Society and Culture

2011 Assessment Report

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

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OVERVIEW

Assessment reports give an overview of how students performed in 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 choosing Society and Culture has remained strong in both country and city schools, and across all sectors. Many more schools have taken up the 10-credit option for this subject.

In the first year of this new course it seems that teachers may not be confident about using the performance standards, or in designing tasks that best allow students to meet the performance standards. Attendance at clarifying forums gives teachers an opportunity to discuss benchmark pieces of student work and ask questions about the interpretation of performance standards.

The most successful students in both 10-credit and 20-credit subjects provided convincing evidence against the performance standards in response to well-structured and interesting tasks. The most successful tasks were based on recent contemporary issues or events that engaged the students' interest. Students were less successful when they responded to tasks that appeared to be retained from the previous curriculum statement without modification. These tasks often required the students to provide evidence against criteria that no longer exist in the new subject outline, for example 'defining social myths' and 'analysing competing demands'. Students need to focus on the current assessment design criteria and specific features as described in the performance standards. Teachers should ensure that they are using a current Society and Culture subject outline.

Where teachers had designed tasks that required students to meet a few specific features relevant to that task, students were better able to demonstrate their learning because they had a clear focus. Where teachers had included all, or most of the specific features in any one task, or where there was too much background information about the topic, students struggled to provide evidence of their learning in any depth. Moderators found such tasks difficult to interpret and commented that being presented with too much information rather than clear, concise instructions about the actual assessment requirements may have disadvantaged students.

Teachers are reminded that it is not necessary to allocate a weighting to each task as the intent is to award a grade to each assessment type in a holistic way.

SCHOOL-BASED ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 1: Folio

Moderators commented that teachers seemed more confident and more accurate in marking the folio than the interactive task. Moderators noticed that teachers often rewarded evidence of research as if it were evidence of analysis, which sometimes inflated student grades. Similarly, grades were inflated when teachers rewarded students for providing evidence of 'outdated' criteria.

As in previous years, the most popular topics were Youth Culture, Cultural Diversity, Social Ethics, and A Question of Rights. Most teachers began the course with one of the Group 1 Topics on Culture; this seems to be a good way to engage students in understanding the learning requirements in relation to an aspect of society that particularly interests them.

Most students showed skill in providing evidence of their learning in relation to learning requirements 1, 2 and 4 which focus on investigation and analysis of contemporary social issues, and the nature and causes of social change from a variety of perspectives. However, they were not so confident in providing evidence against learning requirements 3 and 6.which focus on power and connections within and between societies. At times, moderators found it difficult to find any evidence in students' work of an understanding and analysis of how power operates in societies. Where teachers had specifically written a question about power, students were more successful in providing evidence of their learning.

Often students' understanding of the ways in which societies and cultures are connected was implicit rather than being clearly evident. Again students best demonstrated this understanding when teachers had constructed a task with a question specifically related to this learning requirement.

Most evidence submitted for this assessment type was in written format and nearly all students adhered to the word count. It was pleasing to see that where students had submitted multimodal, oral or visual evidence, the time limits were adhered to and generally students provided evidence of the appropriate specific features as described in the performance standards.

While referencing sources was, on the whole, well done, it appeared to moderators that there are still students who do not know how to reference in a consistent manner, or omit doing so altogether. This knowledge and skill is assessed under *evaluation and communication* in the performance standards. Students and teachers are advised to refer to the SACE Board website for guidelines on appropriate referencing.

Assessment Type 2: Interactive Task

The interactive task has two components: a group activity and an oral activity. Generally, evidence of the oral activity was stronger than the group activity, however, across the full range of students, there were some outstanding group activities.

While there were many commendable group activities, there were still too many presented for moderation that did not provide sufficient evidence of students' learning for moderators to make a judgment about the standard of the work. Where teachers

provided evidence of group work on DVDs it was clear to moderators how they had made their assessment decisions; moderators were most appreciative of this evidence.

The best group activities were those that involved the students in real and worthwhile social action. Some of these activities included: organising an activity to raise money for overseas aid; organising and participating in a fund-raising walk; presenting a role-play at school assembly on an issue such as bullying or reducing litter; organising peer support activities for Year 8 students; visiting a nursing home and providing entertainment; putting up a display in the local council offices; writing a protest song and performing live to an audience to raise awareness; or organising a petition to change food choices in school canteens.

