Society and Culture

2013 Chief Assessor's Report

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

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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.

In 2013 the number of students enrolled in Society and Culture decreased slightly, in both 10-credit and 20-credit versions of the subject.

Nevertheless, the quality of the work submitted for moderation was again excellent; students continued to exhibit a pleasing engagement with relevant and contemporary social and cultural topics and issues. The achievement of students in school assessment was largely consistent with that of previous years. It is clear that most teachers understand, and are able to apply, the performance standards with confidence.

On the whole, moderators were pleased to note that teachers had structured their tasks to cater for a wide variety of student abilities and interests, and endeavoured to maximise students' success. There was an emphasis on recent current events as topics for analysis. Students were encouraged to provide evidence against the performance standards in a variety of formats — not just written or oral, but also multimodal forms, which made creative use of available technology. However, it was disappointing to see some evidence of the use of old terminology (e.g. competing demands in relation to social change) in examples of materials for assessment tasks. In addition, some teachers used historical marking scales in the assessment of student responses. All teachers should familiarise themselves with the most recent (2014) subject outline, available on the Society and Culture minisite.

Moderators were pleased at the generally high standard of packaging of material for moderation, and noted that this was an improvement on previous years. As requested, work was submitted by assessment type and not by student. Learning and assessment plans were included with student materials. Most teachers included task sheets and circled or shaded performance standards. Because the main aim of moderation is to confirm teachers' judgments, the inclusion of materials indicating how teachers have reached their assessment decisions makes this process much more straightforward. It is also most helpful if students' work is clearly marked either by name or by SACE registration number.

When an assessment type is made up of a number of tasks (for instance, a folio comprising four tasks), moderators stressed the importance of attaching marks sheets, or other identification of standard, to each task, as well as an overall grade for the assessment type. This would eliminate one problem that was apparent in some moderation materials this year: the difficulty of confirming grades when there appeared to be a mismatch between the evidence presented and the grade attached to the student work, or when there was no indication at all of how the grade had been achieved. Since judgments about student achievement are made according to

evidence of the specific features from the assessment design criteria, it is important for the moderators to know which specific features have been used by teachers in the assessment of student evidence.

SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 1: Folio

Overall, moderators found a sound standard of work in the folio tasks. Student work demonstrated clear evidence of the selected specific features of the assessment design criteria. The most successful tasks directed students to focus on a small range of specific features, which were most suited to the particular task. The least successful tasks included all the specific features from the assessment design criteria for every task. This made it harder for students to demonstrate achievement at the highest level. Some teachers used colour-coded task sheets, which undoubtedly helped to direct students to the selected specific features addressed in the designated task.

Moderators also noted that most folio tasks continued to reflect a preference for written responses from students, and that there was a pleasing adherence to the word count. However, there was also a noteworthy effort by teachers to encourage multimedia responses to tasks. Students were more successful in demonstrating their learning in relation to the highest levels of the performance standards when there was an emphasis on analysis and evaluation of source material, and not just a creative use of technology. On the other hand, moderators also remarked that some tasks, such as tests, were inappropriate for the folio assessment type.

The most popular topics selected for the folio were, as in previous years: Cultural Diversity and Youth Culture from Group 1; Social Ethics and Technological Revolutions from Group 2; and A Question of Rights and People and Power from Group 3. On the whole, topics chosen clearly reflected contemporary issues. Topics that focused too much on a historical issue or that had a context with no reference to Australian society or culture, tended to disadvantage students.

It was clear to moderators that students achieved well when given tasks that were written succinctly without too much detailed instruction or too many parts to be addressed. The most successful tasks gave explicit directions, set out clearly the selected specific features of the assessment design criteria, asked students to use skills of social inquiry, and focused on current issues, while engaging students' interest.

Assessment Type 2: Interaction

This assessment type requires two separate tasks, a group activity and an individual oral activity. Moderators could not find evidence for both these tasks in some nominated student work in the moderation materials; evidence of student work for both tasks must be submitted for moderation purposes.

