Performance is the assessment of each student’s learning in and about the workplace. For students to be successful in this assessment type, they must have completed at least 50–60 hours for the 20-credit subject, and 25–30 hours for the 10‑credit subject.

Students provide evidence of their learning in relation to the assessment design criteria of:

* knowledge and understanding
* application.

There are three aspects to Assessment Type 2: Performance:

* **Student evidence of learning**This may include, for example, a written journal, a record of workplace and/or training events, photo stories, and/or video and audio recordings. Students performing well in this area were often provided with guidance by the teacher, such as a work-log template, but overly structured journals generally did not allow students to meet the higher performance standards.

**AND**

* **Teacher’s Report on Student Performance — Vocational Learning form  
  OR Teacher’s Report on Student Performance — VET form  
  OR Report on Performance as a Personal Carer form**These forms provide supporting evidence of student engagement in a work-related context and are fundamental to this assessment type. At least one of the three forms must be completed for each student. These official forms allow teachers to describe exactly the context for learning and the hours completed, and provide the opportunity for teachers to explain their assessment decisions. When coupled with Workplace Supervisor’s Reports, these forms provide an invaluable insight into the performance of each student.

**AND**

* **Workplace Supervisor’s Report (for Vocational Learning)**

**OR**

**Statement of Attainment or academic record from an RTO (for VET).**  
The Statement of Attainment from a registered training organisation (RTO) must be provided in order for students to achieve at the higher levels. This is in addition to the student evidence of learning outlined above. Where a Statement of Attainment was the only evidence provided to moderators, they were in many cases unable to confirm teacher assessment decisions. A signed letter from the principal detailing the VET units and the corresponding VET results will suffice if no RTO record is available.

All forms are available on the SACE website ([www.sace.sa.edu.au](http://www.sace.sa.edu.au)) and it is important to note that it is a requirement that teachers use the relevant SACE forms rather than creating their own templates.

Students were better placed to achieve well in performance when it was clear that the required hours were undertaken. When students had obviously undertaken the required hours, but no Workplace Supervisor’s Report was available or located, a conversation between the teacher and employer/supervisor is sufficient and can be stated so on one of the Teacher’s Report on Student Performance forms. A student should not be penalised or given an ‘Insufficient’ or very low grade because the Workplace Supervisor’s Report form has not been returned by the workplace host or employer.

It was also noted that some students were being asked to complete more than one performance task, each with a significant number of hours over the suggested 50–60 hours. It appeared that some of these students were being penalised for completing only one assessment, despite the minimum hours being reached. In these instances, teachers are encouraged to refer to the subject outline for clarification of the assessment scope and requirements.

Students who achieved at the highest levels included their own ‘voice’ and showed their knowledge and understanding through a journal, photo stories, or verbally, rather than though a reflective recount piece. The best place for such reflective writing is the two reflection tasks in Assessment Type 3: Reflection.

Scaffolded booklets may assist some student to include their knowledge and understanding, but overly scaffolded work may also prevent students from achieving higher standards due to the limitations of the question-and-answer style. Journals or portfolios that show what students have learned and how they have applied their learning allow them to achieve at higher levels.

For students who are less comfortable with providing a written or multimedia presentation, knowledge and understanding, and application in performance can be demonstrated through conversations. It is important in these situations that an oral recording is submitted for confirmation purposes.

Assessment Type 3: Reflection

For the reflection assessment type, the 20-credit subject must include at least two reflection tasks, and the 10-credit subject must have at least one reflection task. Students provide evidence of their learning in relation to the assessment design criteria of:

* knowledge and understanding
* investigation and analysis
* reflection and evaluation.

The most important aspect to note for the reflection assessment type is that these tasks are in no way associated with the evidence provided for Assessment Type 2: Performance. There must be distinct tasks that ask students to reflect on and evaluate their learning in a range of contexts.

Task design that allows for students to reflect on learning and to self-evaluate generally allows for higher grades to be achieved. Students generally performed best when tasks were clearly linked to a learning activity which students had undertaken. For the 20-credit subject, it is strongly recommended that each of the two tasks be different to allow the students to meet the performance standards to the highest possible standard. Where students reflected in exactly the same way (for example, on two similar work experiences, or even twice on the same experience), insufficient evidence of their engagement with the learning criteria was generally found.

