



**FIRST YEAR EVALUATION
OF THE
SOUTH AUSTRALIAN CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION (SACE)**

Final Report

July 2012

4 July 2012

Ms Jane Danvers
Acting Presiding Member
SACE Board of South Australia
60 Greenhill Road
WAYVILLE SA 5034

Dear Jane

Attached please find the report of the Evaluation Panel established to examine the first year following the implementation of the new SACE.

The Panel commends the work of the SACE Board and its staff in what has clearly been an extremely complex task over a long period of time. In an overall sense, the implementation must be regarded as a success.

Like all complex implementation efforts, there is some fine tuning that can be identified and most of the recommendations in the attached report will not surprise SACE Board staff.

Thank you for the opportunity to assist the SACE Board as it strives for ongoing improvement of the SACE through the Board's continuous improvement program.

Yours sincerely



Mr Bill Cossey AM
Convenor



Professor John Bennett
Panel Member



Dr Petra Lietz
Panel Member



Ms Miriam Silva
Panel Member

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Attachment 1: Members of the SACE Evaluation Reference Committee

Attachment 2: Evaluation Brief

Attachment 3: List of submission authors

Attachment 4: List of Individuals and Organisations interviewed by Panel Members

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1. INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In February 2012, the SACE Board of South Australia commissioned an external, independent evaluation of the first full year of implementation of the revised South Australian Certificate of Education.

The SACE Board formed a panel (referred to throughout this report as the Panel or the Evaluation Panel) comprising

Mr Bill Cossey AM (Convenor)
Professor John Bennett
Ms Miriam Silva
Dr Petra Lietz

to conduct the evaluation.

The Evaluation Panel was guided and supported throughout the five month period of the evaluation by a Reference Committee whose membership was representative of all key stakeholders for the SACE. A complete list of Reference Committee members is included as Attachment 1 to the report.

The Evaluation Panel was ably assisted by Ms Sue Cobbin who was assigned to the role of Project Officer to the evaluation by the SACE Board. Ms Cobbin's experience and wide-ranging skills proved invaluable to the Panel throughout the evaluation and her support and assistance is acknowledged with gratitude.

The Panel members also thank and acknowledge everyone who assisted the Panel in any way including:

- SACE Board members, leadership team and staff
- Evaluation Reference Committee members
- Authors of submissions
- Students who participated in the student survey and in the focus groups

- Individuals and representatives of schools and other organisations who agreed to be interviewed
- The Northern Board of Studies and Northern Territory schools
- Harrison Research Pty Ltd
- Staff of the South Australian Tertiary Admission Centre (SATAC).

Throughout this report the Panel has referred to the SACE but acknowledges that by arrangement with the Northern Territory Government, the SACE Board provides its materials and associated support to the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training for use in Northern Territory schools. The Northern Territory Certificate of Education (NTCE) is based on the SACE but with key policy differences, the main one being that the Research Project is an optional Stage 2 subject.

A separate Section of this report (Section 6.2) deals with the views of Northern Territory schools. It was intended that, where recommendations in this report would relate differently to the NTCE and Northern Territory schools, those differences would be noted in the recommendations. No such differences have been documented.

This is the final report of the Evaluation Panel.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1 Overview

This First Year Evaluation commissioned by the SACE Board honours a commitment by the Board to have an independent, external assessment of the implementation of the SACE within the first two years after implementation.

It is also consistent with the SACE Board's commitment to a continuing improvement program for the SACE.

The evaluation has taken place in an environment of much critical comment in the media about the SACE, its structure and its standing, both nationally and internationally.

Some of the critical comment could be interpreted as suggesting that the SACE is either the cause of, or the potential solution to, any or all of the challenges facing schools and students in today's ever changing world. That is clearly unreasonable and unrealistic.

As will be described in detail in this report, the Evaluation Panel has learnt that whilst the SACE has its critics and detractors it also has its supporters and enthusiasts. Even within schools that are generally supportive, there are individual teachers who are critical and vice versa.

There is no clear pattern evident.

Anecdotally, it appears that, despite the intensive efforts of the SACE Board, schools and, within schools, individual teachers have varied considerably in their readiness for the changes that the SACE required. In fairness to teachers, the changes and the extent of the changes differed between subject areas.

This variation in apparent readiness is, in part, understandable. At a superficial level the changes may not have seemed to be too great. The curriculum content in most subject areas was little changed. On the surface, the completion requirements may have appeared to be lower with 200 credits needed instead of 220, literacy and numeracy being essential at Stage 1 rather than the former SACE pattern at Stage 2, a compulsory Research Project at Stage 2 instead of a fifth subject and a Personal Learning Plan at Stage 1 (normally completed in Year 10).

However, as will be described in detail in this report the impact of these changes, as superficially insignificant as they may have seemed, have had a deep impact on schools, teachers and students.

Of particular impact has been the change to the policies and procedures for the assessment of student learning introduced by the SACE Board as it pursued a policy objective of ensuring a robust, rigorous, defensible regime of assessment, within a framework of valuing teacher judgement and increasing the extent and recognition of teacher assessment of student learning. More comment has been made about the implementation of the new approaches to assessment in the submissions to this evaluation than any other single topic and has therefore received a very high level of attention by the Evaluation Panel.

Although the need for a continuing improvement program for the SACE is clear, the Evaluation Panel acknowledges the enormous effort and commitment of SACE Board staff to the implementation of the changes to the SACE.

Implementing change in most environments is difficult enough. Implementing change in an environment in which a number of key stakeholders only seem to become aware of the extent of the change and the resulting workload pressures when they become immersed in it, is even more difficult. And, whilst the SACE Board had a number of clear responsibilities in leading the change, there has also been a significant requirement on schools, school leaders and teachers to be ready for the change. The need for high levels of leadership in schools will continue as further changes are progressed.

The commitment of SACE Board staff to a continuing improvement program has also been evident in the Panel's discussions with SACE Board staff throughout this evaluation. Indeed, many of the workload pressures experienced by schools and teachers in 2011 were also experienced by SACE Board staff.

There is also no doubt that schools, school leaders and teachers are passionate about giving senior secondary students every opportunity to succeed. In situations in which students in the first year of SACE implementation have not achieved at the levels to which they might have

aspired, there is ample evidence of teachers deeply feeling as if their lack of understanding of the SACE assessment requirements has contributed.

That said, a number of teachers and schools are revelling in the knowledge that the SACE has given students who may not previously have completed the SACE the opportunity to do so and to achieve an Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) and a TAFE Selection Score - thereby keeping a potential post secondary pathway open.

The random survey, designed and commissioned by the Evaluation Panel, that involved 800 young people who were Stage 2 students in 2011 has given the SACE overall a neutral rating whilst highlighting concerns with several aspects of it. That neutral rating, however, is based on an extremely wide range of views from extremely positive to quite negative.

Submissions to this evaluation have dealt with both the positives and negatives as their authors are seeing them. The critics of the SACE have been much louder and more intense in their representations to the Panel. However, the supporters, though less vocal, are equally passionate.

Most of the submissions expressed impression and opinion. Wherever possible, the Panel has attempted to determine if trend data or other quantitative evidence supports those impressions and opinions. However, as this evaluation was undertaken so early in the life of the current SACE, drawing firm conclusions has not always been possible.

Understandably, much of the comment in submissions and in face to face discussions with the Panel has dealt with the two biggest areas of change in the current SACE compared with the former SACE. They are the impact of the new approach to assessment of student learning and the impact of the compulsory Stage 2 Research Project.

These topics are dealt with in detail in this report.

In respect of the approach to assessment, the Panel commends the SACE Board for its pursuit of an objective of implementing a system based on documented performance standards, rigorous assessment based on those standards, a combination of school based assessment recognising the value of teacher judgement and external assessment underpinned by various quality control mechanisms.

The Panel also commends the SACE Board for involving large numbers of practising teachers in the development of standards and for its considerable efforts to explain the new approach to assessment to all teachers.

However, the Panel has also found that there is still a way to go in achieving consistently high levels of teacher understanding of, and confidence in, the application of the new standards. Recommendations have been made which, in the Panel's view, will address this situation and its workload impacts.

They deal with topics such as:

- improving the clarity of performance standards
- increasing the number and range of exemplars for the various grades applicable to school based assessment
- assisting teachers to improve the design of assessment tasks and potentially reducing the number of expected assessments tasks
- strengthening the feedback from moderation processes, and
- extending the number of, accessibility to, and agendas of clarifying forums.

The Panel has also made a number of observations about the use of grades vis a vis the use of marks by teachers in assessing student performance. It has noted that the SACE Board's processes are based on grades although teachers may elect to use marks. A case is made in this report for the SACE Board to consider the use of marks alongside grades (without any weakening of its commitment to performance standards) to ensure that the desired ratio of 70:30 (teacher assessment : external assessment) is achieved in practice and to assist with greater discrimination of student results.

The report also links this discussion with the need for continuing work in association with SATAC to ensure the absolute integrity of ATAR calculations and, in part, to address issues documented independently of this evaluation related to ATAR calculations in 2011.

Possible refinements to aspects of the processes for moderating teacher assessments of student work are also identified, without detracting from the essential and important role of moderation.

Notwithstanding the opportunities for continuing improvement, the Panel has noted that in the random survey of 800 students who undertook the SACE in 2011, reported on in detail later in this report, students rated highly the fairness of the assessment of their work.

In respect of the Research Project, the Panel has made a number of recommendations for improvement, assuming that the current policy position of the Research Project being a compulsory Stage 2 subject prevails.

Those recommendations cover topics such as:

- providing schools, teachers and students with guidance regarding soundly based topics for Research Projects for the full range of student skills, abilities and aspirations based on examples of projects submitted in 2011
- extending the guidance referred to above to provide examples of soundly based Research Projects that build on, or complement, a student's directed investigation in another subject and which avoid or minimise the possibility that students devote more time to the Research Project than necessary for a 10 credit unit
- assessing the performance standards for the Research Project to determine if there are inherent and unintended barriers to students electing to submit Research Project A rather than Research Project B and
- in addition, examining whether there is anything inherent and unintended in the performance standards and/or the assessment arrangements for the Research Project that may be leading to a significant difference in the achievement levels of male students compared with female students and
- further increasing the accessibility of students to external organisations willing to, and capable of, assisting students to identify topics and providing a degree of mentoring as well.

The Panel has also noted that a number of submissions strongly suggested that the Research Project be either discontinued, made optional at Stage 2 or become a Stage 1 subject. Though strictly beyond its Terms of Reference (such changes requiring a significant policy shift), the Panel has, in this report, documented the main points in favour of, and against these respective options.

That said, the Panel has also suggested that it would be unusual for such a significant policy position to be changed so soon after its implementation and before its longer term effectiveness could be assessed. The Panel has noted the significant changes to the SACE Board's computer systems that would be required if there is a departure from the current policy position.

Credence could well be taken from the experience with the Personal Learning Plan (PLP). Initial reactions to the PLP were quite unfavourable when it was first introduced in 2009 and 2010.

Based on experience and feedback, the PLP was substantially modified. Submissions to this evaluation have made almost no negative comment about

the revised PLP and, consistent with that, the Panel understands that acceptance of the PLP is increasing amongst schools, teachers and students.

There is one option for the Research Project that was not canvassed widely in submissions to the evaluation but which the Panel considers is worthy of SACE Board consideration. This would involve the Research Project being maintained as a mandatory requirement but with an option of it being studied as a Stage 1 subject (with no consideration of results for ATAR calculations) or a Stage 2 subject (with the possibility of results being used for ATAR calculations).

Should this option be pursued it would need to take into account the impact on the SACE Board's computer systems and be accompanied by strategies to encourage and facilitate the study of five Stage 2 subjects by those students electing to study the Research Project as a Stage 1 subject.

Finally in respect of the Research Project, the Panel has noted that in the student survey it commissioned, the student feedback covered the full range of views but with a slight orientation toward it being positively regarded.

Often connected with points made about the Research Project, the Panel received many submissions which were critical of the narrowing of subject choices that students are making, particularly at Stage 2. The Panel has noted that this trend has also occurred at Stage 1 with subjects in the area of humanities and languages other than English being most affected and the mathematics, technology and science subjects being least affected. This report provides details of the most affected and least affected subjects.

It is not really clear whether this phenomenon is caused by the overall structure of the SACE (including the reduction in the number of credits required from 220 to 200), the introduction of the Research Project, the removal of the subject pattern requirements from the previous SACE or the decision of the Universities to remove restrictions on certain subjects for ATAR calculations and to base ATAR calculations on fewer subject credits. However, it will bear further consideration in the light of skilled teacher availability if the expectations of the Australian Curriculum when introduced later in this decade are for a return to some form of 'pattern'.

To satisfy its Terms of Reference, the Panel has also made some observations (recognising that no trend data could be expected) on the intended and unintended consequences of the introduction of the current SACE. It has extended this discussion to suggest areas in which expectations of the theme of the 2005 SACE Review (Success for All) are yet to be fulfilled.

Because it is far too early to tell whether early indications of intended and possibly unintended consequences will be sustained over time, the Panel has

made suggestions regarding the on-going processes of evaluation and continuing improvement, the main features of which are also documented in this report.

To complete the picture, the Panel has summarised the main items in the SACE Board's own improvement agenda, determined independently of this evaluation but highly consistent with it.

