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Outdoor Education

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.

Forty-eight schools offered Outdoor Education with an enrolment of 617 students. The subject provides opportunities for students to develop skills such as leadership, group cooperation, organisation, and self-reliance within an environmental context.

Schools continue to use available natural environments to assist in developing worthwhile practical skills and learning.

It is important that all Outdoor Education teachers understand the learning requirements, specific features, and assessment design criteria of the Outdoor Education subject outline. Clarifying forums are an excellent opportunity for teachers to share their ideas and work under the guidance of a subject expert. Such interaction assists in the correct interpretation of the subject outline and provides an excellent resource for all teachers.

Subject operational information (SOI) is available online on the SACE website and from each school’s SACE coordinator. The requirements of the SOI need to be followed.

It was evident that students who performed well in the course components clearly displayed a depth of analysis and reflection in their responses. Such responses were encouraged by better task design which required students to provide genuine emotional and cognitive responses to their environmental experiences.

Short responses that are heavily based on secondary sources, or diary or journal-type entries that do not address the assessment design criteria should be discouraged.

The content of this report can be clarified by referring to information on the SACE website, where exemplars of learning and assessment plans, coursework exemplars, annotated work samples, and practical skills checklists are available.

## School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Folio

This assessment type provides students the opportunity to complete tasks in a range of assessment modes such as written tasks, tests, video, multimedia, and oral presentations.

One folio assessment must relate to the topic Environmental Studies. The focus of the other folio topics should relate to the topics Planning and Management Practices, and Leadership and Planning.

Good task design enabled students to display investigation skills, critical analysis, knowledge, and communication. It was evident that those students who achieved in the higher grade bands were given specific features to address for each piece of work.

Good task design will encourage students to use personal photos, display information in a variety of ways, access relevant data, and seek expert opinions. Such use needs to be relevant to the topic and augment evidence of learning.

It was pleasing to see that most tasks were given suitable word-limits without restricting the students’ ability to demonstrate depth of learning. It is reasonable to expect that students could display evidence of a depth of practical knowledge and skills, investigation and critical analysis, and communication in less than 2000 words in folio tasks.

Students who performed in lower grade bands focused heavily on information from secondary sources, with little investigation or critical analysis. The over-scaffolding of some tasks resulted in students not being able to display a depth of learning.

It was difficult to link some task design with the specific features of the assessment type. Tasks such as navigation and weather tests are not appropriate. First aid courses need to be supported with outdoor scenarios so that students can demonstrate investigation and critical analysis, and communication specific features.

It also should be noted that students are not permitted to present the same task in a different assessment type. Reflections from group practicals or risk-management plans that have been assessed in practical performances associated with the outdoor journey or self-reliant expedition components cannot be used for the folio.

If oral presentations or multimedia presentations are being submitted, it is important that these are filmed or taped for presentation at final moderation in a way that is readily accessible to moderators (e.g. .AVI files) and that there is evidence of assessment using the relevant assessment design criteria. Before submitting these presentations, the teacher should check each to determine that they work.

Assessment Type 2: Group Practical

The outdoor journeys component is the foundation of Outdoor Education subjects.

Students generally score 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 which were linked to coursework.

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.

It is helpful that moderators know what planning students were involved in before the trip, the risk management, and the location and the route followed.

Teachers must use the skills checklists available as support materials on the SACE website to assess the practical skills component of this assessment type. Teachers are encouraged to write written, detailed comments on these checklists in order to provide feedback to the student and allow the moderating team to gain a better understanding of the depth of learning of the student.

Evidence of learning for this assessment type should be in the form of skills checklists (to assess practical knowledge and skills) and a multimedia presentation, oral presentation, or written response (to assess investigation and critical analysis, and reflection and evaluation).

Teachers should use the performance standards to indicate the depth of student learning in investigation and critical analysis, and reflection and evaluation.

