

Child Studies

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

Assessment Type 1: Practical Activity

It was positive to see effective task design that used language from the performance standards. Often student success in the higher grade bands was achieved when the teacher explicitly communicated the language of the performance standards through the task sheet. Task design that assessed specific features that directly related to the task often resulted in a more successful outcome.

It was refreshing to see a range of ways to present an action plan. For example, students who need greater scaffolding benefited by presenting their action plan in a table with clear headings; this format provided them with the opportunity to clearly meet the specific features being assessed.

It was often noted that issues identified in the action plan should relate directly to the practical task, rather than identifying and presenting research on the issues identified. When addressing the issues and strategies of the task, students who achieved in higher grade bands were provided with clear guidelines, so that there is definitive evidence that the students have understood the task requirements. More successful action plans provided specific reasons for decisions when justifying.

Although improvement was identified in the link to technology within action plans, there is still room for improvement to make this link within individual evaluation reports. The specific feature E2, ‘appraisal of the impact of technology on the health and well-being of children’, ideally should relate directly to the practical application. When task design focused on the use of technology within the context of our society, students’ achievement in the higher grade bands was noticeable, as they could analyse and reflect on results of the practical application.

It was pleasing to see a continuation of the trend towards strategic selection of specific features to be assessed across tasks; however, there is still room for improvement, particularly when assessing individual evaluation reports. Assessing all four specific features of evaluation often reduced opportunities for the student to provide evidence against the performance standards which were ‘insightful’, ‘sophisticated’, and/or ‘in-depth’. Assessing fewer specific features in the individual evaluation report allowed for a better connection to the practical application. Students who were graded in the lower grade bands often provided a recount for the individual evaluation report, which does not support an insightful or well-considered response. In contrast, the students who achieved in the higher grade bands clearly demonstrated each selected specific feature in detail. Other improvements that students could potentially make to their individual evaluation reports include such features as a critique of the processes and outcomes, what did and did not work and why, future improvements, and how the outcome could be modified to further develop the idea.

It must be acknowledged that there has been a significant improvement in the student evidence presented for practical application. Photographs relating to the assessment design criteria and supported by written captions allowed for explicit evidence against the performance standards. One suggestion for improvement is to include an image of the final product as part of the evidence sheet. An image of the final product will assist the moderation panel during the reviewing process. Often two pages of practical evidence was appropriate; however, in some cases no photographs and limited written captions narrowed the evidence to support the grade provided. As each practical activity does not require an individual evaluation report (for the 20-credit subject), the student evidence is very important.

It was inspiring to see the high standard and quality of the practical applications, including a variety of creative ideas. Students often demonstrated innovative ideas when interpreting the practical application. However, pamphlets and baby simulators are not suitable practicals. The broad topic of protective behaviours was covered well, with a variety of creative ideas for tasks. Other successful topics included road safety, being sun smart, playground safety, and kitchen safety. However, tasks such as protection from abuse, neglect, and other forms of harm are considered inappropriate for this subject and should not be undertaken. In general, the focus to improve innovative and creative ideas that support the health and well-being of children is encouraged; too often, however, the only link identified was to government healthy eating initiatives. In addition, it is important to note that healthy eating practices should be more carefully considered in practical applications that involve a children’s party.

It was pleasing to see most students using their word-count effectively and writing to clearly address the criteria. However, the use of tables disadvantaged some students, as the tables were used to include ‘necessary’ information that is considered part of the word-count (within the body). Tables should only be used as an extension of knowledge and should be referred to within the body. Teachers and students are strongly encouraged to read the SACE word-count policy.

Research tasks were more successful when there was a specified question rather than just a topic. The question provided greater opportunity for students to demonstrate critical thinking and analysis. Teachers who allowed students to respond to a question in the research task, rather than researching a topic, often performed in the higher grade bands. Furthermore, successful examples of the research task were when students had the opportunity for their practical application to clearly link with what they were researching.

It was refreshing to see a diversity of topics and issues covered, and assignment ideas changing to match contemporary issues. In addition, it was pleasing to notice that the assignment was flowing as a set, where the research issue or topic supported the practical application and the evaluation.