As with the implementation of the SACE it is essential that the continuing improvement agenda be supported by a comprehensive change management and communications plan and pursued as a collaborative effort between the SACE Board, schools and teachers within the overall legislative charter of the SACE Board.

2.2 Recommendations

Throughout this report, the Panel has included recommendations appropriate to the matter being discussed.

This Section of the report contains all recommendations with a reference to the relevant Section of the report.

It should be noted that several recommendations make reference to the Australian Curriculum which is being developed for senior secondary schooling. The Terms of Reference for this evaluation did not require the Panel to take into account the emerging Australian Curriculum. However, a number of submissions to the Panel referred to it and it is apparent that in the lead up to the implementation of the Australian Curriculum, the SACE Board will be expected to consider its implications for the SACE.

The time frame for the implementation of the Australian Curriculum is unclear. Opinions vary as to the likely implementation date but a date towards the end of this decade seems possible. As this report notes, there may be curriculum implications for the structure of the SACE. There will also be new approaches to assessment of student learning based on performance standards rigorously applied. In that regard, South Australian and Northern Territory experience with the assessment approach underpinning the SACE and NTCE will prove invaluable.

The Panel recommends that:

- (1) The SACE Board maintain its commitment to a continuing improvement program for the SACE and, in so doing, encourage maximum involvement of schools and teachers in determining the improvement priorities and strategies; the main aim being to take advantage of the detailed experience of all schools and teachers as they continue to implement the SACE. (Introduction to Section 8)
- (2) The SACE Board continue to monitor national, interstate and international developments in senior secondary education and certification (particularly the developing Australian Curriculum) and continue to assess the structure of the SACE to ensure that it remains a certificate of national and international standing. (Section 8.3.1)
- (3) In relation to the Personal Learning Plan (PLP), the SACE Board note the relatively minor comment received by this evaluation suggesting that the changes introduced after the first year of experience have been reasonably well received. Further, that as part of its continuing improvement agenda, the SACE Board, in conjunction with schools, identifies and promotes through various professional development initiatives, emerging good practice in the application of PLP outcomes for students as they progress through Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the SACE. (Section 8.3.2)
- (4) The SACE Board clarify for all schools that Stage 1 transferring interstate students and international students enrolling part way through Stage 1 need not undertake the PLP and reconsider whether the PLP should remain as a mandatory requirement for any international student. (Section 8.3.2)
- (5) In relation to literacy and numeracy, the SACE Board continue to pursue and enhance its rigorous approach to assessment of the Stage 1 student learning based on performance standards and, in conjunction with schools, monitor student subject choice in literacy and numeracy at Stage 2 with a view to:
 - identifying any undesirable trends in subject choices as early as possible and, if such trends emerge
 - examining whether there are aspects within the SACE Board's control (such as the nature of assessment tasks required or perceived areas of misalignment between school based assessment tasks and external assessment tasks) which are continuing a trend which commenced earlier than 2011 of reduced Stage 2 student selections in English subjects and in Specialist Mathematics. (Section 8.3.3)

(6) In relation to the Research Project, the SACE Board note the wide range of opinions expressed to this evaluation ranging from high levels of support to substantial criticism. Assuming the current policy position of the Research Project being a compulsory Stage 2 subject remains unchanged, the Panel recommends that the SACE Board's continuing improvement efforts concentrate on:

- ensuring that teachers assigned to teaching the Research Project have access to sufficient materials to enable them to teach research skills to students and to supervise Research Projects with confidence
- assisting schools to identify, in conjunction with students, the essential components of a sound research project topic without diminishing each student's capacity to choose a topic of interest to them
- understanding whether there are unintended barriers to the greater adoption of Research Project A and taking steps to lower or remove them
- using experience to date to identify examples of students being able to meet the requirements of the Research Project successfully by taking further a directed investigation in another subject and promoting such examples to schools generally
- using experience to date to identify examples of students from non English speaking backgrounds, new arrivals and Aboriginal students undertaking soundly based research projects with innovative and relevant topic selection and innovative teacher support and promoting such examples to schools generally.
- researching the reasons for the stark difference between the performance of male students and female students in the first year and discussing with schools ways and means by which this may be addressed in future
- helping schools and students, through the provision of guidelines based on experience, to deal with the undesirable potential for a student to apply more effort to the Research Project than intended for a 10 credit subject
- continuing to be vigilant to ensure that work submitted is that of the student and that any outside assistance is acknowledged.

In addition, the Panel recommends that, in conjunction with schools, the SACE Board staff develop a program of good practice seminars in which learnings of the type envisaged above as well as the work of those schools which have used the Research Project to reconsider their overall approach to senior secondary education can be discussed more widely with peers.

Further, should the SACE Board wish to reconsider the current policy position, the Panel recommends that it gives specific consideration to the Research Project remaining as a mandatory requirement but with an option that it be studied as a Stage 1 subject or a Stage 2 subject.

This consideration would need to:

- take account of the potential impact on the SACE Board's computer systems in determining an implementation time-table
- include the determination of strategies to encourage those students who elect to study the Research Project as a Stage 1 subject to study five full year Stage 2 subjects
- acknowledge that students who elect to study the Research Project as a Stage 1 subject will not be able to have its results contribute to their ATAR calculations. (Section 8.3.4)

(7) The SACE Board note the early trends in subject selection and, in conjunction with education authorities, continue to monitor the trends in subject selection at both Stage 1 and Stage 2. Further, with the emerging Australian Curriculum in mind, the Panel recommends that the authorities consider and address the possible difficulties in the availability of skilled senior secondary teachers in subjects for which a reversal of the early trend in subject choices may occur in future. (Section 8.3.5)

(8) In light of the importance of assessment and consistent with the objective of ensuring a rigorous approach whilst valuing teacher judgement, that the SACE Board assign high priority in its continuing improvement program to the area of assessment and in particular:

- note the difficulty which a number of teachers in a number of subject areas are having with the new approach to assessment
- use the first year experience of practising teachers to take steps to simplify the statements of performance standards and associated criteria

- in association with teacher associations and using the first year experience of practising teachers, provide professional development opportunities in assessment task design
- extend the reach and content of clarifying forums so that they are more accessible to all teachers and include a component of assessment task design and other aspects requested by teachers
- continue to compile a more complete set of annotated exemplars of student work at each grade (alongside the related assessment task) with an emphasis on exemplars that are at the borderline between the five grades (and also between A and A+ grade levels)
- in conjunction with practising teachers, continue to refine the expectations regarding the number and nature of assessment tasks for each subject with a view to requiring potentially less assessment tasks and a greater degree of subject specific flexibility
- consider whether teacher assessment and moderation outcomes would be strengthened through the use of marks to complement the use of grades
- reconsider whether the teacher assessment and moderation outcomes would be strengthened by enabling teachers, either through marks or other form, to indicate the teacher's assessment of the relative position of each student in samples of work submitted for moderation
- closely monitor the relativity between external assessment results and internal assessment results to ensure that all assessment tasks are based on the same performance standards and criteria
- consider whether the use of school assessment marks would contribute to the improvements in the calculations of the ATAR
- investigate whether there are any aspects of the assessment arrangements for particular subjects that provide an unintended advantage to female students even when the SACE is 'bedded down'
- consider whether there should be a return to some form of statistical moderation of school assessments in those subjects or subject components where it would be appropriate to do so
- continue the initiative of providing more detail in Chief Assessors' reports

- authorise SACE Board staff and moderators to provide expanded and direct (i.e. including face to face) feedback to each teacher whose internal assessment has been moderated by more than one grade and/or where the key determinant in the moderation outcome being different from the teacher's assessment has been the assessment task design
 - authorise SACE Board staff and moderators to assist teacher associations to prepare materials to assist in the continuing development of teacher understanding and skills. (Section 8.4)
- (9) The SACE Board note the considerable effort that SACE Board staff have applied to the development of an initial program of improvement. Further, the Panel supports the thrust of the program and recommends that the practice of annual review of the results cycle be continued and that the SACE Board makes its improvement agenda widely known in seminars, forums and by other less personal ways such as via the website, direct emails to schools, teachers and professional associations, newsletters etc.

Where identified initiatives including IT initiatives are competing for limited resources, the Panel recommends that higher priority be assigned to those which will impact positively on teacher and SACE Board staff time and workload.

Further, the learning from the first year evaluation is that alongside the Board's improvement agenda should sit a comprehensive change management and communications plan which aims to ensure that all schools and teachers are kept as up to date as possible on the progress of the various initiatives.

The Panel also recommends that added to the SACE Board's list be a consideration of the potential for introducing on-screen marking of external assessments and separating the electronic release of SACE results from the paper documents. (Section 9)

- (10) The SACE Board note the Panel's early assessment of the areas of possible intended and unintended consequence as well as the areas of unfulfilled aspirations with a view to:
- reinforcing in publicity about the SACE the positive effects that the SACE has stimulated
 - monitoring whether any of the possible unintended consequences and unfulfilled aspirations become a longer term trend and, in conjunction with schools and practising teachers taking steps to offset or eliminate them. (Section 10)

(11) Further to earlier recommendations dealing with the commitment to a continuing improvement program, including the monitoring of possible unintended consequences and unfulfilled aspirations, the Panel recommends that the SACE Board, by the end of 2014, commission separate external research into the longer term impacts of such matters as:

- readiness of SACE completers for further study and the workplace
- changing practices in schools and
- variability in SACE enrolment and completion rates between groups of identified and traditionally disadvantaged students, particularly Aboriginal students.

In this regard, the Panel suggests that the research effort, as well as the effort involved in satisfying ad hoc requests for data would be aided considerably if SACE Board staff had access to a modern data warehouse. (Section 11)

3. TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE EVALUATION

The Evaluation Panel was provided with the following Terms of Reference.

"The Evaluation Panel operates under the auspices of the Board to undertake the following responsibilities.

- a) To determine the evaluation strategy for the SACE First Year Evaluation with reference to the SACE Reform Principles in the SACE Review Report and to the Legislative Principles in the SACE Board of SA Act.
- b) To determine the most effective means of including the perspective of students in the evaluation process.
- c) To consult with key stakeholders about the first year of the new arrangements for the SACE, including the establishment and operation of an Evaluation Reference Committee consisting of nominees from, but not limited to:
 - the three South Australian school sectors (AISSA, CESA and DECD)
 - secondary principals associations of the three school sectors
 - South Australian parent organisations
 - the Australian Education Union
 - the Independent Education Union
 - the Council of Education Associations of SA (CEASA)
 - the South Australian Universities
 - Aboriginal Education
 - South Australian Training and Skills Commission
 - DFEEST
 - Business SA.
- d) To consult with the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training and Charles Darwin University about the new arrangements for the Northern Territory Certificate of Education.
- e) To identify areas of concern that have been raised during the first year of the SACE operating under the new arrangements, including but not limited to, the new compulsory requirements of the SACE, the relationship between the

Research Project and Year 12 subject enrolments, and the operational impact of the SACE for schools and the SACE Board.

- f) To gather relevant information and data relating to the new arrangements for the SACE.
- g) To analyse and interpret the information and data it receives to identify and analyse progress towards the achievement of the principles of the SACE and the intended and unintended consequences of the new arrangements for the SACE.
- h) To take into appropriate account the relationship between the SACE results and the University entry selection process operating in South Australia and the Northern Territory.
- i) To advise the Board on improvements to the arrangements for the SACE that are consistent with the SACE Reform Principles outlined in the SACE Review Report and the Legislative Principles defined in the SACE Board of SA Act.
- j) To advise the Board on matters that should be considered in the introduction of any improvements to the arrangements for the SACE, including the most effective implementation timeline.
- k) To advise the Board on future and ongoing evaluation activity in relation to the SACE.
- l) To provide progress reports and a final report to the Board according to the defined timeline.”

The Panel was also provided with an Evaluation Brief prepared by the SACE Board. That Brief elaborates on the Terms of Reference and is included as Attachment 2 to this report.

4. CONTEXT FOR THE EVALUATION

The SACE that was first implemented in the 2010 (Stage 1) and 2011 (Stage 2) school years had its origins in the 2005 review of the previous SACE.

That review led to a number of significant changes to the SACE as follows:

- the introduction of a Personal Learning Plan to be completed by students as a 10 credit unit in Stage 1 of the SACE (generally undertaken in Year 10)
- the requirement to complete, to a satisfactory level, 200 credits of study (the equivalent of 10 full year subjects) over the two Stages of the SACE (most usually in Years 11 and 12 of senior secondary schooling). Of the 200 credits, 20 credits are assigned to literacy related study in Stage 1 and 10 to numeracy related study, also in Stage 1
- the removal of the categorisation of subjects at Stage 2 as being HESS General or HESS Restricted. Under this previous categorisation, Universities would not allow results obtained in HESS Restricted subjects to be included in calculations of Tertiary Entry Rank scores
- the removal of the requirement to study at Stage 2 a blend of subjects defined by what was known as the SACE pattern and which, as a minimum, ensured that students included at least one language-rich and at least one quantitative / experimental subject in their choices
- the introduction of a requirement that all Stage 2 subjects be assessed via a combination of school assessment (up to 70% of the total assessment) and external assessment (at least 30% of the total assessment); as discussed in more depth later in this report the assessment regime was also changed considerably
- noting that the mandatory SACE completion requirement is 70 credits of Stage 2 subjects including the compulsory 10 credit Research Project, there was a reduction in the expected or normal Stage 2 study load from the equivalent of five full year subjects to four full year subjects plus a compulsory

10 credit Research Project to be regarded as the equivalent of a half year subject. For those students wishing to have the Research Project considered as part of their Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) score, there is a requirement that it include a piece of written work of 1 500 words.