Assessment Type 3: Self-reliant Practical

This assessment task should allow students to plan and conduct the expedition in a self-reliant manner with minimal input from the teacher.

Good task design requires students to document all aspects of their planning thoroughly. This planning folio is then submitted as evidence of student learning at final moderation. Where required, the original work of the student should be clearly indicated.

Better student responses displayed a depth of reflection and evaluation, with good emotional and cognitive responses throughout. Such reflection and evaluation focused on a critical analysis of the planning, risk management, and running of the expedition. As the reflection is one of the final pieces of assessment, it is a good opportunity for students to show what they have learnt throughout the year.

As with the group practical, it is important that teachers use the self-reliant practical skills checklist. Teachers are encouraged to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the student.

A performance standards sheet should be used to indicate the final assessment of the student for the self-reliant practical.

Teachers need to shadow their students while they complete the self-reliant practical and use checkpoints, meeting points, and communication systems to ensure safety of their students. Such practice also allows teachers to validate their grading of each student’s journey.

All self-reliant trips need to be lightweight and nodal.

As safety is a priority, students must have previously experienced the chosen activity in the group practical or in previous years.

## External Assessment

Assessment Type 4: Investigation

Markers commented on the range of environmental issues investigated.

Good task design encouraged students to clearly identify an issue that created debate and was directly related to an expedition. It is strongly recommended that students and teachers work closely in selecting an investigation topic that allows the student to meet all assessment criteria.

Students in the upper grade bands used a range of primary data sources, including observations and photos taken while on the expedition. This primary data was then used as the foundation of their report. The same students included expert material from appropriate and relevant sources and clearly linked their findings to secondary data. They were prepared to consider a range of perspectives and management strategies while examining these critically. It is important that students address the criteria using ecological and sustainable management language and not drift off topic and discuss economic and tourist information.

Students in the upper grade bands clearly articulated genuine emotional and cognitive responses and made a genuine connection to the issue and the environment they travelled through.

It is important that the students present their findings and analysis from the field and not get caught up in overusing secondary data which then limits the student’s performance against the assessment criteria.

Tables, images, graphs, and visual materials were used effectively and were usually referenced in the analysis and discussion and not used to simply increase the length of the report.

Good investigations had subheadings to define the topic being discussed, a clearly stated investigation strategy, and continual use of referencing either from expert opinions or secondary data. It is important to distinguish the difference between writing an investigation based on an environmental issue and a research project.

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. Any words over the limit will not be read.

Although it is encouraged that each student has his or her own particular question to investigate, students can have related topics. As stated above, it is imperative that the issue revolves around a journey with photos taken by the student. It is important to know if the photos are taken by the student or are from a secondary source.

## Operational Advice

School assessment tasks are designed and graded by teachers. Teachers’ assessment decisions are reviewed by moderators. Teacher grades should be evident on all student school assessment work. Accompanying teacher annotations are helpful for the moderation team.

Where a learning and assessment plan (LAP) is amended, the addendum section needs to be completed and submitted to show course changes.

A Variations — Moderation Materials form needs to be included if a student’s work is subject to special provisions or variations, or has incomplete materials for final moderation.

During final moderation, moderators commended those teachers who followed the guidelines in the subject operational information for the submission of student work.

There are a few points of clarification for teachers to ensure that moderation proceeds smoothly:

* Include task sheets for each piece of student work, which gives moderators an understanding of what the task involves and how it is being assessed against the relevant assessment design criteria.
* Include the LAP, and a marks scheme for each task. It also helps when the tasks are clearly labelled and not just called ‘task 1’, ‘task 2’, etc.
* Ensure that a complete set of summative tasks for each of the students identified in the sample is included. By not including all work, teachers take the risk of their students being disadvantaged.
* All criteria listed to be assessed in the LAP need to correlate with the assessment practice for each task.
* Learning materials for each student should be easily identifiable to assist in the moderation process.
* The investigation should have no reference to the school.

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