In some group activities there was no evidence of social action provided at all. When students also did not provide evidence of an evaluation of the effectiveness of their social action, moderators were not able to assess whether any social action had occurred. Team work and group work is highly valued by employers, as well as being required by the tertiary sector, so the group activity provides students with an important opportunity to develop the skills needed for their future. It was clear that when the group activity was done well, the students had really enjoyed and benefitted from working in a group.

Many teachers included the assessment design criterion of *analysis and investigation* in the interactive task even though this criterion is not required in the subject outline and does not have to be assessed. Having a focus on the specified criteria and specific features allows students to demonstrate knowledge and skills in collaboration, which may not be assessed elsewhere in the course. Providing an opportunity for students to focus on developing knowledge and skills in one aspect of their learning allows them to demonstrate this in greater depth rather than demonstrate their learning for a range of criteria, but in less depth.

Allowing students to link the oral activity to the group activity worked well as students were able to explore a particular aspect of an issue chosen for the group activity in much greater depth and complexity. Moderators were very appreciative of the provision of oral evidence on DVD or USB. Where students had strengths in oral presentation it was to their advantage for the moderators to be able to see evidence of the performance standards being met to the highest level. This ability is often not conveyed fully in notes. For advice on how to present multimodal or oral evidence for moderation, teachers are referred to the *Learning Area Manual*.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 3: Investigation

Except where specifically stated, the following comments apply to both the 10-credit and 20-credit subjects. Both require evidence against the same performance standards, and it is only the word limit that differs.

Students chose a wide range of interesting topics covering a number of contemporary social or cultural issues for their investigation. Successful students developed guiding questions which provided the focus for their investigations. Teachers are advised to check the support materials on the SACE Board website for

examples of the most interesting and successful guiding questions and hypotheses submitted by students in 2011:

Many markers noted that most students who chose to investigate local issues presented outstanding, interesting research. The quality of their guiding questions, and the interest and knowledge of members of the local community interviewed, encouraged analysis at the highest level.

Teachers and students are advised not to duplicate topics chosen for investigation within the same class. While this is not prohibited by the subject outline, it suggests that students are not aware of the full range of social issues that are possible; limited viewpoints then tend to occur in students' evidence. Markers noted that where whole classes that had almost exactly the same question for every student there was little opportunity for discrimination between students. There are so many contemporary, local, and global issues to be investigated, that students are best advised to choose an issue in which they are really interested, and different from other topics chosen by students in their class.

There was more evidence in the 10-credit subject (than in the 20-credit) of whole classes of students choosing the same topic or aspects of the same topic, and then using exactly the same processes and methodologies to process their investigation. This scaffolded approach may have supported some students, but it also prevented students from demonstrating evidence at the highest level of the performance standards. Most students in this situation carried out surveys because they had been instructed to do so, but without thinking about its relevance to their particular topic. When using surveys students need guidance in using and analysing the data obtained, and understanding its limitations. Since many of these surveys were distributed amongst peers, the information gained was often not at all helpful, and again prevented the students from demonstrating evidence of learning at the highest standard. Students undertaking the 10-credit option need to have a narrow, sharply-focused question or hypothesis, and to be very precise in every aspect of their investigative report.

Markers were pleased to note that students are generally choosing appropriate interviewees who are qualified to speak on their topic/or issue. On the whole, students were more able than in previous years to differentiate between when to use a survey and when to use an interview to provide the best primary evidence. In the 20-credit subject there was less reliance on surveys that were given out to a group of peers. This kind of survey usually provides little useful information or data. The choice of 'real' issues, and selecting relevant and keenly interested people to survey or interview, leads to a clear 'student voice', and appropriate 'ownership' of the research outcome. Overall this leads to a better result in demonstrating evidence of the assessment design criteria. Many markers commented that using primary sources that are relevant and useful is the key to a successful investigation.

Where students rely heavily on the internet for their research, they need to demonstrate that they can discern relevant and appropriate sites from the less relevant ones. Students are still quoting from American websites as if the data or information provided automatically applies to Australian society. Students also need to be aware of the date on which the web site was published. Some made the mistake of calling their secondary information 'current' when it was dated 2005.

Most investigations were well-structured, and within the word limit, although teachers need to be alert for plagiarism. Word limits need to be printed on the front cover of the investigation; often this was not done. Those students who did not follow a report

structure submitted evidence that was more like a research essay than an investigation, and these students found it hard to provide evidence of the criteria at the highest standard. Similarly when students had too many focus questions (some had five or six) they were not able to provide the depth of knowledge and understanding required by the performance standards.

Students should avoid dot points as these do not allow for depth of analysis, or depth of understanding. Many students made the mistake of presenting their conclusions in dot point form with no further elaboration about how and why these 'conclusions' had been reached.