These changes necessitated considerable negotiation with the higher and further education sectors, particularly in regard to the impact on ATAR calculations. The Universities agreed to use the fewer number of subjects as the basis for ATAR calculations. South Australian Universities also agreed to the removal of the distinction between HESS General and HESS Restricted subjects by which results in HESS Restricted subjects were previously excluded from tertiary entrance assessment (no such restriction had applied in the Northern Territory). In addition, the ATAR calculations were refined to take into account results from any University subjects studied, any Vocational Education and Training qualifications at Certificate 3 level or higher and International Baccalaureate results.

In overseeing the implementation of these changes to the SACE, the SACE Board and its staff have been guided by seven principles which require that the SACE be:

- flexible and responsive to the needs of individual students and groups of students
- credible in terms of rigour of the learning process, the standards used to assess students' achievements, and the reliability of the certificate's attestation to what SACE graduates know and can do
- inclusive of all students, cultures and study pathways so that success for all is the prevailing dominant culture
- connected to learning that precedes it, to work and study destinations beyond it, and to local and global communities
- worthwhile in terms of benefits perceived by students
- futures oriented so that students have the capacities to not only survive in a globally competitive world, but to shape it
- supportive of quality learning and teaching.

With a change of this magnitude involving up to 20 000 South Australian based students in each year level, more than 260 schools in the State, more than four thousand senior secondary teachers at Stage 2 alone and a number of tertiary institutions, the effort required is huge. It is also inevitable that not all aspects of the implementation proceed as smoothly as anticipated or desired.

Therefore, the SACE Board had made an early policy decision that the SACE would be the subject of a continuing improvement program commencing with an independent evaluation within two years of the initial implementation. This evaluation report commissioned very soon after the completion of the first full cycle of Stage 1 and Stage 2 students honours part of that commitment.

5. PROCESSES ADOPTED BY THE EVALUATION PANEL

The Evaluation Panel, encouraged by the SACE Board and the Minister for Education and Child Development, adopted a policy of wide ranging discussion and consultation. This was pursued through a number of means including:

- public calls for submissions in the Adelaide daily newspapers of 11 March and 13 March 2012
- email communication to all schools offering senior secondary education drawing attention to the call for submissions and encouraging entries in school newsletters
- an entry on the SACE Board website referring to the call for submissions
- attendance by the convenor of the Evaluation Panel at Leaders' Forums in February and, as part of a brief presentation, encouraging submissions
- the seeking of advice from the Reference Committee as to individuals or organisations to receive direct contact from the Evaluation Panel
- for the schools in the Northern Territory, the conduct of a survey arranged by the Northern Territory Board of Studies.

In total 114 written submissions were received. Submissions were received from:

- Schools (27 submissions)
- Governing Councils of Schools (2 submissions)
- Teachers (39 submissions)
- Parents (12 submissions)
- School, Subject and Principal Associations (10 submissions)
- Educational Institutions (9 submissions)
- Unions (combined) (1 submission)
- Parent Organisation (1)
- Students (4)

- Members of the Public (5)
- Northern Territory Schools (3 submissions)
- Northern Territory Teachers (1 submission)

A full list of submission authors is included as Attachment 3 to this report.

In addition, members of the Evaluation Panel participated in many meetings with individuals and organisation representatives to seek their views. In a number of cases these discussions were stimulated by submissions from the individuals and/or the organisations. A full list of people interviewed is included as Attachment 4 to this report.

The Evaluation Panel members, collectively and individually, met with members of the SACE Board's staff on many occasions throughout the five month period of the evaluation. The purposes of these meetings ranged from obtaining overall perspectives on the implementation of the SACE and improvement opportunities already identified by staff to requesting specific data relating to such matters as subject choices, assessment regimes and information technology challenges.

The Evaluation Panel was also mindful that its Terms of Reference required the views of students to be sought. This was done in several ways, guided by the expertise of the Australian Council for Education Research (ACER) in ensuring that representative samples of students were involved. The main features of these processes were as follows.

- The engagement, after a limited tender, of Harrison Research Pty Ltd to conduct a telephone survey of 800 students who were enrolled as Stage 2 students in 2011 and who were randomly selected from the SACE Board data base. The survey was conducted to elicit responses from students relating to their experience with the SACE in 2010 and 2011. A list of the questions asked of respondents is included as Attachment 5 to this report.
- The cross-referencing of the responses to the student survey with several small focus groups of Stage 2 students in 2011 drawn from a University College and school alumni.
- Comparing the responses to the student survey with the experiences of those members of the Evaluation Reference Committee who have direct contact with significant numbers of students.

The Panel noted that much of the material in the written submissions related either to specific, individual circumstances or general impressions. This is perfectly understandable. Wherever possible, the Panel attempted to confirm or validate these impressions by requesting data from the SACE Board and/or the South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre. Where such data was available for analysis, references are made in the relevant Sections of this report that follow.

6. OVERVIEW OF MAIN TOPICS COVERED IN SUBMISSIONS

6.1 South Australian Submissions

The South Australian submissions covered an extremely wide range of topics. As was expected, most submissions dealt with issues of concern although a number of them also took the opportunity to include statements of commendation relating to aspects such as:

- the dedication, commitment and desire to be helpful, of SACE Board staff
- the flexibility of the SACE and its more pronounced accommodation of Vocational Education and Training (VET) options
- the achievement of other forms of flexibility (such as the recognition of tertiary subjects studied) within a single certificate
- the pursuit of rigorous assessment of student performance based on documented performance standards and the opportunities that this has provided for professional development of teachers
- the foundation provided by the SACE for schools to reassess their overall approach to teaching and learning, including aspects of school organisation such as lesson length and timetabling.

The main areas of concern related to topics such as:

- whether the SACE as currently structured compares well with national and international equivalent qualifications (and, to some extent, whether this is harming South Australia's attractiveness in the international student markets)

- whether the current structure of the SACE has limitations for students wishing to pursue tertiary studies beyond South Australia, particularly in Universities which have pre-requisite studies at Stage 2 and which are not mandatory in the SACE
- the undesirability of students narrowing their choice of subjects at Stage 2 (based on the now mandatory requirement of four full year subjects instead of the previous five); submissions pointed to this phenomenon having a far greater impact on certain subject areas (humanities and languages in particular) than on others
- the value of the Research Project as a Stage 2 mandatory requirement; submissions questioned whether the large effort required of students is in-keeping with a 10 credit unit of study, whether there are greater inherent difficulties for students with less access to resources and with less well developed English language skills and whether students are “research fatigued” given the extent of research type activities such as directed investigations in other subjects
- the difficulty and complexity for teachers of applying the new approach to assessment of students’ work based on performance standards
- the substantial increase in the workload of teachers as they implemented changed approaches to designing assessment tasks, assessing student work and preparing student work for submission to the SACE Board for moderation
- significant increases in the administrative effort required of schools in support of teachers preparing student work for submission for moderation.

In Sections 8.2 to 8.4 of this report, these and other areas of concern are discussed in more detail.

6.2 Survey of Northern Territory Schools

With the assistance of the Northern Territory Board of Studies a survey of Northern Territory schools was conducted. The main outcomes from this survey were as follows:

- of the 20 schools in the Northern Territory offering the Northern Certificate of Education (NTCE) based on the SACE, responses were received from three schools

- those schools generally rated the level of support and assistance from the SACE Board and the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training as more than acceptable
- similar concerns to those in South Australian submissions were raised about the difficulty of working with the new assessment regime and which have been reported on elsewhere in this report; specific comments were made about the complexity of the wording of performance standards, confidence in determining grade levels without adequate exemplars and the impact on teacher workload
- some concerns were also raised about the late notification by the SACE Board staff of key dates, late availability of support materials and of late feedback on Learning and Assessment Plans
- the Research Project, which was optional in the NTCE, was not undertaken by any of the 2011 cohort of Northern Territory students in the schools that responded to the survey ; separately the Panel was advised that approximately 20 of the 800 Northern Territory students who completed the NTCE in 2011 undertook the Research Project.

In addition to this survey, the Panel specifically sought views from the Charles Darwin University but no views were received. That should not be interpreted as a criticism of Charles Darwin University. As has been mentioned elsewhere in this report, no submissions were received from South Australian Universities either. Informal advice obtained from University representatives on the Evaluation Reference Committee indicated that it is simply too early to draw conclusions from the perspective of Universities, as to the impact of the current SACE on the preparation of students for higher education.

7. STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SACE

As an important stakeholder group that had not featured much in the submissions (only four submissions were received from students), a random sample of 800 students who were enrolled as Stage 2 students in 2011 was conducted to obtain a representative picture of their views of the SACE.

In addition, two focus groups with 2011 SACE students were held, one at Adelaide High School (five students) and one at St Ann's College (21 students) in response to an invitation by the Principals to the convenor of the Evaluation Panel. The focus groups were conducted by two members of the Evaluation Panel after the completion of the survey.

The main points of students' views regarding the new SACE can be summarised as follows (where percentages are used they relate to the survey results):

Likes

- What students most frequently mentioned when asked what they liked about the new SACE included the range of subjects from which students could choose (18%), the way they were graded (13%), the Research Project (13%) and having only four subjects and the Research Project in Stage 2 (10%).

Research Project

- On a scale from 0 "not at all useful" to 10 "extremely useful", students rated the Research Project on average as a neutral "5". Distributions indicated a slightly more positive view of the Research Project than the PLP as nearly half (48%) gave the Research Project a rating of 6 and above compared with the PLP for which the corresponding percentage was 39%.
- The main reason for higher ratings of the Research Project was that students found it helpful for their research skills, career and university choice (29%). Reasons for lower ratings included that students found it not helpful (9%), that it took too long (9%), that other subjects would have been more useful (9%) and that it was too confusing (9%).

- Most suggestions (48%) for improvement related to the Research Project with students from non-metro areas or non-government schools (i.e. Independent and Catholic schools) mentioning this aspect more frequently than students from metro areas or government schools.
- More detailed suggestions for improvement of the Research Project that emerged from the focus groups were to (a) give it more structure, (b) leave the topic of the Research Project less open and attach it to other subject areas (c) more teaching of research methods and skills and (d) do it in Year 11 to allow students the possibility of studying five subjects in Year 12.

PLP

- On a scale from 0 “not at all useful” to 10 “extremely useful”, students rated the PLP on average “5”, also as neutral.
- The main reason cited by those students giving the PLP a relatively higher rating was that it had helped their career or university choice (21%). Reasons for students giving the PLP a lower rating included that it had been irrelevant (20%), pointless (14%) and not fitting their needs (13%). Students from Independent schools were more likely to find the PLP irrelevant (27%) than government school students (16%). Students from Catholic schools were more likely to find the PLP pointless (20%) than students from the other two sectors.

Principles for reform of the SACE (as per the aspirations of the 2005 SACE Review)

- All statements had average ratings at the more positive end of the scale but the relevance of the new SACE was given the lowest median rating with a “6” on the scale from 0 “strongly disagree” to 10 “strongly agree”.
- The new SACE’s responsiveness, utilising learning prior to Year 11, benefit and preparation of students with different plans after school were given a median rating of “7”.
- With a median rating of “8” students expressed their highest agreement with their performance having been assessed fairly and having received quality teaching.
- Females found the new SACE to have been responsive to their needs more so than males.

- Students enrolled in full time university study rated the relevance of the new SACE to what they were currently doing slightly more highly than former students who were now in full-time employment.

7.1 The Survey

A telephone survey of a random sample of 800 students who were enrolled as Stage 2 students in 2011 was undertaken by Harrison Research Pty Ltd as part of this evaluation from 4th to 16th of May. The survey was supervised by ACER and aimed to ascertain the views of students about their experiences with the new SACE. The questionnaire (Attachment 5) sought responses from students regarding:

- whether or not they had completed the SACE or a Certificate 2;
- their current activity, for example, study at university or TAFE, employment, gap year, home duties;
- their general likes about the new SACE and suggestions for improvement;
- whether their SACE results were in line with their expectations and whether, with the value of hindsight, they would have done anything differently;
- the perceived usefulness of the PLP and Research Project as well as suggestions for improvement;
- their ratings of statements regarding “Principles for reform” (e.g. responsiveness, relevance, benefit, inclusiveness of the new SACE);
- any other comments.

7.1.1 The Sample

According to SACE records, a total of 10 677 students were in their 12th year of schooling attempting to complete their SACE in 2011. Additionally, these students had provided telephone numbers – which was a necessary requirement given that the survey was conducted by telephone – and had declared their consent for being contacted for research purposes. Due to time constraints, only students who were 18 or above at the time of the survey were included in the sampling frame to avoid having to seek parental consent. While this reduced the number of students

by 1 027 to 9 650, a comparison of students under 18 and above 18 along the lines of the sample characteristics in Table 7.1 revealed no major differences between the two age groups. These 9 650 students constituted the sampling frame.

To increase the sample precision, the sampling frame was sorted by ATAR (in five categories: Four quartiles and no ATAR), sector, geolocation (metro/non-metro), SACE completion, language at home (English/other), and whether students identified as Aboriginal or international students. From this sampling frame, every second student was drawn. The SACE Board then provided Harrison Research with the telephone numbers of these 4 825 students.