Students achieved best where they had the scope to investigate, reflect, and evaluate, rather than just answer questions given by a teacher, and achieved well when tasks reflected and evaluated their vocational learning holistically, rather than merely acting as a recount of their performance. It was also evident to the moderators that students were able to achieve at higher levels when tasks were designed to allow them to self-evaluate rather than evaluate their workplace or industry.

The subject outline does not include a word limit for the reflection. Where a word-limit was included in the design of the task, this often hindered students’ ability to address criteria at a high standard.

## External Assessment

Assessment Type 4: Investigation

Students provide evidence of their learning in relation to the assessment design criteria of:

* knowledge and understanding
* investigation and analysis
* reflection and evaluation.

This year for the first time there were more practical investigations than issues investigations, perhaps reflecting the fact that teachers are feeling increasingly comfortable with providing students the opportunity to choose the task most appropriate to their own learning style, learning needs, and chosen vocation. It was generally evident where students were not provided with the opportunity to choose their focus, and in most of these instances the students were not able to meet the performance standards to a high standard, often due to the fact that much of the learning or reflection and evaluation was not contextualised for the individual.

It is strongly recommended that teachers avoid providing all students in the class with the same task for the investigation. In instances where all students completed overly simplistic class tasks such as ‘Occupational Safety’ or ‘Drugs in the Workplace’, there was generally limited engagement with the information and limited evidence of analysis or evaluation. Many of these tasks were also overly scaffolded and did not allow students to engage with their learning on a more sophisticated level. Where students were allowed to choose their own focus question, the quality of work was generally higher than classes where work was standardised.

It is also important that students understand the difference between presenting information (such as facts, statistics, and graphs) and analysing the information and what it has taught them about their chosen topic. Having information from more than one source, and more than one source type, is helpful in allowing students to synthesise and analyse a range of viewpoints before coming up with their own opinion or conclusion about an idea or task. While a survey can be a helpful way of gathering information, it is not always effective when the respondents are not necessarily involved in the chosen industry or have limited knowledge of what the student is investigating. In many cases therefore, while it was evident that significant investigation had taken place (specific feature IA2) through surveys and other methods, it was not always evident that the student had adequately analysed the relationship between these issues, tasks, and practices (IA1).

One important note to consider is the appropriate use of appendices in both the practical and issues investigations. Appendices are useful only to illustrate or support the body of the text, for example, when providing evidence of the completion of preparatory work with photos, surveys, interviews, and the like. However, this year markers noticed an increase in students using appendices to circumvent the word limits (maximum of 2000 words for the 20-credit subject; maximum of 1000 words for the 10-credit subject). Markers must be able to find all evidence needed to provide a grade in the body of a student’s work. Students’ directing markers to find the evidence in an appendix often limited their achievement. So too, did students who presented the data in their report and the analysis of the data in their appendix, rather than choosing the most appropriate components of the analysis to include in the body. Where evidence of reflection and evaluation, or analysis, or knowledge and understanding was provided only through an appendix, this was not sufficient evidence that the assessment design criteria had been addressed.

Issues Investigations

As in previous years, the most successful investigations started with an appropriate question — worded as an actual issue — that students could engage with and investigate. Where a clear and appropriate issue was defined, students were generally more likely to engage with their research in a meaningful manner. Some students were not well-served by their issue, with students using topics and themes rather than issues and therefore not addressing many of the criteria for assessment. Topics such as ‘Workplace Health and Safety’, ‘Drugs in the Workplace’, ‘CEO Investigation’, ‘Bullying’, ‘Harassment’, ‘Scaffolding in the construction industry’, or ‘Work-life Balance’ are examples of work that generally struggled to meet the minimum requirements for this task. Simply creating a meaningful issue out of these broad topics would have, in many cases, alleviated these problems.

Markers once again noted that the students who performed the best for their issues investigation were able to link their chosen issue to their own workplace context. This allowed for more sophisticated investigation and analysis, and knowledge and understanding to be demonstrated.

The most successful students also made sure to reflect on and evaluate their learning in regard to their own career decisions and how this issue will impact on them as they transition to the workforce. Students who reflected on or evaluated their performance in the assessment task (such as their own time management), generally only met this performance standard to a limited degree.

Where teachers provided detailed and restrictive scaffolds for students, markers noted that it was difficult to find evidence at the higher levels of achievement. These highly prescriptive tasks also limit the students’ ability to effectively investigate and analyse their findings.