The group activity always presents particular challenges for moderators in confirming teachers' assessment decisions, but is made much less complex when clear evidence of student achievement against the performance standards is submitted. Some students presented comprehensive folios of work, documenting collaborative group work, self and peer assessment, photographs of activities undertaken as part

of the social action, discussion notes, filmed presentations, and audience feedback, all of which was very helpful to the moderators. Moderators noted the helpfulness of written comments from teachers, assessing the contribution made by each student in the group. On the other hand, it was difficult for moderators to confirm teachers' assessment judgments when only limited evidence was supplied.

The collaborative social action should follow on from, and be directly related to, preliminary research undertaken collaboratively by the group. The more successful groups did not limit themselves to secondary source research, presented insightful evaluation of the information collected from a variety of perspectives, and made a clear link with the chosen social action. The less successful group activities produced folios consisting largely of printed secondary sources that lacked any annotation or analysis. This material was neither necessary nor useful in confirming teachers' judgment.

Some of the more authentic and effective social actions were linked to the local community, and the most successful tasks were those where students were given a choice of activities. Interesting social actions included:
- organising an alcohol/ drug awareness campaign day for the school cohort
- collecting exercise books and stationery to donate to a school in a developing country
- volunteering for a day in a local aged care facility
- participating in Slum Survivor (run by TEAR Australia)
- conducting awareness-raising activities with a junior secondary class
- writing to, and lobbying, politicians about homeless youth in Adelaide

Less effective social actions — which gave students limited opportunity to achieve at the highest levels of the performance standards — included activities that were limited to the students' own class, or to, for example, writing a letter to a politician, who may or may not have replied.

The more successful oral activities were those where students were given a context to frame the task; for instance, 'You are to be the spokesperson for a human rights group, charged with enlisting support for a particular issue…'. It was pleasing that evidence from most students was provided for an oral presentation. Transcripts, cue cards, and recordings were the most common forms of evidence.

The evidence of student achievement is vital in supporting assessment decisions. When materials are packaged clearly, task sheets, as well as an overall grade, are attached to student work, and the evidence of students' learning is in their own voice, the process for moderators to support teachers' judgments is simplified.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 3: Investigation

The overall standard of investigations in 2013 was consistent with that of previous years. The most successful featured:
- analysis of a range of sources and perspectives, especially expert primary sources
- a focus on current and/or controversial social issues
- adherence to the structure suggested in the current subject outline
- the use of consistent referencing.

Markers commented that students were successful when teachers had supported them to understand and use the skills of social inquiry. Students should also be encouraged to draft and edit their investigation.

As in previous years, a wide variety of investigation topics were selected by students, including perennial favourites, such as body image, the raising of the driving age, animal welfare, cyber-bullying, and child obesity. Although some of these topics are chosen because of the wealth of easily accessible material online, this does not necessarily mean that they lead to successful investigations. Students can easily be drawn into a report in the style of a 'literature review', allowing them to demonstrate little or no evidence of learning in relation to the specific features of the assessment design criteria. On the other hand, such topics resulted in successful investigations when the hypothesis or guiding question devised by the student was clear and well focused, and led to analysis and evaluation from a variety of perspectives.

Local topics, or topics recently in public debate and the media, led to the most successful and most interesting investigations. Examples were based on issues such as:
• performance-enhancing drugs in sport
• effects of video gaming
• the opt-out organ donation system
• legalisation of same-sex marriage
• Australian attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers
• compulsory vaccination of children
• issues to do with elderly people and aged care
• the impact of P-plate restrictions on young drivers
• teenage depression
• the legalisation of euthanasia
• teenage smoking
• the impact of social media.

Students who successfully investigated these topics had accessed primary data, especially from interviewees with relevant expertise. A simply survey of classmates resulted in a lack of knowledgeable opinion and did not allow for deep analysis. The most successful investigations also sourced sound, up-to-date secondary sources as the basis for discussion and analysis. Students were advantaged when investigations were structured with three or four focusing questions linked to the hypothesis or guiding question. Focus questions that reflected the assessment design criteria for this assessment component were also a useful way for students to ensure that these were explicitly addressed. Markers noted, however, that when it was apparent that a teacher had given students a detailed scaffolding, this sometimes discouraged them from developing an investigation focus that might have been more appropriate for their topic.