By way of random selection, Harrison Research approached 2 626 students from the list in order to obtain the 800 responses which constituted the final sample. Reasons for students approached not completing the survey included refusals, respondents being unavailable or no response to phone calls even after four attempts.

The characteristics of the final sample together with those of the population (i.e. all students enrolled at stage 2 in 2011) is given in Table 7.1. As can be seen, the sample is representative of the population in terms of proportions for gender, sector, geolocation, and SACE completion.

Table 7.1 Sample characteristics

		Population	Sample
Total		10 677	800
Gender	Male	48%	45%
	Female	52%	55%
Geolocation	Metro	73%	73%
	Non-metro	27%	27%
Sector	Government	57%	58%
	Independent	20%	21%
	Catholic	23%	21%
SACE Completion	Yes	89%	90%
	No	11%	10%

7.1.2 Survey Results

Current activity

Information regarding current activity was mainly obtained to enable comparisons for these sub-groups in addition to the sample characteristics listed in Table 7.1.

As shown in Figure 7.1, most students were enrolled full-time at university and/or had part-time work. 8% each were doing a VET/TAFE course, were in full-time employment or were having a gap year.

Figure 7.2 illustrates current activities when broken down by subgroups. Results show that females (58%) were more likely to be enrolled in full-time study at university than males (44%) and to be employed part-time (57%) than male respondents (40%). Males, on the other hand were more likely to be involved in full-time employment (10%) or full-time traineeships/apprenticeships (6%) compared to female respondents (7% and 2% respectively).

Similar differences could be found between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas whereby respondents from metropolitan areas were far more likely to study at university full time (58%) or have part-time employment (51%) than their non-metropolitan peers (33% and 44% respectively). In contrast, non-metropolitan respondents were more likely to have a gap year (12%) or be in full-time employment (13%) than their metropolitan peers (7% and 7% respectively).

In terms of differences in current activity between sectors, Catholic and Independent schools were more likely to pursue full-time study at university (58% and 60% respectively) compared to students from government schools (46%). The same applied to part-time employment with 51% from Catholic and 57% from Independent schools reporting this as a current activity compared with 46% from government schools. The only other notable difference related to a gap year with 13% of Independent school students reporting this as a current activity compared with 8% in government or 4% in Catholic schools.

Figure 7.1 Current activity

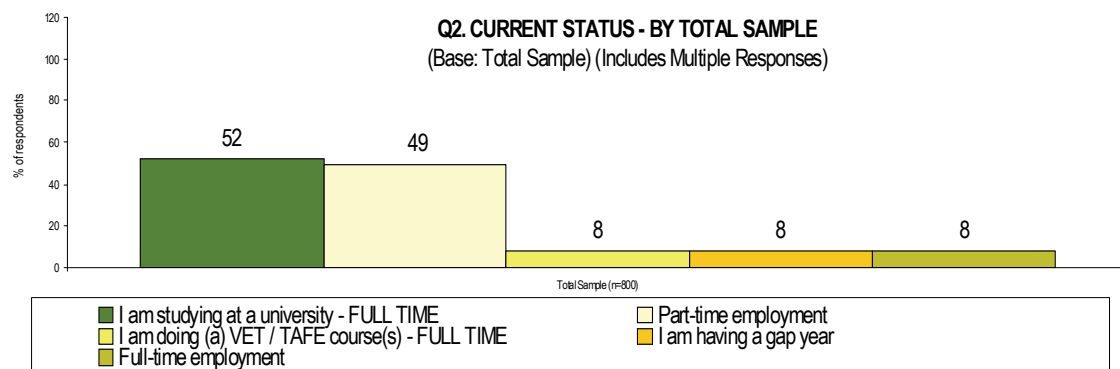
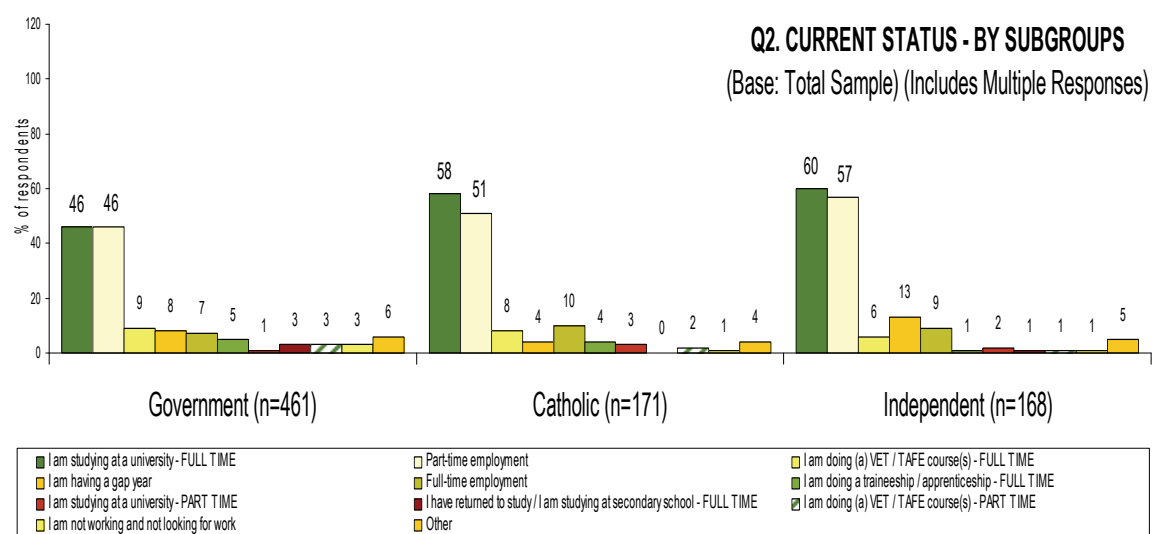
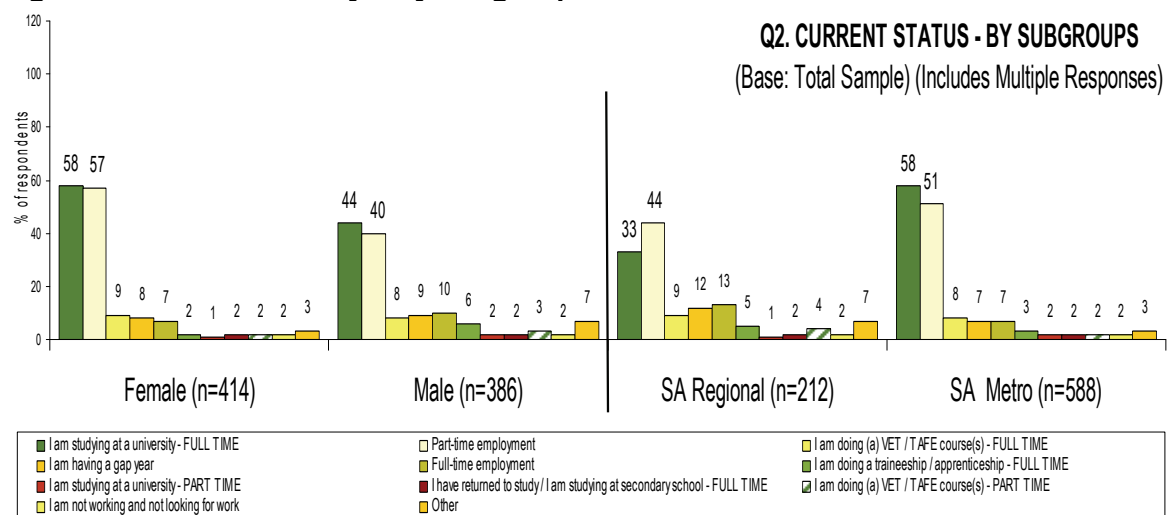


Figure 7.2 Current activity – by subgroups



Likes about the SACE and suggestions for improvement

Figures 7.3 and 7.4 illustrate students' likes about the SACE and their suggestions for improvement. The largest proportion (22%) was unsure regarding any likes about the new SACE. This was followed by 18% stating that they liked the range of subjects from which they could choose. 13% responded that they liked how they were graded and the same percentage also liked the Research Project while 80 students (10%) stated that they liked having only four subjects and a Research Project in Stage 2.

At the same time, nearly every second student (48%) mentioned the Research Project as an element of the SACE that could be improved. On this issue, students from non-metro mentioned the Research Project more frequently (55%) than metro students (45%) whereas students from government schools were less likely to raise this topic than students overall (44% and 48% respectively).

Other topics that were raised in response to the question regarding possible improvements included that it was confusing for students and/or teachers (14%), their teachers' subject delivery (8%), how they were graded (8%) and the point system (8%). Indeed, the first two and the second two could be grouped in that the teachers' confusion left room for improvement in subject delivery. Also, responses referring to the way of grading and the grading system can also be considered to be related.

Figure 7.3 Likes about the new SACE

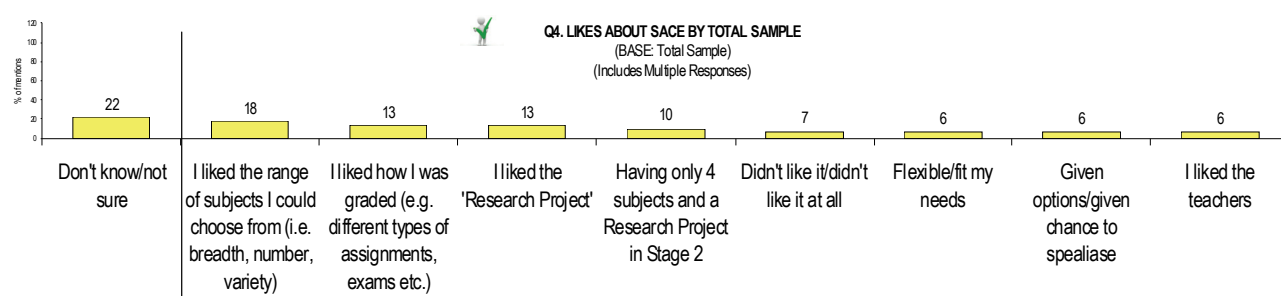
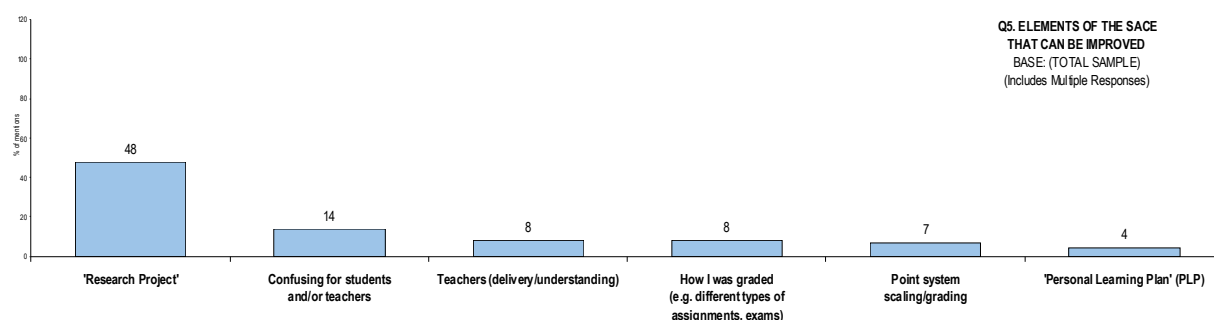


Figure 7.4 Suggestions for improvement of the new SACE



Usefulness of the Research Project and the PLP

Students were also asked to rate the usefulness of the Research Project on a scale from 0 “not at all useful” to 10 “extremely useful”. As can be seen in Figure 7.5, the median rating was 5, indicating that students gave the Research Project a middle rating between not useful and extremely useful. While the students’ median rating of the PLP was also 5 (see Figure 7.6), the proportion of students giving a rating of 6 or higher was greater for the Research Project (48%) than for the PLP (39%), indicating a slightly more favourable view of the Research Project compared with the PLP.

A comparison of the usefulness ratings of the Research Project in terms of subgroups, namely, by gender, geolocation and sector revealed no noteworthy differences. In other words, the Research Project was not rated more or less useful depending on whether students were male or female, came from metro or non-metro areas or had attended a Catholic, government or Independent school.

