

# Modified Subjects

2013 Chief Assessor's Report



Government  
of South Australia

**SACE**  
Board of SA

# MODIFIED SUBJECTS

## 2013 CHIEF ASSESSOR'S REPORT

### 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.

### 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 students' 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 63 schools submitted samples for review.

## **Student Work Samples**

Student work samples from students with mild intellectual disabilities will generally be a good indicator of learning. The majority of the evidence submitted at both reviews this year has been from this range of students; however, there is an increasing diversity in the cohort of students undertaking modified subjects.

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 secondary evidence presented folios of student work collected during one semester or over the whole year. This is a good way to provide evidence of the students' progression over time towards meeting their personal learning goals.

At both reviews, the reviewers could easily find evidence to substantiate students' learning. Most schools gave a great amount of detail in annotating individual pages of student work to cross-reference personal learning goals and capabilities. Some folios of student work provided evidence of learning that was arranged by personal learning goal. This made the review process relatively straightforward and made it much easier to confirm schools' assessment decisions.

A few samples of student work were poorly organised, making it difficult to find evidence that matched the student's personal learning goals. This slowed down the review process considerably and made the task of finding evidence to confirm schools' assessment decisions difficult.

However, the review samples were generally very good at showing actual student learning and demonstrating students' knowledge, skills, and understanding.

## **Video and Photographic Evidence**

Many schools used video and photographic evidence to capture evidence of student learning. In previous years, video evidence was used predominantly to capture the evidence of learning demonstrated by students with severe and multiple disabilities. However, the number of videos used as evidence in 2013 has decreased from previous years.

Photographic evidence was most commonly used to capture evidence of learning demonstrated by students from the special schools cohort. Some schools used photographs to capture evidence of students achieving their personal learning goals

over time. More than one photograph taken over time and in different contexts supported the reviewers to confirm the school's assessment decisions. Other schools used photographs of multiple students undertaking group work to help demonstrate personal learning goals such as 'able to work with others'. This evidence 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**

A variety of checklists was used as secondary evidence of student learning. 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 a useful method of evidence collation for a multifaceted 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**

There was minimal use of the addendum to the learning and assessment plan this year. In some cases this made it more difficult to find evidence to confirm schools' assessment decisions, as in some instances the assessment tasks appeared to be 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 many review samples were good this year, making it easier to conduct the review process and to confirm schools' assessment decisions. However, in a significant number of cases, there were difficulties with materials either missing from packages or not being included correctly. This was particularly the case in relation to the personal learning goals identified on the student description sheet not correlating to those on an approved learning and assessment plan and/or addendum. Reviewers noted that many staff working in the modified subjects area had not attended training and development sessions this year, most notably the planning and clarifying support workshops. Schools would benefit from attending these support workshops in 2014 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 occurrence of student learning were generally very well evidenced across a variety of formats. However, the use of the student description sheet 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 providing a general statement that the student has a mild intellectual disability. Detailed descriptions made evidence a much more powerful record of student learning.

It is recommended that schools work more strategically when developing 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. As in previous years, 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 in only one or two.

Students are undertaking a greater number of Stage 2 subjects including the Research Project: Modified. It is pleasing that the Research Project: Modified is being undertaken by a broad cohort of students. 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. For students who were without a recognised system of communication, evidence for communicating the project outcome 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 that were undertaken and enjoyed by the student. It was obvious from the review that, in many schools, the Research Project is an integral and relevant component of the SACE for students.

Modified Subjects  
Chief Assessor