Modified Subjects: Subject Assessment Advice

Overview

Subject assessment advice, based on the previous year’s assessment cycle, gives an overview of how students performed in their school assessments in relation to the learning requirements and assessment design criteria, set out in the relevant subject outline.

Teachers should refer to the subject outline for specifications on content and learning requirements, and to the subject operational information for operational matters and key dates.

Considerations when assessing modified subjects

Modified subjects are designed to allow students with significant impairment in intellectual functioning and/or adaptive behaviours to demonstrate their learning in a range of challenging and achievable learning experiences. Setting of appropriate goals is key to ensuring students achieve learning at the highest standard possible. Personal learning goals (PLGs) are negotiated by individual students with teachers and significant others working closely with the student as they know the student well and his/her learning priorities and transition plans. Negotiated PLGs will be an indicator of the capabilities that require focus.

School assessment

Assessment is school based for modified subjects. Learning and assessment plans (LAPs) are developed by teachers to meet individual student learning needs and approved by the school’s principal (or delegate). Teachers ensure a high quality curriculum is delivered to students studying modified subjects. The principal or the principal’s delegate ensure plans meet all the requirements listed in the learning and assessment plan checklist.

Teachers assess each student’s evidence of learning in relation to these documented PLGs and capabilities and assign a result of ‘completed’ or ‘not completed’ for the modified subject. For a result of ‘completed’, the student’s evidence of learning demonstrates achievement against:

* the personal learning goals identified for the student
* one or more of the capabilities selected for development in the subject.

It is important that:

* assessment tasks provide the scope and opportunity for students to demonstrate effectively that their learning has been achieved
* the number of assessment tasks match the requirements for a 10 or 20 credit subject.

Personal learning goal (PLG) development

Effective goal-setting is pivotal to successful delivery and assessment of the Modified Subjects. Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time defined (SMART) goals are foundational to defining learning in the modified subjects. Evidence is collected from assessment tasks undertaken by the student while engaged in learning linked to negotiated PLGs. Evidence of learning directly linked to identified goals and capabilities is needed to confirm a ‘completed’ decision.

The following should be considered to successfully develop and document PLGs:

* negotiate relevant and aspirational PLGs in consultation with the student and key people around the student
* SMART principles are recommended as a way of defining personal learning goals. Use of the SMART acronym is a good way to assist in reviewing, refining, and amending goals, ensuring that they are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely
* these principles have been broadened into SMARTAR goals. The ‘AR’ referring to goals that are *agreed* upon and *reviewed* further. The addendum section of the LAP provides a place to document reviewed goals
* SMARTAR goals make for better and more transparent ‘completed’ and ‘not completed’ assessment decisions for teachers

Less successful goal development and assessment:

* occurred when goals were broad, generic and ambiguous
* failed to specify assessment tasks and provide evidence of learning reflective of documented PLGs
* did not enable sufficient evidence of learning to be collected to substantiate that learning was successful
* used assessment tools not applicable to modified subjects. Grades, performance standards and rubrics with graduated statements indicating how well students met their goals are not required.

Capabilities development

To ensure students are supported to develop individually relevant capabilities teachers are encouraged to have a sharp focus on a few capabilities (one or more) that benefit the student rather than attempting to develop all five in every subject. There are two subject exceptions:

* Personal Learning Plan: Modified (PLM) requires communication, personal development, and learning to be developed and demonstrated; citizenship and work are optional.
* Research Project: Modified (RPM) requires development of learning and one other chosen capability relevant to the student’s project.

Review

The SACE Board, in partnership with schools, undertakes quality assurance of the modified subjects through a review process. The review is designed to ensure that a school’s interpretation and application of ‘completed’ and ‘not completed’ assessment decisions in compulsory modified subjects are consistent with the state-wide interpretation before students receive their final results in the subject.

The modified subjects that are reviewed which allow students to meet the compulsory requirements of the SACE are:

* Stage 1 Personal Learning Plan: Modified
* Stage 1 English: Modified
* Stage 1 Mathematics: Modified
* Stage 2 Research Project: Modified.

Schools that have had assessment decisions confirmed in two consecutive years are not required to submit samples the following year. The SACE Board advises schools that are required to participate in the review at the commencement of the school year as a part of the state-wide triennial cycle.