Figure 7.5 Usefulness of the Research Project



Q10. RESEARCH PROJECT USEFULNESS RATINGS

(BASE: Total Sample)

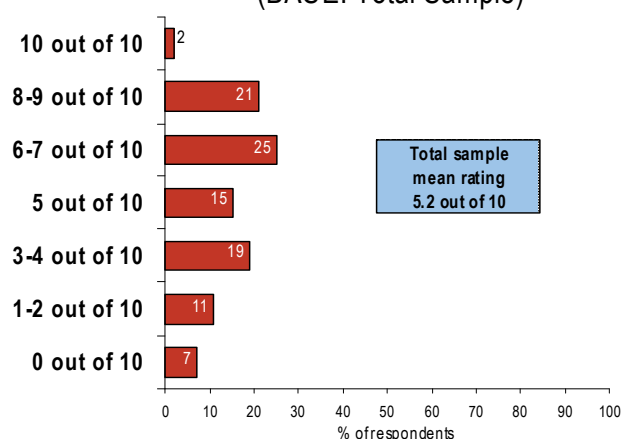
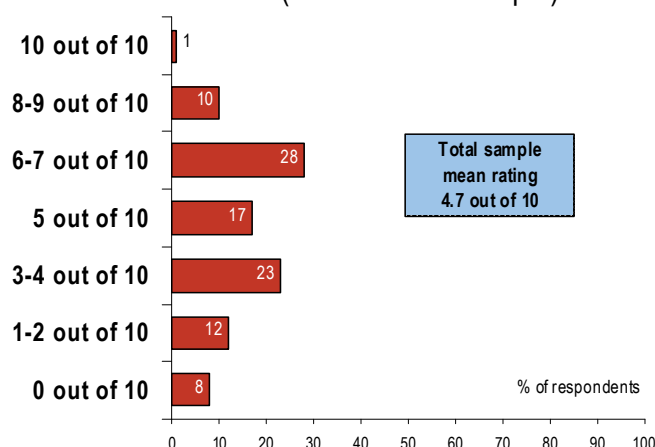


Figure 7.6 Usefulness of the PLP



Q8. PLP USEFULNESS RATING DISTRIBUTION

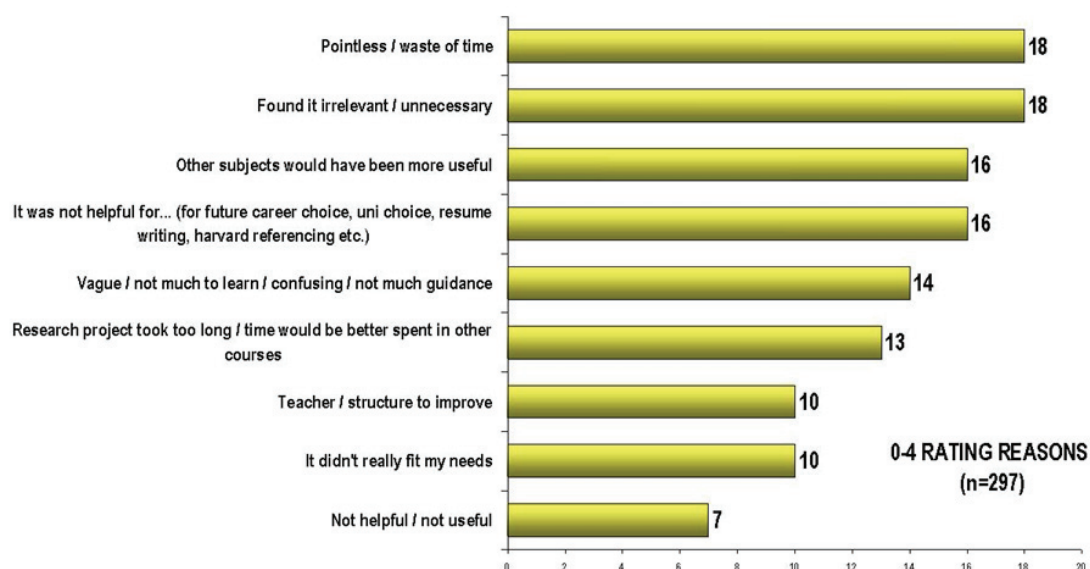
(BASE: Total Sample)



Students were also asked about the reasons for their ratings for both the Research Project and the PLP. Figure 7.7 shows the reasons given by students who rated the Research Project lower than the middle point (i.e. from 0 to 4, n=297) while Figure 7.8 illustrates the reasons mentioned by students who rated the Research Project higher than the middle point (i.e. from 6-10, n=381). The corresponding illustrations for the PLP are Figure 7.9 and Figure 7.10 respectively.

Reasons for lower ratings of the Research Project mentioned by the largest proportion of students (18%) were that it was pointless, a waste of time and irrelevant or unnecessary. Almost as often (16%), students mentioned that subjects other than the Research Project would have been more useful and that it was not helpful either in general (7%) or with respect to specific skills such as referencing or future career. Other reasons for low ratings included that it was perceived as vague and confusing (14%), that it took too long and time would have been spent better in other courses (13%), that the teacher or the structure needed to improve (10%) and that it did not fit students' needs (10%).

Figure 7.7 Reasons for usefulness ratings lower than 5 for the Research Project



Quite in contrast (see Figure 7.8), more than half (53%) of students who rated the Research Project as being relatively useful (n=381) cited as a reason that it was helpful in terms of research skills, future career and university choice. Other reasons for rating it useful included finding the Research Project very helpful (18%), helpful (7%) or relevant (13%). That some respondents who were rating the Research Project higher than the half way mark still had some negative comments was reflected in 6% saying that it was too vague, 5% saying that it did not fit their needs while 4% found that the time would have been better spent on other things.

Figure 7.8 Reasons for usefulness ratings higher than 5 for the Research Project

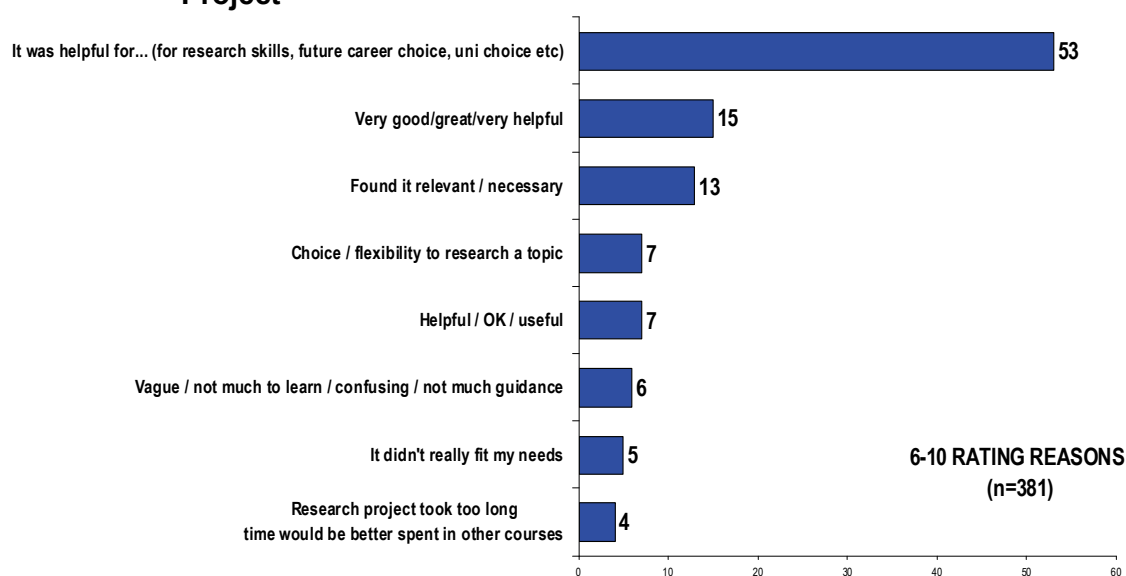
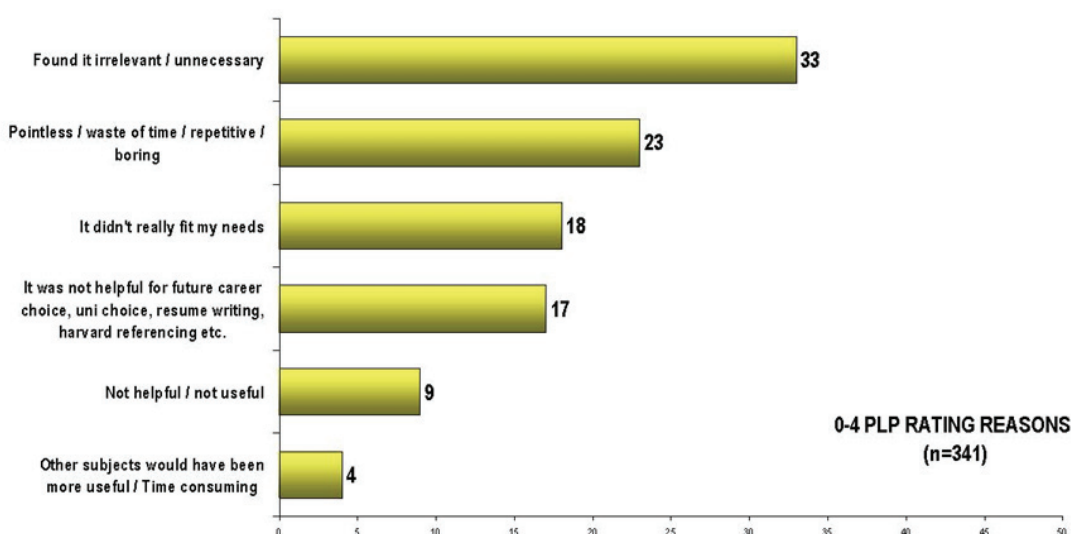


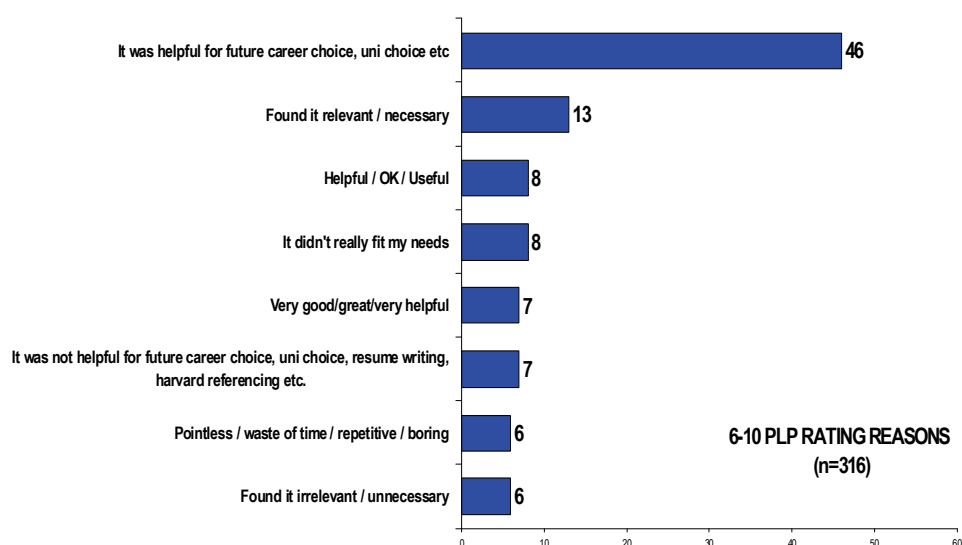
Figure 7.9 shows the reasons for rating the usefulness of the PLP lower than the half way mark (i.e. a rating of 0-4, n=341). The reason mentioned by most students (33%) was that they found it irrelevant or unnecessary, followed by it being a waste of time (23%). Other reasons included that it did not really fit their needs (18%), was not helpful for their future career (17%), just not helpful (9%) or that other subjects would have been more useful (4%).

Figure 7.9 Reasons for usefulness ratings lower than 5 for the PLP



Nearly half of the respondents (46%) who rated the PLP as being useful (i.e. 6 or higher, n=316) cited its helpfulness for future career and university course choice as the reason for the higher rating (see Figure 7.10). Another 28% had positive comments about the PLP and judged it to be relevant (13%), helpful (8%) or very good (7%). Some respondents, despite giving a relatively higher rating regarding the usefulness of the PLP, provided reasons that were critical of the PLP and stated that it did not fit their needs (8%), was not helpful for future career or university choice (7%), pointless (6%) or irrelevant (6%).

Figure 7.10 Reasons for usefulness ratings higher than 5 for the PLP



Results expectations and retrospective insights

Figures 7.11 and 7.12 illustrate the responses to the question as to whether students thought their SACE results had been in line with their expectations and whether, with the value of hindsight, they would have done anything differently.

The question relating to students' expectations of their results enabled students to indicate not only were their expectations met but, if they wished, to give a reason for their answer (such as whether they were assessed fairly, whether they worked hard to achieve their results or whether the assignments or exams were too difficult).

The most common response was that 37% of respondents indicated that their results were in line with their expectations and that they had been assessed fairly. Another 10% indicated that their expectations had been realised and that this was a result of their hard work. 25% of respondents had expected higher results and 10% had expected lower results.

There was a slightly different gender response to results expectation, with females being more likely to expect lower results (12%) than males (8%).

Almost half of respondents (45%) said that they would not change anything if they were to do the SACE again. 21% mentioned a change in subject choice, with male respondents and those who had attended Independent schools more likely to express this view.

17% of respondents indicated that they could have worked harder and 10% said they should have been better organised. Those in full-time employment were more likely to have wished that they worked harder (30%) than those studying full-time (11%).

10% wished that they had chosen a different topic for the Research Project, with non-metro students (16%) more likely to have expressed this desire than metro students (8%).

