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Modified Subjects

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.

## 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. One subject in each of the nine learning areas is provided in modified form, plus the Stage 1 Personal Learning Plan: Modified and the Stage 2 Research Project: Modified.

Modified subjects from the nine learning areas of the SACE curriculum 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 Personal Learning Plan: Modified may be undertaken as a 10-credit subject at Stage 1. The Research Project: Modified may be undertaken as a 10-credit subject at Stage 2.

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.

Teachers assess each student’s evidence of learning 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:

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

Personal learning goals are developed and negotiated, and may be a good indicator of the capabilities that require focus.

Personal Learning Goals

Specific, measurable, and achievable yet aspirational goals define learning in the modified subjects. The goals are best 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. Evidence is collected from assessment tasks undertaken by the student while engaged in learning linked to negotiated personal learning goals.

Best practice was noted by reviewers 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.

In some cases, personal learning goals were quite generic and applied to a group of students as outlined on the learning and assessment plan (LAP). However, these generic goals should be supported by personalised goals for each student that may be on the ‘Adjustments to Personal Learning Goals’ section (a new section on the LAP for modified subjects from 2015) or the addendum. The personalised goals should reflect the context and content of the subject undertaken as defined by the key areas and target capabilities.

Reviewers noted that wording of personal learning goals continues to be an important issue. Considered wording of goals is important if student achievements are able to be best acknowledged. Broad goals can describe learning needs for a broad group of students but may set up unrealistic requirements for some. This is where the adjustments to personal learning goals section is essential in identifying the individual goals for particular students. 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.’

There should be a mention of the key area(s) of learning chosen in the learning program design section of the LAP. However, the key areas of learning are not compulsory and the lists in the subject outline are not exhaustive. As a guide, a 10‑credit subject should include at least one key area of learning, and a 20-credit subject should include at least two key areas of learning.

Reviewers noted that there is often a tendency for teachers to focus on too many capabilities. 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*:

* 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.

Teachers are reminded that the 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.

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 state-wide 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

2015 saw the introduction of changes to the confirming phase of the quality-assurance cycle for modified subjects. Schools participate in the review process until their assessment decisions are confirmed in two consecutive years. Schools have been informed of the transition arrangements to a state-wide 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. Schools may also wish to nominate a teacher as an additional 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 2015, 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 LAP, a completed student description sheet(s) (the student description sheet is available on the Modified Subjects minisite), and a copy of the Stage 2 Research Project: Modified — School Planner, if applicable. The student description sheet needs to identify and describe up to three students. This should include their background, accommodations required, learning needs, and the specific personal learning goals that align with the evidence of learning provided.

Student Work Samples

The evidence submitted at both reviews this year was from students with a range of intellectual disabilities, mild to severe. It is interesting to note that there is a continuing increase in the diversity of students using modified subjects and in the diversity of evidence provided of learning.

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, teacher observations, material prepared by scribes, and photos.

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 outside providers in the form of reports, checklists, videos, and annotated photographic evidence.

Reviewers commented that the review samples were very good at showing actual student learning and demonstrating a student’s knowledge, skills, and understanding.

Consequently, it was generally easy for reviewers to find evidence to support the assessment decision of the student’s learning. 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.

Video and Photographic Evidence

Given the specific requirements of curriculum delivery and assessment in modified subjects, there were many interpretations and systems using video and photographic evidence to capture student learning and demonstrate personal learning goals and capabilities. While some video evidence was submitted, it was very limited. The use of still photographic evidence continues to grow.

As in previous years, photographic evidence was the most commonly supplied evidence from both special schools and mainstream schools. Some schools managed to use photos to capture, on multiple occasions, evidence of students achieving and demonstrating their personal learning goals. Other schools used photographs of multiple students undertaking group work, to assist in demonstrating for example, the personal learning goal ‘able to work with others’. This was very pleasing, as it showed a range of students in a single classroom undertaking learning applicable to their specific needs. The variety of photographs used by schools is also encouraging, as it gave the students a wide range of opportunities to show evidence of their learning in a variety of different situations and places. The annotation of photographs with respect to personal learning goals and capabilities supported reviewers during the review process.

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. 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. Electronic files can now also be submitted on a USB drive. Reviewers recommend that each student’s work be presented in a separate file or folder on the CD, DVD, or USB drive.

Checklists

The use of checklists as a part of evidence collection, if annotated correctly, is an excellent method of evidence collation for a multifaceted task. 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

It was encouraging to see a number of schools using the new section of the LAP, adjustments to personal learning goals, to describe any variations that have occurred over the teaching and learning program to the individual goals.

As success in a modified subject is focused on development of particular capabilities and achievement of personal learning goals, it is essential that these are constantly monitored and reviewed. Adjustments to personal learning goals for specific students within a similar group may be required to ensure goals are developmentally appropriate. Details of adjusted goals for individual students should be documented in the adjustments to personal learning goals section, once the LAP has been approved.

The addendum should be used to identify any changes to assessment tasks and this should be included with the approved LAP for review.

For clarity, personal learning goals and capabilities in LAPs should correlate directly with those used in the student description sheet provided for review. Where there are major discrepancies between the approved LAP and the evidence provided, the addendum must be used to record any changes. Reviewers noted the importance of assessments tasks that correlated with an approved LAP.

Reviewers praised the standard of packaging this year. The packaging and presentation of the majority of review samples were very good, making it straightforward to conduct the review process and to confirm schools’ assessment decisions. However, in a few cases, there were difficulties with material missing from packages or not being included. This was particularly the case in relation to personal learning goals identified on the student description sheet not correlating to those on an approved LAP and/or addendum or within the student work sample.

## General Comments

Relevant course development and delivery demonstrated a deep understanding of students’ learning needs through consultation and inclusion of key people in the development of student goals. Negotiated personal learning goals are the foundation of meaningful subject development, learning, and assessment. Evidence provided by the majority of schools confirmed that students accessed relevant content. Much of the assessment evidence documented learning that met students’ present and future needs. It was clear that students undertaking the modified subjects are accessing opportunities to develop and further their learning in different settings including possible post-school destinations.

On occasions when a student had been enrolled in the modified subject but continued to access content in a mainstream class, the development of student-centred goals was not always 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.

While reviewers noted improvement in the use of the student description sheet, this is still an area for development. Some schools did not use the description sheet as well as they might have, using only broad, generalised descriptions of students. 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 assists reviewers to gain a concise understanding of the student’s needs. Detailed descriptions made evidence much more powerful as a record of student learning.

Overall, it was pleasing to see more schools developing and using LAPs with a manageable number of personal learning goals to be demonstrated and judicious selection of capabilities to be addressed. A small number of schools listed for assessment all the capabilities, along with numerous personal learning goals that were very precise and descriptive, which created workload issues for teachers, schools, and students.

Reviewers noted that many staff working in the modified subjects area 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 2016 as topics such as setting personal learning goals, designing tasks, and compiling samples of student work for review are covered. Teachers who participated in a review process this year commented on the benefits of this experience and the professional development it offered. Teachers unable to attend support workshops are advised to seek guidance from the Modified Subjects SACE Officer.

Teachers are reminded also to familiarise themselves with the relevant sections of the Stage 1 and Stage 2 Modified Subjects Information and Guidelines 2016, which is available on the Modified Subjects minisite.

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Chief Assessor