Students who performed in the higher grade bands used a variety of credible sources. It was impressive to see a range of valid and reliable Australian sources being used. Australian sources are recommended to support the research on contemporary issues or topics within an Australian context.

Students are encouraged to provide explicit evidence of analysis in relation to specific feature ICA2. Students who were able to provide this evidence generally achieved a higher grade band. Students are also encouraged to improve evidence of in-text referencing or footnoting within the body to support their findings. Full referencing is encouraged, as only providing URLs may not support the credibility of the research. SACE support materials include a guide to referencing.

Assessment Type 2: Group Activity

It was refreshing to see students moving away from the group action plan to the group decision-making task. Students who performed at the higher grade bands clearly communicated P2 (‘decision-making about problem-solving and implementation strategies’), rather than focusing on P3 (‘justification of decisions about problem-solving and implementation strategies’). Focusing on specific feature P2 also allowed students to provide explicit evidence of group collaboration within the allocated word-count.

It was pleasing to see students providing explicit evidence of collaboration within the group decision-making task. Strong evidence included examples of a group inbox or mind map, rather than just still photographs of students working as a group. Exploring creative ways of presenting evidence of collaboration is encouraged; examples include a ‘collaboration wheel’ or peer feedback of group performance.

Individual evaluation reports for group activities should be more than only discussing what roles each student took on, but rather the working relationships formed. More successful evaluations conveyed the learning that occurred and evaluated against the issues identified in the group decision-making task. In addition, students who achieved in the higher grade bands provided evaluation on their own performance, as well as the group collaboration.

It must be ensured that students complete an individual evaluation report for each group activity. It was inspiring to see many group tasks that provided students with opportunities to work with a child or children. Where possible, these opportunities allowed for a more insightful evaluation.

Task design that allowed students to fully participate in the collaboration was more successful. This was achieved when multiple issues could be explored and specific features were easily identifiable and clearly addressed. When grading the group decision-making task, all members of the group should be awarded the same grade. If a student has not contributed equally, this will become evident in the student’s collaboration grade, or reasons should be identified on the Variations — Moderation Materials form.

## External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Investigation

It was pleasing to see a variety of topics covered in the investigations, with the majority of the research questions and hypotheses being well worded. Students who had a well-worded research question or hypothesis were better able to meet the performance standards, setting themselves up for success from the beginning. In particular, research questions and hypotheses which were refined and specific were common, with some familiar topics having interesting slants to add interest and originality. This approach assisted the student to make perceptive and insightful judgments (as required by specific features ICA1 and ICA2).

The vast majority of students had well-considered research questions or hypotheses enabling them to present numerous perspectives on an issue, instead of a topic where there is no opportunity for debate. Refined investigations in general resulted in students finding rich and relevant sources of information. Successful students tended to link their investigations to one area of study, which enabled them to present a focused and manageable investigation. Investigations tended to be well structured and logical; they included an introduction, clear discussions of findings, and relevant conclusions. It was pleasing to see the majority of investigations clearly linking to the health and well-being of the child.

Topics which debated issues from a variety of perspectives generally resulted in a deeper investigation with evidence of critical analysis and thus achieved in the higher grade bands. In addition, there was a significant decrease in the number of research questions and hypotheses allowing for a yes or no answer. It was pleasing to notice that teachers have been working to support students in selecting appropriate investigations and supporting them to sharpen their research question or hypothesis.

Popular topics this year included screen time, child obesity, and immunisation. There tended to be less variety of topics covered, but there was a larger diversity of the common themes being investigated. Unfortunately, topics such as child abuse and topics focusing on the parent rather than the child continue to be included. These topics provide limited opportunity for students to meet the performance standards, resulting in lower achievement.

It was pleasing to see fewer students using obsolete terminology such as ‘special studies’, which is from previous subject outlines. The concern is that using obsolete terminology does not allow students to connect with the specific features and intentions of the investigation in the current subject outline.

Teachers and students are reminded that appendices are not read by the markers (and therefore should not be included), and that markers stop reading the investigations at 2000 words for the 20-credit subject (or at 1000 words for the 10‑credit subject). There has been a vast improvement in students not exceeding the word-limit.