Figure 7.11 Results expectations

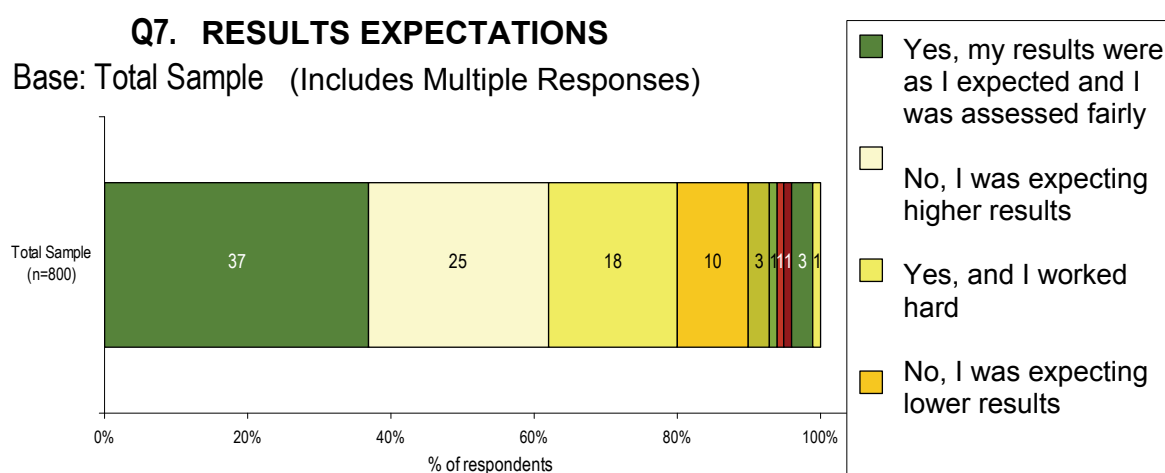
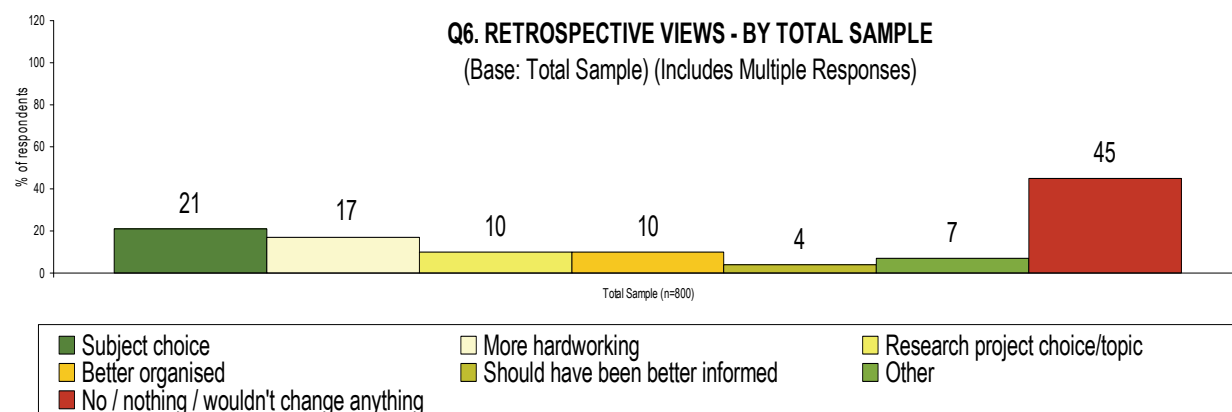


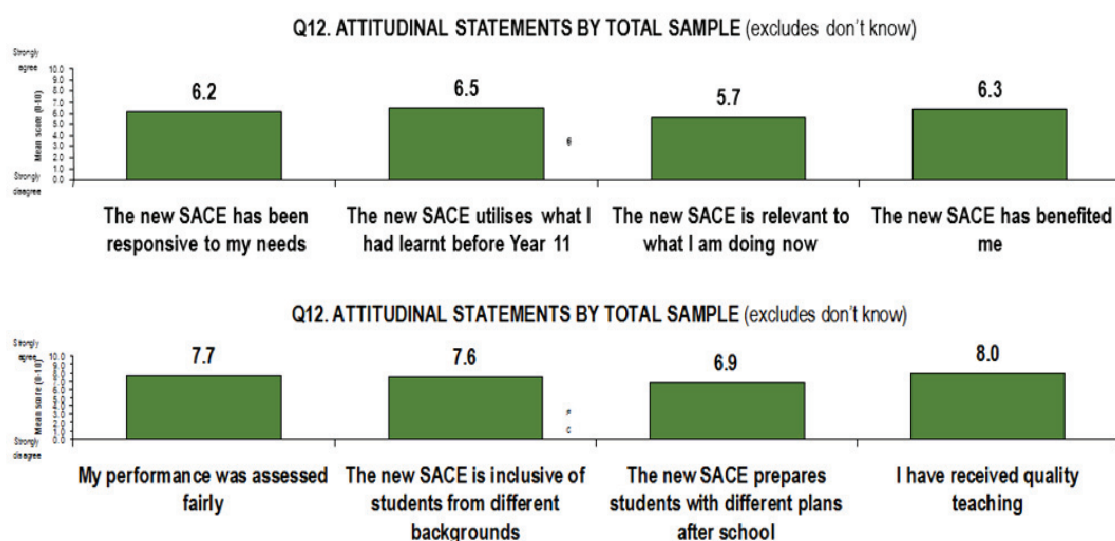
Figure 7.12 Would you have done anything differently?



Views regarding the principles for reform of the SACE (as per the aspirations of the 2005 SACE review)

In order to ascertain students' views on the principles for reform, eight statements were developed. One a scale from 0 'strongly disagree' to 10 'strongly agree', respondents were asked to rate how responsive, credible, inclusive, worthwhile, futures-oriented, connected and supportive they had found the SACE. Results are illustrated in Figure 7.13.

Figure 7.13 Views regarding the principles for reform



The highest rating at 8.0 related to students' views with regard to having received quality teaching. This was closely followed by students' attitude to the fairness of their assessment (7.7) and the inclusiveness of the SACE for students from different backgrounds (7.6).

The lowest mean rating of 5.7 was recorded for the statement "The new SACE is relevant to what I am doing now". Average mean ratings between 6 and 7 were given to the statements regarding the new SACE being responsive to students' needs (6.2), having benefited from the new SACE (6.3), the new SACE utilising what students had learnt before Year 11 (6.5) and the new SACE preparing students with different plans after school (6.9).

As regards subgroup differences, female students found the new SACE to have been responsive to their needs more than male students (6.4 compared with 5.9). Moreover, respondents in full-time employment found the new SACE notably less relevant to what they were currently doing than respondents in part-time

employment or full-time study (4.2 compared with 5.8 and 6.3 respectively).

Any other comments

The last question in the survey asked respondents for any other comments regarding the new SACE and a content analysis of responses was undertaken. The analysis was guided by questions that arose during the presentation of the student survey results to the Evaluation Reference Group.

Details of the analysis are given in Attachment 6 and can be summarised as follows:

- Elements of the new SACE which caused the most confusion were related to teachers' lack of knowledge regarding the new SACE in general but also regarding the marking and assessment criteria in particular. Suggested improvements focused on the improvement of information dissemination and training to teachers.
- Only three comments related to specific subjects. Respondents said that the requirements for visual arts and design were too rigorous, teachers had insufficient knowledge regarding specialised subjects and that the reduction had led to fewer offerings in the humanities.
- Eight comments mentioned the reduction at Stage 2 from five to four subjects plus the Research Project. All argued that five subjects provided more options for study and pathways and voiced their preference for increasing the number of subjects by making the Research Project optional or by requiring five subjects and the Research Project.
- Twenty-eight comments were received with respect to the Research Project. Of these, eleven expressed a general dislike, five perceived it as irrelevant, four suggested that it be implemented in Stage 1 and three argued that the lack of teachers' knowledge about the Research Project had a negative impact.
- The PLP featured in eight comments with most of them (n=7) expressing a general dislike.
- Ten positive comments regarding the new SACE were received with students saying that they liked it, were

satisfied with the marking/assessment system, appreciated the contribution of the Research Project to the SACE completion and the possibility of gaining bonus points for university entrance.

7.2 The Focus Groups

Two focus groups with students who had been in Stage 2 in 2011 were undertaken by members of the evaluation panel on 6th and 7th of June 2012. Questions asked in the focus group followed those in the survey as a guide. In addition, a “warm-up activity” required participants to rate the usefulness of the Research Project and the PLP. The intention was to compare those ratings with the survey results. Ratings were also obtained for some additional school subjects as members of the Evaluation Reference Group had questioned whether students would have given other subjects such as mathematics or physics equally low ratings as those given to the Research Project and the PLP. The full focus-group guideline is attached as Attachment 7.

At Adelaide High School, the focus group consisted of five former students who had been on the SACE merit list. Of these, four were now students at Adelaide University while one was having a gap year. In terms of gender, two were female and three were male participants.

At St. Ann’s College, focus group participants had attended many different secondary schools, all in non-metro areas and were now undertaking tertiary studies, either at Adelaide University or the University of South Australia. The group consisted of thirteen female and eight male participants.

The two Evaluation Panel members in attendance took notes at the focus groups. While the main themes that emerged are summarised below it should be noted that a large part of the discussion revolved around the Research Project.

Ratings of usefulness

As indicated above, the start of the focus groups, a “warm-up activity” required participants to rate the usefulness of the Research Project and the PLP. The intention was to compare those ratings with the survey results. Ratings were also obtained for some additional school subjects as members of the Evaluation Reference Committee had questioned whether students would have given other subjects such as mathematics or physics equally low ratings as those given to the Research Project and the PLP. Figure 7.14 shows the results of these ratings. It should be noted that the base number of students differs as not all students took all subjects.

A comparison with the ratings of the Research Project by the representative survey sample (see Figure 7.5) reveals that the focus group students were more negative in

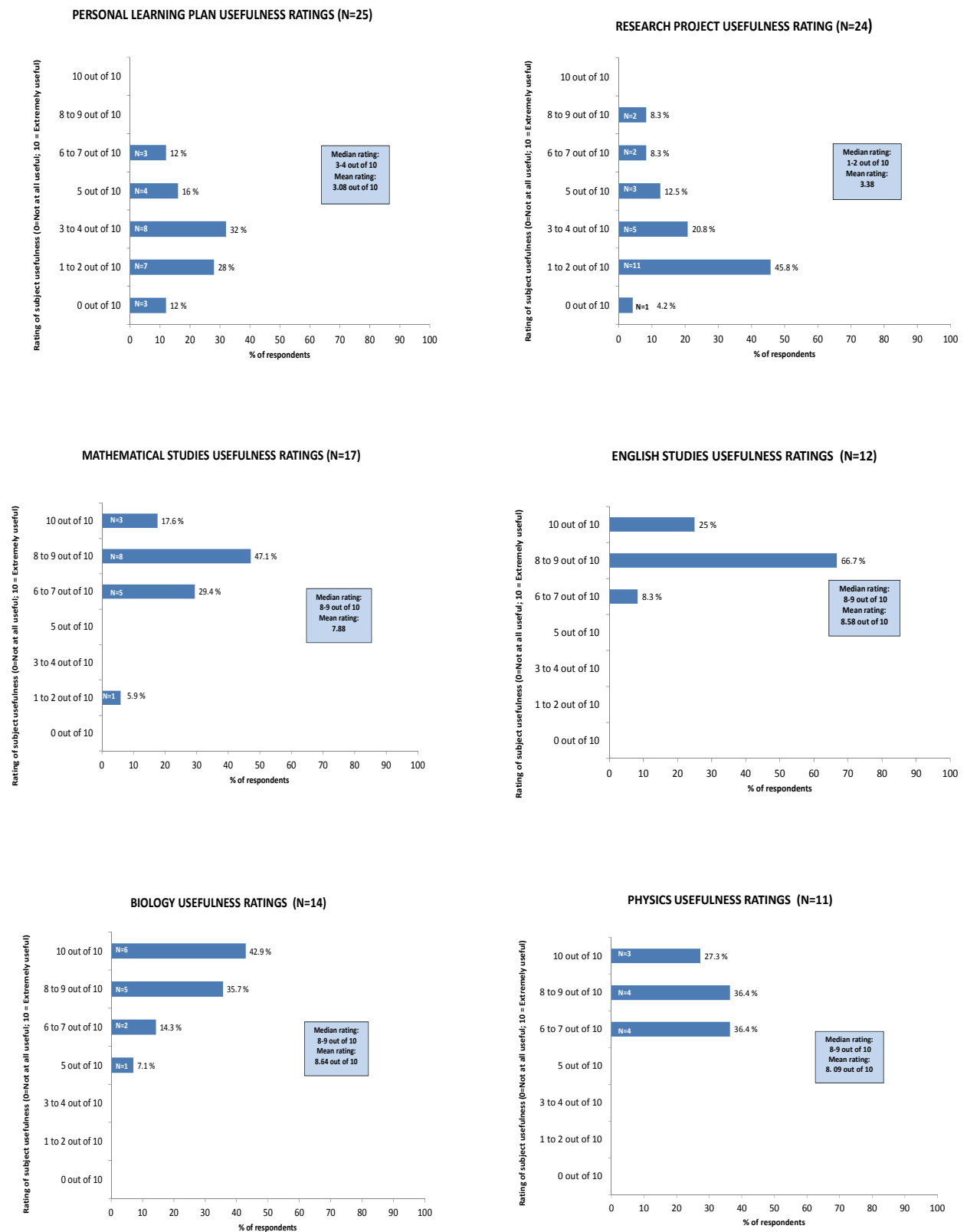
their ratings. Thus, the median rating of the Research Project by the focus group participants was a “2” compared with a “5” by the survey participants.

What also emerged was that focus group participants rated the usefulness of other subjects such as mathematics or English studies, biology and physics far more positively than the Research Project. As reasons for these relatively high ratings, participants cited the usefulness for subjects such as biology and physics for their university studies and the ease with which they were able to apply their knowledge. Thus, the hypothesis that students might assign lower ratings not just to the Research Project or PLP but also to subjects such as mathematics or physics could not be confirmed.