Practical Investigation

The most successful practical investigations asked for students to demonstrate their involvement in a real-world activity related to their focus industry. Many of the more successful practical investigations included a multimedia component, such as videos, photos, or other evidence. Markers found that, where students referenced their practical in a written report without providing any supporting evidence in their work (such as annotated photos and so on), it was difficult to confirm their learning at the higher levels.

In some of the less successful practical investigations, students were asked to imagine their involvement in a particular work-related task. In these instances, students were unable to address analysis, reflection, or evaluation to an appropriate level, as they were generally attempting to do so for something that they had never actually completed. It is highly recommended that teachers avoid using such imagination tasks with their students.

Other less successful practical investigations included how-to guides, as most students simply created the guide without completing any other processes to support their achievement. A better approach, if using a how-to guide, is, for example, creating a how-to guide and showing it to industry experts for feedback and then making changes which are addressed in a written reflection and evaluation; these processes could address many of the assessment design criteria to a more sophisticated level.

It is essential in the cases where students have researched and completed a task with a tangible outcome that there is evidence provided of the finished product. For example, students who have completed a video guide for completing a work task, need to ensure that the video is submitted (perhaps on DVD) with the investigation.

Conversely, some practical investigations submitted contained only the evidence of completion of the task (such as a video, how-to guide, or poster). This effectively demonstrates knowledge and understanding for most students, but almost completely neglects investigation and analysis, and reflection and evaluation. It is highly recommended that students completing a practical investigation have a separate component that addresses each of these assessment design criteria in some way.

Students who were most successful reflected on and evaluated the impact of their finished product on their learning, rather than merely discussing how well they completed a process. It was noted that where students utilised specific headings, such as ‘Reflection and Evaluation’, they were much more likely to meet this performance standard to a satisfactory standard.

## Operational Advice – School Assessment

School assessment tasks are set and marked by teachers. Teachers’ assessment decisions are reviewed by moderators. Teacher grades/marks should be evident on all student school assessment work.

Teachers are increasingly using the addendum section of the learning and assessment plan (LAP) to indicate changes to their plan over the year. This, at moderation, made it evident that teachers had personalised the learning to meet the needs of all students in their group. When coupled with the appropriate use of the Variations — Moderation Materials form, moderators were able to have a more complete picture of the students, thus helping in the confirmation of teacher standards.

Packaging and presentation of materials for moderation was generally done well this year. However, a few key items for teachers to consider when packaging materials for final moderation are listed below:

* Ensure that a complete set of task sheets is included along with the LAP. This is important, especially if there are no cover sheets attached or no indication of which assessment standards or which criteria have been assessed.
* Ensure that student work is organised and preferably has marks or assessment standards shaded by the teacher with supporting comments. This helps the moderation team to confirm assessment decisions made by the teacher.
* Ensure that all work is clearly labelled for each student. When tasks are missing, a Variations — Moderation Materials form must be included. Otherwise, it can be difficult to determine how grades were obtained and to verify teachers’ assessment decisions.
* Ensure that, for Assessment Type 2: Performance, all relevant forms are included in the materials submitted for moderation. These include: Teacher’s Report on Student Performance — Vocational Learning, Teacher’s Report on Student Performance — VET, or Report on Performance as a Personal Carer; Workplace Supervisor’s Report, where applicable; and Agreement to Use Part-time or Casual Employment for Study, where applicable.
* Schools that applied a maximum word-limit often limited the chance for students to succeed at a higher level against all the criteria. There are no stated word limits in the subject outline, except for the externally assessed investigation.

Offering students a range of presentation methods — written, oral, or multimodal – can allow for better results.

## Operational Advice – External Assessment

It is important that the investigation is presented in the appropriate manner for external assessment. This means:

* the external assessment cover sheet is attached with industry focus, the question, and the word-count clearly written
* all work is de-identified
* all work (including DVDs, USBs and other additional materials) is labelled with the correct SACE registration number
* where print-outs of additional information (such as PowerPoint presentations) are provided, text must be in a font size that can be read by the marker.

## General Comments

It is clear that the most successful Workplace Practices programs are those that can be tailored to and encompass each student’s individual industry focus. It is apparent that when students are supported to focus on a particular career or industry, they are able to make meaning of their learning and can see the relevance of the topics covered in each assessment type.

It is also important that student learning such as VET training and work placement are undertaken in the same year in which the subject is taking place. This ensures that work is being used only for this subject, that students have adequate recollection of their learning to effectively reflect and evaluate, and that the SACE Board can adequately determine that work or VET has not been used in other areas to contribute to a student’s SACE completion.

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