

Society and Culture

2014 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.

In 2014 the number of students enrolled in Society and Culture increased slightly, especially in the 10-credit course, and it was pleasing to see the quality of the work submitted was again excellent; students continue to exhibit a strong engagement with significant and contemporary social and cultural issues and topics. The achievement of students in school assessment was largely consistent with that of previous years. It is clear that most teachers understand the performance standards and are able to apply them with confidence.

Overall, 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. Evidence was provided against the performance standards in a variety of formats — written, oral, and multimodal — however, the most popular remained written folio tasks. While teachers are encouraged to give students choice where possible, it is recommended that clear guidelines are set so that students achieve the best outcomes possible.

Moderators were pleased with the generally high standard of packaging of materials for moderation; however, teachers are reminded of the importance of including the assessment plan and set of task sheets. 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 with students’ names or SACE registration numbers.

## School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Folio

Most students submitted four written tasks for the folio assessment type. Reports and tasks with several parts were the most common response types. A number of folios contained similar tasks, and moderators noted an over-reliance on essays in some student folios. Students who had undertaken a variety of task and response types were generally advantaged. Moderators noted that most tasks addressed contemporary social and cultural issues and provided opportunities for students to demonstrate achievement at all grade bands. Task design varied in quality and in several cases prevented students from achieving at higher grade bands; for example, tasks which required students to research historical events or to complete short-answer tests, and tasks which were overly scaffolded or addressed too many assessment design criteria. Tasks which featured a good balance of scaffolding and choice advantaged students by encouraging creativity, originality, and analytical depth.

The most popular topics continue to be: 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. Within these topics, students engaged with contemporary social and cultural issues which were personally relevant, provided good access to information sources, and were generally based within an Australian context.

Students were most successful in their achievement within the knowledge and understanding criterion. Students were generally able to identify and understand the nature and causes of social change in relation to contemporary issues; students who simply identified similarities and differences over time, for example, in their consideration of the experiences of different generations, were less successful. More successful folios considered the interactions between different groups within societies and the interconnections between different societies and cultures. Students who were able to correctly use terminology such as ‘interdependence’, ‘power structures’, and ‘social change’ were more able to demonstrate understanding and achievement at higher grade bands.

While many students conducted well-organised investigations into issues, a lack of *insightful* analysis was evident in many folios, which limited achievement in the higher grade band of the investigation and analysis assessment design criterion.

Moderators commented that students displayed generally good evidence of research, including referencing skills, although there was general consensus among moderators that quite a number of students were relying too heavily on secondary sources to investigate issues. More successful responses displayed an ability to analyse information from a wide range of primary and secondary sources and perspectives, with the best responses also demonstrating insightful evaluation of this evidence.

Students generally produced between 1000 and 1500 words for written folio tasks. Moderators noted some instances of low word-counts which limited student achievement. A small number of students completed oral tasks for the folio. The best evidence of oral tasks included transcripts and/or visual information (e.g. copies of PowerPoint slides). In some instances, students completed group oral tasks for the folio component (e.g. role plays); however, it was often difficult for moderators to discern evidence of individual achievement, particularly when no transcript was provided and when recordings did not identify individual students.

Assessment Type 2: Interaction

Students undertake two tasks in the interaction assessment type: a group activity and an individual oral activity.

Confirming the assessment decisions of teachers in relation to the group activity continues to present challenges for moderators, with the main issues being the nature, quality, and quantity of the evidence provided.

In a number of cases, only the individual student evaluations were provided as evidence, making it difficult for moderators to observe evidence of achievement against all of the relevant assessment design criteria. The packaging of material frequently made it difficult for moderators to locate evidence of the group activity; for example, where the work of an entire group (including individual student evaluations) was only located in one student’s package of work.

The best evidence of the group activity included:

* photographs that clearly depicted the nature of the social action
* evidence produced by each member of the group that clearly outlined the contributions of each group member (e.g. record sheets, journals, notes)
* good-quality recordings, when included, that clearly identified each student (e.g. students introducing themselves, file names identifying students, names written on the DVD envelope, photographs of students)
* transcripts of group collaborative evaluations, debriefing, or round-table discussions, clearly indicating the contribution of individual group members
* evidence that demonstrated inquiry into a social issue
* evidence that demonstrated knowledge and understanding of a social issue
* evidence of social action that was relevant or in some way linked to the social issue investigated.

Good examples of social action included whole-school awareness and fund-raising activities related to human-rights issues; preparation of a museum display depicting issues connected with refugees and asylum-seekers; creation of a Facebook page; and informative presentations to other students. Student achievement was limited where social action was restricted to, for example, creating a poster. In some instances, it was unclear to moderators what, if any, social action had occurred.

Most student packages contained a recording of an oral activity, with the quality of these recordings varying in quality. Transcripts of oral presentation, together with PowerPoint slides or other material, provided the best evidence for moderators to confirm assessment decisions.

Role plays which contained basic discussion tended to restrict students from demonstrating achievement against the investigation and analysis, and knowledge and understanding criteria in the higher grade bands.