It should be reiterated, though, that the participants were a relatively high achieving group as, with one exception, all of them were pursuing full-time university studies at the time of the focus groups.

The Panel made some attempts to determine if students’ views of subjects had historically been the subject of rigorous research in Australia at any time in the recent past. It was unable to locate any research of this type so definitive comparisons between the ratings of the Research Project, the PLP and other subjects have not been possible in this evaluation.

Figure 7.14 Subject usefulness ratings by focus groups



The Research Project: Criticism and suggestions for improvement

The Research Project was the lowest rated subject on average. Focus group participants were of the view that it was poorly structured and that little was actually taught. Where actual lessons had been allocated to the Research Project, students commented that teachers did very little by way of actually teaching and that students often did not attend the lessons. Also, students argued that the investigation assessment component in other subjects already covered research aspects.

In addition, students stated that teachers were not able to provide much guidance by way of content as every student could select a different topic and teachers argued that they were not content experts in all the topic areas.

Many students expressed frustration as a consequence of changes to topic choice and assessment criteria that occurred during the Research Project as teachers themselves learnt more about the Research Project in workshops and professional development.

Students also commented that it took less effort to achieve a good grade for the Research Project than for other subjects. In addition, the actual amount of work students said they had put into the Research Project varied from six months to a few days and nights.

Some of the positive comments covered the ability to pursue a topic or subject (e.g. music) that they could not have done otherwise. Also some commented on specific skills regarding survey development or interviewing skills that had made them more confident.

Most students in the focus groups would have agreed, if there had been a choice, to make the Research Project optional or to abolish it completely.

Suggestions for improvement included having more examples, assistance with finding a research topic, possibly linking the Research Project to one of the other subject areas and being taught “how to do research”. A number of students also commented that it would be good to do the Research Project in Year 11 in order to have more time to focus on other subjects in Year 12 and possibly do a fifth subject in that year.

Grades (A to E) compared to marks (0-100%)

Many students reported that their teachers were using the “old” marking system of marks out of 100. Also, participants commented that teachers were still marking to the “old” weighting system with school marks counting 50 per cent and statistical moderation the other 50 per cent. Participants said that teachers used to design hard exams and mark these quite “tough” in the school-based component in the knowledge that the external exams used for moderation would then be relatively easier and provide students with higher marks that would adjust their marks upwards. Yet, with the new system that assigned 70 per cent of weight to the school-based

assessment, this led to students receiving lower marks than anticipated – also by their teachers.

A number of comments suggested that it was difficult to distinguish between grade levels such as A and A+ and that, with grades, there was not as much room to differentiate between students as there was with marks.

The rubric was not well understood by either students or their teachers as expressed by many frustrated comments. Also, it was difficult to see what was required for the different grade levels if, in some cases, the difference in the rubric was only one word. Again, students argued that more examples would be helpful.

Advice to a current student starting the new SACE

When asked about the advice they would give to a Year 10 student who was about to start the new SACE, participants commented that they would tell them to have a continuous conversation with teachers about the grades, to keep options open by selecting a broad range of subjects at Stage 1 and to put good effort into the Research Project as it was counting towards the ATAR.

Other comments

Other comments referred to the SACE in general and to teachers. Thus, some students expressed the view that the new SACE had not really brought any additional value. Another common view among participants was that the new SACE was probably more inclusive but did not extend the higher performing students and allowed a student with a set of good grades for “easy subjects” (e.g. home economics, tourism) to be considered as having done as well as a student who had received a set of good grades for “difficult subjects” (e.g. mathematics and physics). Finally, participants thought that teachers had not been prepared well for the new SACE and that the new SACE had meant a lot more work for their teachers.

8. DETAILED DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this Section of the report, the main topics which were raised during the evaluation process (either through the submissions received, the face to face discussions or as a result of the Evaluation Panel's own analysis) are discussed in detail.

By way of introduction, the Panel's assessment is that the changes to the SACE might have appeared superficially to be relatively straightforward (even disarmingly so) but have in fact been quite profound in their impact on schools, teachers, students and parents.

Although there has been rationalisation of the number of subjects available for study (through selected combinations of similar subjects), the syllabus content of the most studied subjects changed very little between the former SACE and the current SACE.

What has changed substantially is the expectation by the SACE Board of teachers in their assessment of student learning with the introduction of new approaches to assessment based on published performance standards. These new approaches are linked to a requirement that each student's learning in each subject will be 70% assessed by the student's teacher complemented by a 30% externally assessed component.

The details are described in Section 8.4 of this report but this change has impacted to a significant extent on every teacher in every subject area. It would appear that the extent of this impact only became clear to a number of Stage 2 subject teachers in 2011 as they commenced working with the changes.

Of similar impact has been the requirement that each student in Stage 2 achieve a satisfactory grade (C level) in the newly introduced Research Project. Again, this is discussed in detail in Section 8.3 of this report but it appears that there has been considerable variation in the readiness of schools and teachers for the requirements and potential impact of the Research Project.

Clearly the implementation of the SACE required a collaborative effort between the SACE Board, schools and teachers. This was a change management initiative of significant proportions.

The continuing improvement commitment of the SACE Board will also require a collaborative effort. The early experience of schools, teachers, students and SACE Board staff should play a major part in defining the improvement agenda and in deciding priorities and strategies.

Recommendation

The Panel recommends that:

The SACE Board maintain its commitment to a continuing improvement program for the SACE and, in so doing, encourage maximum involvement of schools and teachers in determining the improvement priorities and strategies; the main aim being to take advantage of the detailed experience of all schools and teachers as they continue to implement the SACE.

8.1 Values, Principles Applied by the SACE Board

Throughout the implementation of the SACE, the SACE Board has been guided by a set of values stated as follows:

“Excellence

We will deliver quality, innovative, and future-focussed curriculum and assessment.

Equity

We will provide high levels of equity and high educational standards.

Innovation

We will embrace change and seek out opportunities at the local, national, and global levels.

Collaboration

We will build strong and effective relationships with our partners and the broader community.

Integrity

We uphold the highest ethical standards.

Respect

We will honour the views, customs and cultures of all individuals and communities.”

The values built on the guiding principles which underpinned the recommendations of the 2005 SACE Review and which are specified in the SACE Board Act.

No submission questioned the validity of these values and principles and there was no criticism during this evaluation process of the values, principles or the SACE Board's commitment to them.

As will become evident in the subsequent Sections of this report there have been some unintended consequences resulting from the application of the values and principles. Where practical, the Panel has made recommendations to address these circumstances which should not compromise the SACE Board's continued commitment to the values and principles.

The Evaluation Panel endorses the values above as the basis for the SACE Board's continuing development and stewardship of the SACE.

8.2 The Standing of the SACE

From the time that the 2005 SACE Review Report was published there have been concerned observers suggesting strongly that the new SACE would not be regarded as a senior secondary certificate of sufficient standing nationally and internationally.

A number of submissions to this evaluation have echoed these suggestions by pointing particularly to the following aspects:

- the reduction in the number of subjects required to be studied to achieve 200 credits (the previous SACE had a 220 credit requirement) combined with the fact that 20 compulsory credits (in total) relate to the Personal Learning Plan and the Research Project which critics have argued as being of questionable value
- the reduction in the mandatory requirement at Stage 2 from five full year subjects to four full year subjects plus the Research Project (Panel note: the actual SACE requirement is 70 Stage 2 credits including the Research Project)
- the removal of the mandatory requirement (as per the SACE curriculum pattern) at Stage 2 to study at least one language-rich subject and at least one quantitative/experimental subject

- the potential for some students wishing to study at an interstate university where Stage 2 English is a pre-requisite for entry to be disadvantaged
- the comparisons with the requirements for the International Baccalaureate which in 2011 was offered by eight schools in South Australia at senior secondary level. (Note that in 2011, the SACE was offered by 262 South Australian schools).

The Evaluation Panel has examined a comparison table of the requirements of the respective senior secondary certificates nationally. That table is included as Attachment 8 to the report.

Attempting to judge whether the senior secondary certificates issued by different credentialing authorities make equal demands of students is a difficult task. There are a number of aspects upon which comparisons could be made. For example, questions need to be addressed such as:

1. 'Is the curriculum content students study in similar subjects at the same level?'
2. 'Do the performance standards set for similar subjects require the same levels of achievement?'
3. 'Is the scope of the total curriculum students are required to study the same?' and,
4. 'Are the requirements in terms of achievement in order to be awarded the certificate the same?'

The first of these questions can be answered by conducting a 'curriculum mapping' between syllabus/subject prescription documents produced in similar subjects produced in the different jurisdictions. Such mappings consider the objectives, outcomes, subject content and such to determine whether the similar subjects from different authorities are equally demanding. Useful information can also be determined by comparing the external assessment instruments produced by the authorities. Curriculum authorities usually conduct such mappings when they are revising their curriculum in particular subjects.

If subject performance standards are established using summary descriptions, assessment tasks and appropriately selected student work samples, the second question can be answered by comparing the materials that illustrate the standards. Some tentative work has been done in this regard in a small number of subjects, and it is understood that at the present time some of the senior secondary assessment agencies (i.e. the SACE Board counterparts in other States) are involved in a similar project.

The third question is relatively straightforward and is the one that seems to be behind the comments made about the relative standing of the SACE prior to and during the evaluation. A comparison of the subject study requirements of the SACE with some of the other senior secondary credentials in other States shows that the number of subjects studied by SACE students appears to be smaller than in other jurisdictions.

Care needs to be taken, however, in considering such information. In NSW students must study the equivalent of six subjects (or 120 credits) in Year 11 and the equivalent of five subjects (or 100 credits) in Year 12. In fact in Year 12 in 2011, 34.6% of students studied more than the equivalent of 100 credits. In Victoria, the VCAA reports that while students need to complete the equivalent of four subjects, most students complete the equivalent of five and a half or six subjects in Years 11 and 12. Similarly, in Queensland the QSA reports that most students take the equivalent of five subjects in Years 11 and 12.

In order to address this matter more fully the proportions of students presenting more than the Research Project and four subjects for the SACE need to be considered. In Section 8.3.1 it is reported that 21.6% of students completing the SACE in 2011 studied more than 90 Stage 2 credits. Hence, it appears that on the whole SACE students are studying fewer subjects than students who undertake the interstate certificates, especially those proceeding to tertiary study.

There is no rule that prevents SACE students from taking more than four Stage 2 subjects. It is possible, however, that the timetabling arrangements in many schools around when the Research Project is undertaken may create more of an issue.

The fourth question is more complex because States vary in their respective policies concerning “satisfactory completion” of a subject compared with “student achievement”.

In the SACE (and the International Baccalaureate and the Queensland Certificate of Education), students need to demonstrate a satisfactory level of achievement in the required number of units or subjects before the certificate can be awarded.

By contrast, in Victoria and New South Wales the policy position is that if a student “satisfactorily completes” a subject then that subject can count towards the awarding of their certificate.

The complexity in considering this question arises because although in each approach a student’s grade is reported against each subject, the

relative performance standards need to be taken into account as discussed in relation to the second question above.

The Panel has also noted that as a result of interstate transfer protocols applied by SATAC, completing SACE students are able to gain an Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR). In 2011, 10 624 students or 85.9% of the 12 367 completing SACE students obtained an ATAR and 11 553 students or 93.8% obtained a TAFE Selection Score.

Through the considerable efforts of the SACE Board, the South Australian Universities and TAFESA have accepted the SACE and its associated assessment requirements as a reasonable basis for assessing students' eligibility for entrance to higher and further education. This acceptance has, in general terms, flowed to all Australian Universities although there are some specific pre-requisite subject conditions for certain courses in interstate universities that a SACE student may need to take into account in their choice of subjects at Stage 2.

No South Australian University and no TAFE College has made a submission to this Evaluation although each University and the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology has participated in Reference Committee meetings. Informally, University representatives have indicated that it is far too early to tell whether those completing students in 2011 are at an advantage or disadvantage in their preparation for higher and further education than their counterparts in previous years.

8.3 The Structure of the SACE

In this Section of the report there is discussion of the main changes to the SACE. This discussion has been informed by material from submissions, discussions with people directly involved with the SACE and from the Panel's own analysis.

8.3.1 Overall Requirements

Much of the critical comment about the overall requirements pointed to a significant reduction in the "content" of the SACE. This related partly to the 20 credit reduction (equivalent of one full year subject) and the fact that, of the overall requirement, 20 credits relate to two compulsory elements – the Personal Learning Plan at Stage 1 and the Research Project at Stage 2 – which critics believe to be of questionable value.

Critics also point to what they believe to be trends in:

- more schools offering International Baccalaureate at the senior secondary level and
- more students opting to study more subjects than are needed for the mandatory 200 credits (suggesting that students have considerably more capacity than is required by the minimum SACE requirements).

Assessing trends after one year of experience with the new SACE is not a statistically reliable undertaking. However, the Panel has noted that:

- of the 262 schools in South Australia offering the SACE in 2011, eight also offered the International Baccalaureate at senior secondary level; over the years there has been a slow growth in schools offering the International Baccalaureate but the numbers of students are relatively small. SATAC has informed the Panel that in 2011, 230 International Baccalaureate candidates successfully completed their IB diploma and that this is a similar number to previous years. 26 SACE candidates used an individual IB subject in the calculation of their ATAR.
- in 2011, 2 667 students out of a total of 12 311 students completing the SACE (i.e. 21.6%) submitted more than 90 Stage 2 credits; this compares with 12.5% of completing SACE students in 2010 who submitted more than 100 Stage 2 credits under the former SACE.

