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Modified Subjects

2016 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.

## School Assessment

Modified subjects are designed to allow students with identified intellectual disabilities to demonstrate their learning in a range of challenging and achievable learning experiences. There is a continuing increase in the diversity of students accessing modified subjects, and also an increasing number of students accessing both modified and mainstream subjects to complete their SACE.

Modified subjects are available from the nine learning areas of the SACE curriculum at Stage 1 and Stage 2, and additionally include the Stage 1 Personal Learning Plan: Modified and the Stage 2 Research Project: Modified. Modified subjects may be studied as a 10-credit subject or a 20-credit subject at Stage 1, and as a 10-credit subject or a 20-credit subject at Stage 2. The Stage 1 Personal Learning Plan: Modified and the Stage 2 Research Project: Modified are 10-credit subjects.

For Stage 1 and Stage 2 modified subjects, assessment is school based. Modified subjects are structured differently from other subjects, as teachers design assessments to enable students to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and understanding that they have developed to achieve their personal learning goals and to develop their capabilities.

Personal learning goals are negotiated by individual students with teachers and others who are working closely with the student, and who know the student well and his or her learning priorities and future directions. Negotiated goals can be a good indicator of the capabilities that require focus.

Teachers assess each student’s evidence of learning in relation to these documented goals 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:

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

Review

The SACE Board, in partnership with schools, undertakes quality assurance of students’ results in 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 a compulsory modified subject are consistent with the statewide interpretation before students receive their final results in the subject.

The modified subjects 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 statewide triennial cycle.

Teachers provide samples of students’ work for the review process in accordance with the requirements in the Stage 1 and Stage 2 Modified Subjects Information and 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. Two reviews were held in 2016, 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 program (LAP)
* a completed student description sheet(s) (the student description sheet is available on the Modified Subjects minisite) — this should include the student’s background, accommodations required, learning needs, and the specific personal learning goals that align with the evidence of learning provided
* an assessment decision of ‘completed’ or ‘not completed’
* a copy of the Stage 2 Research Project: Modified — School Planner, if applicable.

Personal Learning Goals

Specific, measurable, and achievable yet aspirational goals define learning in the modified subjects. Evidence is collected from assessment tasks undertaken by the student while engaged in learning linked to negotiated personal learning goals. Evidence of learning directly linked to identified goals and capabilities is needed to confirm a ‘completed’ decision.

**The more successful school responses**

* occurred when SMART principles were applied in the defining of 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. SMART goals make for better and more transparent ‘completed’ and ‘not completed’ assessment decisions for teachers.
* included detailed descriptions of students in student description sheets. This assists reviewers to gain a concise understanding of the student’s needs. For example, if a student has significant behavioural issues and a limited concentration span, including this rather than a general statement that the student has a mild intellectual disability ensures reviewers consider evidence of learning in a correct context. Detailed descriptions made evidence much more powerful as a record of student learning.

**The less successful school responses**

* had broad, generic and ambiguous goals.
* provided evidence of learning not consistent with or reflective of documented goals
* used assessment tools not applicable to modified subjects. Grades and rubrics with graduated statements indicating how well students met their goals are not required, as students are assessed as ‘completed’ or ‘not completed’ against their personal learning goals and chosen capabilities.
* did not include one or more of the required sample elements, e.g. student description sheet or approved LAP
* did not adjust goals to reflect student achievement
* provided only broad, generalised descriptions of students, which prevented reviewers from attaining a correct insight into learning directions and achievements.

**General information**

As effective goal-setting is pivotal to successful delivery of the modified SACE, the following should be considered when developing and documenting goals:

* Broad goals can be useful to describe learning needs for a broad group of students, but must be adjusted to reflect individual goals for particular students to ensure requirements are realistic and aspirational for each individual student. For example, a learning goal might be ‘to improve skills in the practical use of mathematics in a range of everyday situations’. To show improvement, both a starting point and an ending point are needed, so that evidence can clearly and explicitly show improvement over time. For example, detail of specific student learning goals in relation to the everyday use of mathematics could be clarified in the adjustments to personal learning goals as ‘Student 1 [name] will learn to use a bus timetable to catch the bus in time to get to school.’
* Specific assessment tasks should be aligned to the student’s personal learning goals. However, there does not need to be one task for each personal learning goal. It may be that there are two or three assessments that contribute evidence to a particular personal learning goal.

Teachers are encouraged to have a sharp focus on a few capabilities (one or more) rather than opportunities to develop all five in the assessment overview on the LAP. There are two subject *exceptions*:

* Stage 1 Personal Learning Plan: Modified requires communication, personal development, and learning to be developed and demonstrated; citizenship and work are optional.
* Stage 2 Research Project: Modified requires development of learning and one other chosen capability relevant to the student’s project.

Student Work Samples

The evidence submitted at both reviews in 2016 was from students with a range of intellectual disabilities, mild to severe. 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, 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.