Introductions on the whole were clearly written and gave insight into what was included in the investigation. Students who achieved at a higher level tended to word the methodology in the past tense to reflect their primary and secondary sources of information. Strong evidence included specific details of how many people (and what sort of people) were surveyed or interviewed and why. Often, however, when primary sources were listed, they did not include qualifications or expertise, which leaves the reliability and validity of the sources in question.

Care must also be taken when printing coloured graphs in black and white because the information may be difficult for the marker to interpret, resulting in graphs with little benefit to the student’s work.

Ethical research needs to be considered wisely as well. There were some inappropriate surveys conducted, some with children. However, on the whole this was less of an issue than in past years, perhaps as a result of better scaffolding.

The following discussion addresses how students provided evidence of their learning in relation to the specific features of the assessment design criteria, as listed in the Child Studies subject operational information for this assessment type.

*ICA1: Investigation and critical analysis of contemporary trends and/or issues related to the health and well-being of children*

The majority of students are selecting appropriate contemporary trends or issues related to the health and well-being of children. Those students who could state and link an area of study frequently demonstrated a better focus and structure to the sub-questions.

There was a significant increase in investigations structuring the focus or guiding questions, resulting in a reduction in ‘what’ and ‘advantage/disadvantage’-type questions. This led to a larger number of students analysing information.

A greater proportion of investigations were detailed or in-depth. Considered and perceptive critical analysis of the trend or issue was more frequently left to the conclusion, although skilled students included critical analysis throughout each question, at the end of each question, and in the conclusion. Higher-achieving students tended to use a larger range of well-selected sources. The best papers demonstrated rich Australian data while occasionally referring to overseas studies to back up statements or to counteract them or compare them.

Higher-achieving investigations tended to analyse the sources used and often compared and contrasted them to evaluate their findings and provide a balance of views of arguments. In addition, successful students demonstrated evidence of analysis, debate, and critical thinking all the way through the discussion, culminating in a clear conclusion. It was pleasing to see that many investigations actually referred to the health and well-being of children, staying focused within the scope and ensuring relevance.

There has been a significant increase in the number of students who opted to draw conclusions throughout their investigation rather than leaving it to the conclusion section at the end. These investigations in general tended to meet the performance standards at a higher level. Investigations which met the performance standards at lower levels tended to struggle with drawing conclusions, opting to present information rather than using it to reach conclusions.

*ICA2: Analysis of information for relevance and appropriateness, with appropriate acknowledgment of sources*

Investigations that met the performance standards at the higher level tended to be selective, and used referenced sources of information that were current and relevant. The majority of high-achieving students selected current, relevant, and appropriate resources and listed them in a bibliography. The vast majority of investigations focused on Australian sources of information that were published within the last five years. A greater number of students included correct referencing, and an improvement was noted in appropriate acknowledgment of the source of tables, diagrams, quotes, and statistics.

Higher-achieving investigations tended to demonstrate care with the choice of sources, with sources of a local context providing richer information. Weaker investigations tended to include mostly American or English data, often assuming the research automatically applied to Australian culture.

Some students are valuing primary research above secondary research. In doing so, the survey is a popular means to gather information and opinions. However, it has been noted that students are continuing to survey their school peers for opinions and documenting results in large graphs. The concern with this approach is that opinions of school peers often do not add much value to the overall investigation compared to a wider survey of the larger community.

Guidance to read widely and to seek relevant information and advice from subject experts is recommended. Surveys of parents can be successful; surveys of young children are more difficult to draw valid information from. It was found that inappropriate surveys and interviews disadvantaged students’ work. Students should be encouraged to select information for its relevance.

A number of students included an explanation of the relevance, appropriateness, and bias of resources in the methodology section of their investigation, while others made important comments about the resources in the conclusion. Such discussion was addressed more successfully than in previous years.