Good local topics included:
• the implementation of marine parks in South Australia
• measures to curb violence in the Adelaide CBD
• the need for greater police presence in outer metropolitan areas
• the Adelaide Oval redevelopment
• whether or not dogs should be banned on suburban beaches
• the lack of public transport in specific suburbs
• impacts on the local community of the redevelopment of the Henley Precinct
• the impact of human beings on the cuttlefish population in South Australia

- the threatened extinction of honeybees in South Australia
- the food truck phenomenon as a reflection of Australia's multiculturalism
- the impact of the introduction of iPads to a metropolitan primary school.

Such topics gave rise to in-depth analysis and discussion, and students were able to demonstrate sound knowledge and understanding of local issues. This was particularly the case for schools that encouraged students to look at community-based issues where a variety of opinions could be canvassed and local people were willing to be interviewed by students. Local media reporting was often a good starting point for these topics.

Markers commented that most students chose relevant and current social issues. However, some students needed better guidance in their choice of topic, which stretched the definition of a 'social issue' ('The building of a new cinema complex negatively impacts local business') or were of limited relevance to Australian society ('European legislation prohibiting the wearing of religious symbols') or were too broad and lacking in focus.

Most students included a range of sources in their research, although markers noted that there was a trend towards using easily accessible sources, especially Internet blogs; this was disappointing and limited students from achieving at the highest levels. For analysis of primary research, some students did little more than describe data collected from surveys conducted among a small group of peers. Successful students chose appropriate and expert interview subjects and gained authoritative evidence for their investigation. The more successful investigations showed awareness of other forms of ethnographic research also, such as action research in the form of observation, or the collection of photographic evidence. Students used this evidence to analyse and synthesise various perspectives and points of view on their topic, and ultimately to critique or support their hypothesis or guiding question. Students need to be aware of, and state, the limitations of any primary or secondary sources used in the investigation.

In summary, the most successful investigations:
- involved contemporary social or cultural issues that were open to discussion and debate, and had an Australian context
- had clear and succinct hypotheses or guiding questions
- structured analysis and discussion around focus questions
- used expert primary sources, supported by secondary sources
- evaluated the sources for reliability and bias
- provided evidence of multiple perspectives on the issue
- explicitly addressed the reasons for social change as they relate to the topic
- used a consistent referencing system
- contained a succinct conclusion summarising the findings and addressing the limitations of the study
- adhered to the word limit
- were carefully drafted and edited to ensure the effective communication of ideas, knowledge, analysis, and conclusions.

OPERATIONAL ADVICE

Use of Learning and Assessment Plan Addendum

Moderators were pleased that many teachers used the addendum to the learning and assessment plan effectively to signal amendments to the course, particularly refinements made in response to clarifying forums.

Most moderation bags included a learning and assessment plan as well as a full set of tasks with students' work. Teachers are reminded that this is a requirement of the SACE Board.

Packaging and Presentation of Materials

As noted earlier, moderators praised the standard of packaging this year. Most materials were packaged with care and in accordance with the SACE Board's advice to teachers.

Markers commented that students had taken much more care this year not to identify themselves or their school in the external investigation.

Students and teachers are reminded that it is not necessary to submit survey questions and/or responses, or interview transcripts, as appendices to the investigation. Markers do not take these into consideration when grading student work. Any analysis of these sources should be included in the main text of the investigation.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The overall quality of student responses across all assessment components and types indicated that most students had engaged with the course and enjoyed many aspects of the topics studied.

Teachers who have participated in marking and/or moderation commented on the benefits of the experience and the professional development they gained. All teachers are strongly encouraged to register their interest in joining one of the assessment panels for this subject.

Chief Assessor
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