Students are advised against giving details about a changed topic as this wastes precious words that could be used in analysis or evaluation. Each sentence or paragraph of the investigative report should be clearly focused on showing evidence of one of the specific features from the performance standards.

Where students chose an issue to investigate that seemed to be more closely linked to Health, Geography, Tourism or Science, they generally maintained a focus on the social and cultural aspects, and their evidence was congruent with the performance standards for Society and Culture. Markers commented favourably on the wide range of topics, chosen by this year's cohort, which showed the full scope possible in this subject.

There were still some superficial investigations submitted, generally on topics such as Hooning, Body Image, Video Game Violence, Obesity, Media Celebrities, or Abortion. Students struggle to find a clear focus with such topics, especially if the guiding questions or hypotheses are so broad that they do not allow for the demonstration of evidence at the highest standard.

It was clear that the students who took the time to craft a well-focused and concisely stated investigation topic were the most successful in demonstrating the depth and complexity required by the highest level of the performance standards. Students who relied heavily on personal opinion or loose generalisation that was not well substantiated by other sources generally were not able to meet the assessment design criteria.

Students found the assessment design criterion of *investigation and analysis* the most difficult to demonstrate in their evidence of learning, especially the specific feature of the ways in which power structures operate in societies. Often this feature was ignored altogether. Knowledge and understanding of how societies and cultures are connected and interdependent, was also not well done.

OPERATIONAL ADVICE

Moderators noted the following operational matters:

- There appeared to be some misunderstanding about the inclusion of a Learning and Assessment Plan with moderation materials. Often this was not included at all, or the same plan for every student was included.

- As is specified in the Learning Area Manual, it is necessary to include only one Learning Assessment Plan (with addendum if required). It was pleasing to see that the addendum was being used appropriately.

- Hard cover or plastic-sleeve folders should not be included in bags. This is stated in the *Society and Culture Learning Area Manual* and teachers are

reminded that it is necessary for them to read the current information for this subject in order to understand and comply with instructions for moderation.

- It is helpful for moderators to have task sheets included with student work.

- Often moderators were distracted by too many teacher corrections (such as for incorrect spelling), making it difficult for moderators to keep 'the thread of the student voice'. Where teachers had attached performance standards to each assessment type and indicated on these where the student's achievement level was, this was most helpful to moderators.

- Teachers are reminded to include the required number of examples of students' work for each assessment type. Where work is missing without completion of the Variations in Materials for the Sample for Final Moderation form in the Learning Area Manual it is very difficult to make a sound moderation decision.

- It was clear to moderators that some teachers had not used the performance standards from the current subject outline, but had assessed work with a numerical mark (weighted differently for each task and at times for each criterion) and often against outdated assessment criteria. It is the intent of the new subject that a student's evidence be assessed holistically across each assessment type. Where marks are used for assessment, they must reflect the current performance standards.

- Moderators appreciated the clear labelling of the folio and interactive task on the outside of the sample bags, together with the student number.

- In the external assessment many students attached appendices, such as mind maps, annotated bibliographies, pamphlets, surveys and other papers. This is *not* advised. Please refer to the *Society and Culture Subject Outline*.

- Teachers must not put any comments, ticks, corrections, or results information on students' work for external assessment.

- Many investigations still had student and school names clearly visible. The Learning Area Manual has instructions about the preparation of materials for external assessment. The school number and students' SACE registration numbers must be used instead of school and student names.

- Survey graphs, if included, need to be able to be interpreted by moderators; students are advised *not* to use several shades of the one colour for column or pie graphs as it is almost impossible to distinguish between them. Contrasting colours should be used.

- All type fonts should be easily legible. Students are advised *not* to use 'double shadow' fonts that are very difficult to read.

- Students are advised to use objective language that is appropriate for this genre. There should not be any swearing, any colloquial language (unless used appropriately in an interview quote), any preaching to the reader, or lengthy personal opinion that is not supported by evidence. An investigation is more than an opinion piece.

- Some investigations were labelled as Studies of Societies and used criteria such as 'competing demands'. Markers were concerned that teachers and students had not familiarised themselves with the new, current subject outline.

GENERAL COMMENTS

On the whole it was evident to markers and moderators that most students and teachers had interpreted the new subject outline and its performance standards very well. More than in previous years there was an exciting array of topics explored in the school-based assessment and in the external component.

Moderators agreed that participating in the moderation process was a most beneficial professional development experience.

Society and Culture
Chief Assessor