

Outdoor Education

2014 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.

Forty-one schools offered Outdoor Education in 2014, with a total enrolment of 384 students.

Information is continually being added to the SACE website — including learning and assessment plans, coursework exemplars, annotated work samples, and practical checklists — to form an excellent reference point for teachers.

Schools designed their teaching programs to best use the skills of their staff and the available natural environments to provide worthwhile practical skills. The best assessment designs also reinforced the theoretical components of the course.

It is important for all teachers, especially new teachers, to attend sessions run by the SACE Board. Teaching programs and tasks must follow the subject outline. Many teachers have taken the opportunity to share their ideas and work, which also assists in the correct interpretation of this document and provides an excellent resource for new teachers. Teachers are advised to refer to the subject operational information.

Students who performed well in all course components clearly displayed evidence of reflection and analysis in their responses in order to show a high level of understanding. Students should be encouraged not to produce short responses that are heavily based on secondary sources, or diary-type journal entries that do not address the criteria.

## School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Folio

There was a variety of assessment tasks presented for moderation. These gave students the opportunity to complete tasks in a range of assessment modes, including written tasks, tests, and video, multimodal, and oral presentations.

It was evident that those students scoring highly in this component were given tasks which enabled them to display skills of analysis, understanding, reflection, application, communication, and evaluation. Students who performed at a lower level focused heavily on repeating information from texts with little interpretation and analysis. It is important in task design that students are given the opportunity to meet all assessment design criteria, and that tasks allow for high levels of evaluation, analysis and reflection.

It was pleasing to see that tasks were given suitable word-limits. It is important to ask questions that allow students to provide responses that demonstrate a depth of knowledge and critical analysis. It is worthy of note that the 30% externally assessed investigation has a maximum word-count of 2000 words. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that students could display evidence of practical knowledge and skills, investigation and critical analysis, and communication in fewer than 2000 words in coursework tasks. In fact, many students perform better in shorter tasks, as they are encouraged to focus on meeting the criteria rather than just recalling information and observations.

Tasks should be directly related to course topics, allowing students to apply their knowledge of environmental studies, planning and management practices, sustainable environmental practices, and leadership and planning. In some tasks it was difficult to link the task with the course. It also should be noted that students are not permitted to ‘double-dip’ by using coursework tasks that have been assessed in the practical performances associated with the outdoor journeys or self-reliant expedition components. An example of this is when students have completed a risk management plan in the folio section and have not modified this plan for their outdoor journey or individual practical.

If oral or multimodal presentations are being used, it is important that these are filmed or taped for presentation at moderation in a way that is readily accessible to moderators so that there is evidence of marking against the criteria. There is a list of supported electronic formats on the SACE website.

If assessing communication skills, students need to be encouraged to use photos, display information in a variety of ways, use relevant data, and seek expert opinions to achieve highly in this area.

Assessment Type 2: Group Practical

The outdoor journeys component continues to be the foundation of this subject. Students have again generally scored well in this component, as its practical nature meets the needs of most of the students. It was pleasing to see a wide range of journeys and locations used, with students enjoying worthwhile and rewarding experiences and linking these journeys to coursework.

It was also pleasing to see the majority of teachers using the assessment pro forma available from the support materials on the SACE website and running expeditions that met the criteria of three days minimum. There should be good reasons why some of the criteria on the assessment sheets are not marked. Teachers are highly encouraged to provide written comments on the assessment pro forma which gives better feedback to the student and then subsequently to the moderating team to help them gain a better understanding of the ability of the student.

Standard pro formas on the SACE website should be used unless amended with permission by the SACE Officer — Curriculum responsible for the subject. Such approval should be sought at the time of approval of the learning and assessment plan (LAP).

At least one of the expeditions must be of a lightweight and nodal nature. It is good teaching practice to involve the students as much as possible in the planning of these journeys as preparation for their self-reliant expedition (Assessment Type 3).

