Modified Subjects

2012 Chief Assessor's Report

MODIFIED SUBJECTS

2012 CHIEF ASSESSOR'S REPORT

OVERVIEW

Chief Assessor's reports give an overview of how students performed in the 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.

GENERAL COMMENTS

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, including 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.

SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

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 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
- the student's personal learning goals.

Review

A peer-review process verifies schools' assessment decisions. Teachers provide samples of student's work for the peer-review process, and schools nominate teachers to act as reviewers.

The SACE Board provides formal feedback to principals regarding the outcomes of the review, and teachers ensure final results reflect the outcomes.

Two reviews were held this year, one in each semester, and 54 schools submitted samples for review.

Student Work Samples

Student work samples from students with more mild intellectual disabilities will always be a good indicator of learning. The majority of the evidence submitted at both reviews this year has been from this range of students.

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

Many of the schools that submitted this type of evidence presented folios of student work collected during one semester or over the whole year. This is a good way to evidence the students' progression over time, towards meeting their personal learning goals.

At the review, in most cases it was easy to find evidence to demonstrate the student's learning. Schools gave a great amount of detail in annotating individual pages of student work to cross-reference personal learning goals and capabilities. In other folios of student work, evidence of learning was arranged by personal learning goal. This made the review process relatively straightforward and made it much easier to confirm schools' assessment decisions. In other school samples, as a consequence of the organisation of student evidence, the need to search for evidence to match the student's personal learning goals slowed down the review process considerably and made it more difficult to confirm schools' assessment decisions. However, the review samples were generally very good at showing actual student learning and demonstrating their knowledge, skills, and understanding.

Video and Photographic Evidence

Given the specific requirements of curriculum delivery and assessment in modified subjects, many individual adaptations were made in using video and photographic evidence to capture student learning and demonstrating goals and capabilities.

This year, video evidence was used predominantly in the area of teaching students with severe and multiple disabilities. Some very good evidence of student learning was provided where a school was able to capture students demonstrating evidence

of their learning. However, the number of videos used as evidence in 2012 has decreased significantly year on year.

Photographic evidence was possibly the most commonly supplied evidence from the special schools cohort. 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. Fewer mainstream schools used photographic evidence, relying more on student-prepared work as a primary source of evidence.

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.

Checklists

This year, across the range of modified subjects, a variety of checklists was used as secondary evidence of student learning. In the case of students who have a higher level of needs, a number of schools used checklists to cover particular aspects of assessment tasks and 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. The use of checklists as a part of evidence collection, if annotated correctly, is an excellent method of evidence collation for a multifaceted task.

OPERATIONAL ADVICE

There was minimal use of the addendum to the learning and assessment plan this year, and in some cases this made it more difficult to find evidence to confirm schools' assessment decisions as there appeared to be, in some instances, assessment tasks missing from review samples or significantly amended from those described in the approved learning and assessment plan. The addendum should be used to identify any changes to assessment tasks and/or student personal learning goals, and should always be brought to the review with the approved learning and assessment plan.

The packaging and presentation of most review samples were generally very good this year, making it easier to conduct the review process and to confirm schools' assessment decisions. A significant improvement in the presentation was noted in comparison to the 2011 reviews.

However, in a significant number of cases, reviewers noted that staff working in the modified subjects area had not attended any training and development sessions

this year, most notably the planning and clarifying support workshops. Schools would benefit from attending these support workshops in 2013 as topics such as setting personal learning goals, designing tasks, and compiling samples of student work for review are covered.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The quality of the assessment tasks and the evidence of student learning were generally very well evidenced across a variety of formats.

The use of the student description sheet, however, was not always efficient. 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 detail on the description sheet would give the reviewer a more concise understanding of the student than a general statement that the student has a mild intellectual disability. Detailed descriptions made evidence much more powerful as a record of student learning.

It is recommended that schools work more strategically in the development of learning and assessment plans, particularly in relation to the number of personal learning goals to be developed and demonstrated, and the number of capabilities to be addressed, in each plan. A significant number of schools listed all of the capabilities to be assessed along with multiple personal learning goals that were very precise and descriptive, and this created workload issues for teachers, schools, and students.

The wording of personal learning goals is an important issue that should be addressed; this was the biggest issue that arose during the review process. 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 and end point are needed, so that evidence can clearly and explicitly show improvement over time. Also, there must be evidence of improvement in a range of situations rather than only one or two.

At the review, it was very pleasing to see such good outcomes in the Research Project: Modified. The two significant areas for mention are Key Area 3: Communicating the Project Outcome and Key Area 4: Reflecting on the Project.

Different schools managed the Research Project: Modified in different ways. In some cases, the entire project was student-driven and all evidence of learning was primary evidence that the student supplied. This made the review process straightforward, as the proof of student learning was made evident in a number of ways throughout the project. Students who had the greatest needs undertook a project with a different focus. A significant number of these students undertook a project around their post-school options.

Evidence for communicating the project outcome, for students without a recognised system of communication, was a signed statement, written by a teacher or support worker, on the types of interactions they observed while the student was engaged in the project.

The reflection on the project was addressed by the submission of a written report provided by a Post School Options provider on what types of activities were undertaken and enjoyed by the student. It was impressive to see the innovative manner that some schools adopted in ensuring that the Research Project becomes an integral and relevant component of the SACE for students.

Overall, with a larger number of schools undertaking modified subjects comes a greater need for teachers and others involved in delivering modified subjects to attend some of the training and development that the SACE Board offers, and to establish in-school training and development opportunities. This would result in greater cohesion among schools in relation to what constitutes evidence of student learning, and a more consistent interpretation and application of 'completed' and 'not completed' assessment decisions.

Modified Subjects
Chief Assessor