Teachers provide samples of students’ work for the review process in accordance with the requirements in SACE Board guidelines. On a cyclic basis, schools are asked to nominate a teacher to act as reviewer. The SACE Board provides formal feedback to principals regarding the outcomes of the review, and teachers ensure final results reflect the review outcome and recommendations. Two reviews were held in 2019, one in each semester, with the majority of results being reviewed in Semester 2.

Teachers are reminded to include for review:

* a copy of the approved learning and assessment plan (LAP)
* a copy of the Stage 2 Research Project: Modified — school planner, if applicable
* a completed student description sheet(s). This should include their background, adjustments required, learning needs, and the specific PLGs that align with the evidence of learning provided.

Student work samples

Evidence for assessment tasks was primary evidence, secondary evidence, or a mixture of both, depending on the student’s or group’s level of development.

* Primary evidence took the form of student work — written, visual, and oral, such as photo boards, self‑assessment, journals, and reflections.
* Secondary evidence included teacher checklists; written, photographic and video observations documented by teachers/educators, as well as by family and key people from adult agencies; and material prepared by scribes.
* An increase in the variety of assessment activities was noted including more use of multimodal evidence such as blogs, videos and ‘live’ examples.

Students with higher support needs were necessarily dependent on collection of secondary evidence to document their learning.

There must be sufficient evidence in samples to demonstrate that student learning has been achieved in a way that is needed by the student. The learning should be internalised so that the skill/understanding can be applied again and, if necessary, generalised.

Successful student work samples:

* showed evidence of solid and meaningful learning
* matched and were clearly linked to identified PLGs and capabilities
* provided evidence of learning in a range of settings and formats rather than an ‘event’
* showed clear progression of student learning as they worked towards their PLGs.

Successful samples:

* were correctly packaged and presented, containing:
* a completed [student description sheet](http://www.sace.sa.edu.au/documents/652891/ca7aed5e-bf64-462d-9260-8ceddd618308?v=1) that documents the student’s personal learning goals and chosen capabilities, and outlines the learning context (e.g. student background, adjustments required, and learning needs) for each student in the review sample
* a copy of the relevant approved learning and assessment plan(s)
* a copy of the [Stage 2 Research Project: Modified — School Planner](http://www.sace.sa.edu.au/documents/652891/0045b72a-93ba-4334-83ad-f992cfea1be0?v=1), if applicable.
* provided insight into all adjustments required in the student description sheet
* a detailed student description assisted reviewers to gain a concise understanding of the student’s functional capacity. For example, if a student experiences barriers to learning as a result of limited concentration span, include this rather than a general statement that the student has a mild intellectual disability. This enables reviewers to consider evidence of learning in the correct context. Detailed descriptions made evidence much more powerful as a record of student learning.
* documented adjustments to PLGs to describe any variations that occurred over the teaching and learning program to the individual goals in the LAP and student description sheet
* ensured personal learning goals and capabilities in LAPs correlate directly with those used in the student description sheet
* had a range of tasks broad enough to enable students to demonstrate learning
* linked described goals and capabilities in the LAP to samples of learning with signposting and annotation
* used technology that could be easily accessed on general IT platforms and followed the SACE guidelines on submission of non-written materials.

When the packaging and presentation of review samples followed the guidelines and were referenced to the learning goals and capabilities it was straightforward to conduct the review process and to confirm schools’ assessment decisions.

Less successful review samples:

* did not include one or more of the required sample elements, e.g. student description sheet or approved LAP
* did not clearly identify student work with either SACE registration number or name
* identified personal learning goals on the student description sheet that did not correlate to those on an approved LAP and/or addendum or within the student work sample
* confused task completion with learning goal achievement
* assigned school developed performance standards to student work
* had insufficient breadth and number of tasks to allow students to demonstrate achievement of learning goals
* did not adjust goals to reflect student achievement
* provided evidence that that was not accessible by reviewers such as unclear photographs or inaccessible video, PowerPoint, sound bites and other information technology.

General comments

Delivery and assessment of Modified Subjects in the SACE requires teachers to be familiar with the Stage 1 and Stage 2 Modified Subjects information and resources, which are available on the Modified Subjects minisite. Teachers delivering, and administrators managing, the delivery of modified subjects are advised to participate in professional development activities organised by the SACE Board. Opportunities for planning and clarifying support are available through the online platform, PLATO. Topics such as setting personal learning goals, designing tasks, and compiling samples of student work for review are covered. Teachers are advised to seek guidance from the Modified Subjects SACE Officer prior to developing and delivering learning programs for Modified Subjects.