If a student has severe and multiple disabilities and is unable to provide any primary evidence of learning, evidence is adult-driven on behalf of the student. This secondary evidence may be supplied by teachers, school support officers, and key outside people/providers in the form of reports, checklists, videos, anecdotal reports, and annotated photographic evidence.

Many schools provided a great amount of detail in annotating individual pages of student work to cross-reference personal learning goals and capabilities. In some folios of student work, evidence of learning was arranged by personal learning goals, while in others the evidence was organised by assessment task. Signposting evidence simplified the review process and ensured evidence was considered in a context that was correct.

Rigid guides as to the quantity of evidence have not been set to avoid imposing a rigidity that would curtail flexibility of approach that teachers must have when developing individual learning programmes for students accessing the modified SACE. It is important, however, that evidence in samples is sufficient to demonstrate that the student has learnt the goal set at a sufficient level; that is, that learning has been internalised and the skill/understanding can be applied again and, if necessary, generalised. The evidence in samples provided for review should document solid and meaningful learning rather than an event.

Video and Photographic Evidence

Photographic evidence continues to be used as an effective tool to capture evidence of students achieving and demonstrating their personal learning goals. Some schools used photographs of multiple students undertaking group work, to assist in demonstrating, for example, the personal learning goal ‘able to work with others’. The annotation of photographs with respect to personal learning goals and capabilities supported reviewers during the review process.

While some video evidence was submitted, it was very limited.

Checklists

The use of checklists as a part of evidence collection is an excellent method of evidence collation for a multifaceted task, if the checklists are annotated correctly. A variety of checklists were used as secondary evidence of student learning. A number of schools used checklists to cover particular aspects of assessment tasks and also annotated photographic evidence to demonstrate student participation in the tasks. Some evidence showed explicit checklists, annotated and signed off by a teacher, in relation to a variety of tasks. This evidence was augmented by compiling photographic evidence showing the student completing different elements of the task.

Checklists were also used to demonstrate development of student skills during the course of the subject. This was particularly useful where a personal learning goal was to demonstrate an ‘improvement’ in a particular skill.

## Operational Advice

School assessment tasks are set and marked by teachers. Teachers’ assessment decisions are confirmed by reviewers during the review process.

**Successful review 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, accommodations required, and learning needs) for each student in the review
* a copy of the relevant approved learning and assessment plan(s)
* a copy of the Stage 2 Research Project: Modified — School Planner, if applicable
* included detailed descriptions of students in student description sheets. This assists reviewers to gain a concise understanding of the student’s needs. For example, if a student has significant behavioural issues and a limited concentration span, including this description rather than a general statement that the student has a mild intellectual disability ensures that reviewers consider evidence of learning in a correct context. Detailed descriptions made evidence much more powerful as a record of student learning.
* used the addendum to document adjustments to personal learning goals to describe any variations that occurred over the teaching and learning program.
* ensured that personal learning goals and capabilities in LAPs correlated directly with those used in the student description sheet.

When the packaging and presentation of review samples followed the guides and was 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:**

* had material missing from packages
* 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.

Teachers are reminded to refer to the Modified Subjects minisite for advice on preparing materials and electronic information to be submitted for review. There is also a one-page information sheet titled ‘The preparation and packaging of materials for Stage 1 and Stage 2 modified subjects review’ for assistance.

When submitting video and/or photographic evidence in the review package, teachers should ensure that the student materials are in a format that is accessible during the review. Electronic files can be submitted on a CD, DVD, or USB drive.

## General Comments

Personal learning goals are the foundation of meaningful subject development and delivery in the modified subjects. The evidence provided by the majority of schools confirmed that students accessed relevant content that met students’ present and future needs. It was clear that students undertaking modified subjects are accessing opportunities to develop and further their learning in different settings, including making meaningful links with post-school destinations.

Overall there is an increasing confidence in the implementation of the modified SACE with students accessing meaningful individualised learning programs supported by LAPs that had a manageable number of appropriate personal learning goals to be demonstrated and a judicious selection of capabilities to be addressed.

On occasions, particularly when a student had been enrolled in a modified subject but continued to access content in a mainstream class, the development of student-centred goals was not evident. In some cases, grades were assigned to assessment tasks. Teachers are reminded that grades are not necessary for modified subjects, as the assessment decision is ‘completed or ‘not completed’ in relation to the personal learning goals.

Reviewers noted that many staff working in the area of modified subject may be new to the field and may not have attended training and development sessions, most notably the planning and clarifying support workshops. New teachers to modified subjects would benefit from attending these support workshops in 2017, as topics such as setting personal learning goals, designing tasks, and compiling samples of student work for review are covered. Teachers who participated in support workshops and/or a review process in 2016 commented on the benefits of the experience, the professional development it offered, and the opportunities to have professional dialogue with other special educators.

Teachers unable to attend support workshops are advised to seek guidance from the Modified Subjects SACE Officer prior to developing learning programs within the modified SACE. Teachers are also reminded to familiarise themselves with the relevant sections of the Stage 1 and Stage 2 Modified Subjects Information and Guidelines 2017, which is available on the Modified Subjects minisite.

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Chief Assessor