It should be clear to the moderators the planning that students were involved in before the trip, their risk management strategies, the location, and the route followed.

For assessing investigation and critical analysis, and reflection and evaluation, there needs to be evidence of this in the moderated material. For assessing practical knowledge and skills, it is only teachers who make the assessment, using practical knowledge and skills checklists.

Assessment Type 3: Individual Practical

All students should keep a planning folio and this should be submitted as evidence for moderation. It is important to know what tasks were allocated to each student. Students who scored highly in this component displayed clear evidence of thorough and well-documented planning.

High-achieving students responded with clearly enunciated emotional and cognitive responses. This evaluation and reflection is not a diary of what they did, but a critical analysis of planning, risk management, and running of the expedition.

As the reflection is one of the final pieces, it is a good opportunity for students to show what they have learnt throughout the year. Students should be encouraged to deconstruct the assessment and the criteria used in order to maximise opportunity for critical analysis and reflection. This assessment type must be written and has a limit of 1500 words.

As with the group practical, it is important that teachers use the self-reliant practical checklist and are highly encouraged to write comments to allow moderators to get a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of students.

This practical should allow high-achieving students to plan and conduct the expedition in a self-reliant manner with minimal input from the teacher. As safety is a priority, students must have experience in the chosen activity from the group practical or from previous years.

Teachers need to shadow their students while they are completing the self-reliant practical and use checkpoints, meeting points, and communication systems to ensure safety of their students, as well as also being able to validate their grading of the journey.

## External Assessment

Assessment Type 4: Investigation

Markers commented on the good standard and range of environmental issues investigated. The best assessment design enabled students to clearly identify an issue and create debate. The investigation should be directly related to an expedition. It is strongly recommended that students and teachers work closely in selecting an investigation that allows the student to meet all assessment design criteria.

Successful investigations had students using an appropriate range of primary data sources, including observations and photos taken while on the expedition, which were then used as the foundation of their report. The students had included expert material from appropriate and relevant sources, and clearly linked their findings to secondary data. They were prepared to critically examine a range of perspectives and management strategies.

Reflection clearly articulated emotional and cognitive responses and made a genuine connection to the issue and the environment that the students travelled through. It is important that the students present their findings and analysis and not get caught up in overusing secondary data, which then limits the student’s performance against the assessment criteria.

Successful investigations used tables, images, graphs, and visual materials effectively and referenced them correctly. These investigations also handled their analysis and discussion components correctly by not introducing new data.

Good investigations had subheadings to define the topic being discussed, a clearly stated investigation process, and continual use of referencing, either from expert opinions or secondary data.

It is again important to note that the generic cover sheet found on the SACE website should be used. A word-count should be included.

Although it is encouraged that each student has their own particular question that they will be investigating, students can have related topics. As stated above, it is imperative that the issue revolves around a journey with photos taken by the student.

This assessment type should contain no reference that identifies the school or the student.

## Operational Advice

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.

The LAP addendum needs to be used and submitted to indicate generic program changes. A Variations — Moderation Materials form needs to be included if students have special provisions that result in a change to the assessment for a particular student, or have incomplete materials for moderation. The form should also be used if there is a breach of rules and a penalty is applied by the school.

Moderators appreciated those teachers who followed the guidelines in the subject operational information for the submission of student work. These are a few points of clarification for teachers to ensure that moderation proceeds smoothly:

* Include clear task sheets for each piece of student work, as it gives moderators an understanding of what the task involves and how it is being assessed against the criteria.
* Include the LAP and a marks spreadsheet for the class which separates the marks for coursework, outdoor journeys, and self-reliant expeditions. It also helps when the tasks are clearly labelled and not just called ‘Task 1’, ‘Task 2’, etc.
* A complete set of summative tasks which corresponds to the LAP should be identified in the sample
* The criteria that were listed to be assessed in the LAP need to correlate with the tasks given during the year.
* Folio tasks and practicals should have the students’ SACE Board registration numbers clearly marked to assist in the moderation process.

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