In some instances, it was clear that students had been required to complete an oral activity based on a folio task; this created some confusion, particularly when task sheets did not specify the assessment type.

Moderators noted that the maximum time-limit of 5 minutes for the oral activity had been exceeded by a number of students.

## External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Investigation

The overall standard of investigations in 2014 was consistent with that of previous years. The most successful investigations featured:

* effective analysis of a range of sources and perspectives
* 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 investigations.

As in previous years, a wide and interesting variety of investigation topics was selected by students, the majority featuring contentious issues in Australian society. While some perennial favourites again appeared, such as child obesity and cyber-bullying, popular topics were also prompted by recent political decisions, such as the federal government’s proposed GP co-payment and changes to benefits for unemployed youth, or the state government’s changes to P‑plate regulations. Students may have been attracted to such issues because they appear to work against the interests of young people, and consequently may have easily been drawn into a report that presented only a limited viewpoint. On the other hand, such topics resulted in successful investigations when the hypothesis or guiding question 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:

* attitudes towards refugees or asylum-seekers
* the legalisation of medical marijuana
* shark-culling in Australian waters
* the AFL and banned substances
* compulsory vaccination of children
* commercial surrogacy
* online gaming
* Internet censorship
* the 3 a.m. curfew or ‘one punch’ legislation and violence
* high-speed police pursuits
* changes to university funding
* use of technology in schools.

Markers commented that global topics tended to be less successful, as they are typically too broad to be dealt with in depth in 2000 words, and the sources are almost always limited to secondary sources.

Good local topics included:

* the rejuvenation of Port Adelaide
* security cameras in the CBD
* the Frome Street bikeway
* efficiency of the Adelaide Hills bus service
* road safety programs in secondary schools.

Markers commented that most students chose relevant and current social issues. However, some students need guidance in their choice of topic, as several topics stretched the definition of a ‘social issue’ (such as ‘the current state of the Adelaide music scene’), or were of limited relevance to Australian society (such as ‘the one-child policy in China’), or were too broad and lacking in focus. There were some instances where all students in a class used the same focusing questions; such scaffolding can be limiting.

The most successful students sought a wide range of appropriate and authoritative sources, both primary and secondary. Although surveys remained the most popular primary source, better investigations also obtained valuable primary data from interviewees with relevant expertise. They also showed awareness of other forms of ethnographic research, such as action research in the form of observation, or the collection of photographic evidence. Successful investigations synthesised sources, comparing the perspectives of interviewees with evidence provided by sound, up-to-date secondary sources, and identifying bias. Students were advantaged when investigations were structured with three or four focusing questions bearing a close relationship to the hypothesis or guiding question. Guiding questions which were open-ended, such as ‘To what extent …’, fostered depth in analysis and evaluation. When students were encouraged to look at community-based issues, a variety of opinions could be canvassed from local media reports and local people who were willing to be interviewed. Successful students used this evidence to analyse and evaluate various perspectives and points of view, and ultimately to critique or support their hypothesis or guiding question.

Successful investigations featured a conclusion that included an evaluative summary of the main findings, provided insight into societal trends, and identified strategies for social change. Students need to be aware of, and state, the limitations of their research as part of the conclusion to the findings of their report.

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 tightly worded hypotheses or guiding questions
* structured the analysis around focus questions
* used expert primary sources, supported by secondary sources
* evaluated the sources for validity, reliability, and bias
* provided evidence of multiple perspectives on the issue
* explicitly addressed the nature and causes of social change
* demonstrated clearly an understanding of the ways in which societies and cultures are connected and interdependent
* used a consistent referencing system
* contained an insightful conclusion which addressed 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.

## General Comments

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

Teachers, especially if teaching the subject for the first time, are strongly encouraged to attend one of the clarifying forums early in the school year, to ensure they have a clear understanding of the benchmarks at each level of the performance standards.

Teachers who have participated in marking 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.

## 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.

Most teachers included a learning and assessment plan (LAP) and attached an addendum if changes had been made. There were some instances of teachers not including a LAP, or including a LAP which identified different assessment design criteria to that specified on task sheets. There were a couple of instances of LAPs which were on out-of-date forms and tasks which referred to ‘SSABSA’ policies and the previous name of the subject (‘Studies of Societies’). Teachers are reminded that a copy of an *approved* LAP and a complete set of task sheets for both assessment types should be included in the materials submitted for moderation.

Generally, the standard of packaging was high, with the majority of teachers organising material by assessment type within each individual student package.

Moderators appreciated the following features of packaged material:

* summary sheets which enabled moderators to clearly see how teachers had reached assessment decisions
* assessment sheets with a clear indication of achievement against performance standards attached to individual pieces of student work
* task sheets which clearly identified assessment type (folio or interaction)

In many cases, teachers did not include a Variations — Moderations Materials form, particularly in instances where students had not submitted tasks. Teachers are reminded that where a student has not completed or submitted tasks, the result submitted online should factor in a nil grade/mark for the relevant task.

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