Markers found irregular referencing protocols. The main areas for concern included no referencing (this group of students is decreasing each year); not all primary sources being referenced (this includes surveys); extra uncited sources in the reference list which had not been used in the investigation; incorrect, inconsistent, or irregular use of footnotes; and referencing some sentences and not others which are not original thoughts. Students need to ensure that every source used in the investigation is clearly and completely referenced (e.g. not just a web address) both on the page and in the list of references at the end of the investigation.

In some investigations, students had attached appendices, surveys, extra tables, and data, a practice which is not required or recommended. This material added to the bulk of the investigation and was not considered in the marking process. It was pleasing to note, however, that this extra material is on the decline.

There has been a decrease in investigations which include a large amount of text in tables and graphs that is not factored into the word-count. Students are correctly discussing and referring to the information being presented in tables and graphs to help support the investigation. Text boxes and tables are still prevalent, some having a considerable amount of information. Where this information was discussed in the body of the work, students achieved greater success.

*ICA3: Application of literacy and numeracy skills, and use of appropriate terminology*

Many of the investigations were well structured and logical, with a clear introduction, a discussion of findings, and conclusions. High-level investigations used strong persuasive writing skills throughout the text.

Students should be reminded that the investigation is a formal piece of writing, and they are encouraged to use formal language. Students should avoid colloquialisms such as ‘kids’, and slang.

Literacy continues to improve with the majority of student investigations. The majority of students wrote with a clear use of appropriate terminology, although those in the lower grade bands tended to have a less consistent approach and less formal writing skills, and sometimes their writing was more conversational.

Numeracy skills were particularly evident in the presentation of graphs and statistics. The clearest graphs (particularly the pie charts) had percentages written beside the colour representations. The analysis and interpretation of the findings then referred accurately to these numbers and critically discussed and debated their significance.

*E4: Evaluation of contemporary trends and/or issues related to child development in different settings.*

Similarly to the analysis component of this task, higher-achieving investigations showed evidence of continual evaluation throughout the course of the investigation, with a summation in the concluding comments. Reasoned arguments which were well supported with accurate and relevant evidence were used effectively in the best investigations to draw the topic question or hypothesis to a clear, concise conclusion. Students were less likely to be able to evaluate a trend, but could discuss children’s growth and development.

To add to this, the formation of a clear and strong research question undoubtedly helps students achieve well in relation to this specific feature. Well-constructed questions encouraged and invited the students to evaluate and to make assessments or judgements. Questions which included statements such as ‘To what extent …’, ‘How significant …’, and ‘How important …’ induced students to be considered in their evaluations by weighing up factors or perspectives. Topics with well-constructed focus questions assisted students to stay focused on the topic and to then draw highly relevant conclusions. Students who provided an in-depth evaluation of the issue throughout and in the conclusion tended to achieve higher grades.

In higher-achieving investigations, students demonstrated depth and evidence to their closing statements to form a stronger conclusion.

## Operational Advice

School assessment tasks are set and marked by teachers. Teachers’ assessment decisions are reviewed by moderators. Teacher grades/marks should be evident on all student school assessment work.

Teachers should use current performance standards when making assessment decisions. Teachers are strongly encouraged to ensure that the learning and assessment plan (LAP) and assessment tasks have been updated to use current performance standards.

Difficulties arose when the marks on the teacher’s mark sheet did not match the results submitted electronically to the SACE Board. Teachers should carefully check the accuracy of grades submitted to the SACE Board. Teachers should ensure that evidence presented for moderation reflects the final grade.

Packaging has improved, and most packages allowed for easy access of student samples during the moderation process. It would be helpful if each student’s SACE registration number was clearly provided on the cover page/first page of each assessment task. All teachers should include LAPs, a copy of the task sheets, and, if necessary, a Variations — Moderation Materials form.

When packaging student work for moderation, it would be helpful to separate the two assessment types, the practical activity from the group activity, and ensure that each assessment task is securely assembled (e.g. stapled) so they don’t come apart. For ease of reviewing student work, size 10–12 font is recommended. There is no need for plastic sleeves or folders.

It is not necessary to include appendices; they become a distractor and are not part of the student evidence when confirming grades. Furthermore, additional evidence of practicals, such as storybooks, are irrelevant to the reviewing process, as all evidence should be communicated within the student’s work or on the evidence sheet.

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