Much critical comment has been made about the fact that there is no mandatory requirement in the current SACE for English to be studied at Stage 2. The Panel is aware that English has not been a mandatory requirement under the former SACE either with the former SACE pattern specifying only that a language-rich subject was mandatory at Stage 2.

Again, it is not possible to determine a trend after one year but the Panel has noted that students are electing, in significant numbers, to study English at Stage 2:

- of the 12 367 SACE completing students in 2011, 8 181 (or 66.1%) presented either the 10 credit unit or 20 credit unit in an English subject

- of the 10 most favoured four subject combinations in Stage 2 in 2011, one of the English related subjects featured in eight of them.

At this early stage there is no clear evidence that students of the SACE and the NTCE have been disadvantaged in terms of post secondary school options. However, the world of senior secondary education is not static.

The SACE Review of 2005 and the subsequent Cabinet consideration of its recommendations took place at a time at which it appeared that a national curriculum was either unlikely or a very long time away.

That situation has changed and it now appears that implementation of the Australian Curriculum for senior secondary study could commence some time in this decade.

It is likely that within the framework of the Australian Curriculum, each State and Territory will have some discretion over the structure of their respective senior secondary certificates but it will inevitably place a spotlight on the structure of the SACE.

Critics of the current SACE structure on the basis that it was premature to change the SACE in the light of the emerging Australian Curriculum may well be proven to be correct. However, it must be remembered that in addition to the unknown status of the Australian Curriculum, the 2005 SACE Review and the 2006 Cabinet consideration of that Review were mindful of a set of issues (including reducing rates of school retention and high student dissatisfaction with the Year 12 workload and with the former SACE subject pattern) which were a cause of great concern at the time.

Recommendation

The Panel recommends that:

The SACE Board continue to monitor national, interstate and international developments in senior secondary education and certification (particularly the developing Australian Curriculum) and continue to assess the structure of the SACE to ensure that it remains a certificate of national and international standing.

8.3.2 The Personal Learning Plan (PLP)

Although the PLP is a mandatory Stage 1 10 credit unit it is largely studied in Year 10. The Panel understands that in 2009 and 2010 after its introduction there was widespread criticism and concern about the value of the PLP. This led to considerable reform by the SACE Board.

The PLP attracted very little comment in submissions to this evaluation. There was occasional reference to students' experiences ranging from:

- the students found the PLP to be of no interest or relevance, to
- the students realised only in Years 11 and 12 that the PLP was useful.

There was also positive reference to the practical aspects of the PLP generally related to work experience.

The Panel has tentatively concluded that the PLP is gradually gaining greater acceptance although the student survey commissioned by the Panel found that, on average, students rated the PLP as only marginally useful.

That said, it must be noted that the students surveyed in this evaluation largely undertook the PLP in its original form and before the SACE Board revised it. Future surveys of the experience of students with the PLP should take this into account when comparisons are being made and conclusions being drawn.

The most substantive comment made to this evaluation is that there is still room for considerably more notice to be taken by schools and teachers of each student's PLP outcomes in the preparation of students for their other Stage 1 and Stage 2 studies. With such a new concept as a PLP it is understandable that it will take time for all schools to treat the PLP in this way but the Panel is aware that the SACE Board has a sound knowledge of schools that are well advanced in this area.

Recommendation

The Panel recommends that:

In relation to the Personal Learning Plan (PLP), the SACE Board note the relatively minor comment received by this evaluation suggesting that the changes introduced after the first year of experience have been reasonably well received. Further, that as part of its continuing improvement agenda, the SACE Board, in conjunction with schools, identify and promote through various professional development initiatives, emerging good practice in the application of PLP outcomes for students as they progress through Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the SACE.

There is still confusion about whether interstate transferring students and international students are required to study the PLP. In respect of international students, several submissions urged the SACE Board to consider removing the PLP as a mandatory subject whereas others commended the SACE Board for not requiring all international students to complete the PLP.

The Panel understands that the current policy position for international students who commence part way through Stage 1 (Year 11) or for interstate transferring students is that the PLP is not mandatory. However, there is also a view in some quarters that the PLP should not be a mandatory requirement for any international students.

The main points in favour of removing the mandatory PLP requirement for all international students are that:

- the concept of a PLP is quite contrary to their expectations of what constitutes senior secondary study
- the international students who commence their study in Year 11 and therefore are required to complete the PLP in Year 11 are disadvantaged (from the viewpoint of time availability) in their other Year 11 studies compared with the majority of local students who have completed the PLP in Year 10. This is particularly the case for students with more limited English language capability.

Recommendation

The Panel recommends that:

The SACE Board clarify for all schools that Stage 1 transferring interstate students and international students enrolling part way through Stage 1 need not undertake the PLP

and reconsider whether the PLP should remain as a mandatory requirement for any international student.

8.3.3 Numeracy and Literacy

The SACE now requires students to achieve satisfactory results (C grade at least) in a 20 unit literacy related study at Stage 1 and a 10 unit numeracy related study also at Stage 1.

Critics of this change suggest that this is a downgrading of the literacy and numeracy requirements compared with the former SACE in which there needed to be a language-rich subject and a quantitative/experimental subject chosen at Stage 2.

In considering this matter, the Panel has analysed the extent to which students chose Stage 2 literacy and numeracy related subjects in 2011.

This analysis indicates that:

- (as reported earlier), 66.1% of SACE completing students in 2011 presented at least one of the Stage 2 English subjects offered (10 credit unit or 20 credit unit)
- 6 603 (or 53.4%) of SACE completing students in 2011 presented at least one of the Stage 2 mathematics subjects offered (10 credit unit or 20 credit unit)
- compared with 2010, the reduction in English subjects presented at Stage 2 was 8.1% with a small increase of 3.7% in mathematics subjects presented.

(The Panel is mindful that in the former SACE the definition of language-rich included a range of subjects including languages other than English).

The numbers above are not markedly different from those of the former SACE but interstate comparisons may not be so favourable. The Panel is aware, for example, that in New South Wales, the equivalent to Stage 2 SACE students are required to study English (so the comparison figure to the 66.1% referred to above is 100%) and approximately 65% select a mathematics subject. (As suggested in Section 8.2 above, interstate comparisons need to take into account possible differences in completion and achievement standards).

The Panel has noted that the SACE Board has decided to enhance its rigorous assessment approach to the compulsory Stage 1 subjects (discussed in Section 8.4 below) to ensure that assessments of student learning in the areas of numeracy and literacy are credible. This is a positive development.

The Panel has concluded that although it is too early to tell whether there is any long term trend, the early indications are that:

- the number of students opting to study Stage 2 language-rich subjects, at this early stage in the life of the SACE, has shown a small decline
- in relation to mathematics there is an early sign that students are selecting the subject of Mathematical Applications in greater numbers (17% increase between 2010 and 2011) and the more difficult subject of Specialist Mathematics in lesser numbers (12% decrease between 2010 and 2011). This may, in 2011, have been caused by the decision of the Universities to accept results in Mathematical Applications for ATAR calculations. However, it seems to be part of a continuing trend that should be continually monitored
- the increased rigour associated with the assessment of Stage 1 literacy and numeracy related subjects being implemented by the SACE Board will play an essential part in the development of community confidence in the standards of literacy and numeracy achieved by senior secondary students.

Recommendation

The Panel recommends that:

In relation to literacy and numeracy, the SACE Board continue to pursue and enhance its rigorous approach to assessment of the Stage 1 student learning based on performance standards and, in conjunction with schools, monitor student subject choice in literacy and numeracy at Stage 2 with a view to:

- *identifying any undesirable trends in subject choices as early as possible and, if such trends emerge*
- *examining whether there are aspects within the SACE Board's control (such as the nature of assessment tasks required or perceived areas of misalignment between school based assessment tasks and external assessment tasks) which are continuing a trend which commenced earlier*

than 2011 of reduced Stage 2 student selections in English subjects and in Specialist Mathematics.

8.3.4 The Research Project

With the exception of the new approach to assessment of student learning (discussed in Section 8.4), no topic attracted more comment in submissions than the Research Project. The main negative comments were as follows:

- the Research Project requires far more effort by students than its 10 credit value (Panel note: the student survey seemed not to confirm this point)
- the Research Project should be optional but if it is to remain mandatory it should be at Stage 1 with a return to five full year subjects at Stage 2
- there are now so many research type requirements in most Stage 2 subjects (in the form of directed investigations) that students claim to be suffering “research fatigue”
- there is an inherent advantage in the Research Project for female students compared with males
- conversely, there is an inherent disadvantage in the Research Project for students from lower socio-economic circumstances, from non-English speaking backgrounds, for Aboriginal students and for new arrivals to Australia
- the assessment requirements for the Research Project are too oriented towards academically inclined projects compared with other types of projects
- students who struggle to achieve a satisfactory level of achievement by the end of Semester 1 in Year 12 are then at a disadvantage in their studies of their other subjects in Semester 2 and, in addition, this places a burden on schools needing to schedule extra classes for these students
- the clerical and administrative burden on teachers and schools as a result of all Research Projects having to be submitted to the SACE Board for moderation is excessive.

Not all comments about the Research Project were negative. Supporters of the Research Project pointed to extremely high

levels of student learning, development of organisational skills that assisted greatly in the pursuit of the students' other subjects and a high level of enjoyment where a student chose a substantial topic of deep personal interest.

The student survey commissioned by the Panel found as follows:

- On a scale from 0 “not at all useful” to 10 “extremely useful”, students rated the Research Project on average at the half way mark, namely “5”.
- Students in full-time employment and students in government schools rated the usefulness of the Research Project marginally lower than students in full-time university study and students from Catholic and Independent schools.
- Nearly half the students (48%) mentioned the Research Project as an aspect of the new SACE that required improvement.
- Students from non-metro areas and from non-government schools (i.e. Independent and Catholic schools) suggested that the Research Project required improvement more frequently than students from metro areas or government schools.

In addition to the survey, two focus groups were conducted by panel members with students who had been in Stage 2 in 2011. Suggestions for improvement of the Research Project that emerged from these focus groups included to:

- give the Research Project more structure,
- leave the topic of the Research Project less open by, for example, attaching it to other subject areas;
- have more teaching of specific research methods and skills; and
- do the Research Project in Year 11 to allow students the possibility of studying five subjects in Year 12.

The Panel has made a number of tentative observations from the material presented to it during this evaluation. They are as follows:

- there seems to have been a significant difference in the enthusiasm and readiness of schools for the introduction of the Research Project
- similarly it seems that there has been a significant difference in the readiness of some of the teaching staff assigned to the Research Project
- schools are still experimenting with the best way to manage the Research Project including, but not confined to,
 - introducing the Research Project in Year 11 and either completing it in Year 11 or allowing it to be largely undertaken and completed in Year 12
 - changing their timetabling so that lesson time devoted to the Research Project is increased above normal single lesson blocks
 - spreading the supervision load amongst a range of teachers so that there is more relevance of the teachers' areas of expertise to the topics chosen by students
 - linking more strongly with organisations beyond the school to assist with identification of worthwhile Research Project topics and student mentoring.

The Panel has undertaken some limited analysis of the 2011 Research Projects submitted. It has noted that:

- of the 16 064 Research Projects submitted, 14 365 (or 89.4%) were Research Project B (i.e. including a 1 500 word written piece of work) and 1 699 (or 10.6%) were Research Project A; it has also been noted that there was volatility in Research Project enrolments with 3 752 students withdrawing their enrolment and 2 247 subsequently re-enrolling
- of the 10 624 completing Stage 2 students in 2011 who received an ATAR, 71.6% had an achievement score for Research Project B that was used in the ATAR calculation; conversely data from SATAC suggests that many students

who submitted Research Project A also obtained an ATAR by submitting additional subject credits

- the results for male students in 2011 compared to those for female students were as follows:
 - 22.6% of the female students achieved an A grading compared with 11.3% of male students
 - 40.9% of the female students achieved a B grading compared with 32.1% of male students
 - 32.3% of the female students achieved a C grading compared with 48.9% of male students.

It is not uncommon for there to be a difference in achievement levels between male and female students in particular subjects. In fact, in almost all SACE Stage 2 subjects in 2011 the achievement levels of female students were higher. However, no other subject had this extent of achievement difference by gender.

This evaluation has been unable to assess the reasons for this. There are various theories, all of which are plausible. However, from the SACE Board's viewpoint it is important that it examine whether there is any aspect of the performance standards and/or the assessment arrangements that could unwittingly be contributing to this difference in achievement levels.

The Cabinet decision supporting the restructuring of the SACE included a requirement that the Research Project be a compulsory Stage 2 subject.

There is little doubt that in terms of curriculum, the Research Project has had the greatest impact on schools, students and parents. As reported earlier it is apparent to the Panel that schools varied considerably in their readiness for this impact.

Some schools have embraced the philosophy underpinning the Research Project and have reported to the Panel that it has had a major influence on teaching practice and students' learning. It also seems that the more enthusiastic schools have found ways to innovate including, but not confined to, the changes to timetabling, supervision and external relationships referred to above.

It is also apparent that despite efforts by the SACE Board as early as 2009 with introductory seminars and pilot approaches, not all

schools have embraced the Research Project with the same level of readiness or enthusiasm.

The Evaluation Panel has received a number of submissions and personal representations suggesting various ways to deal with the Research Project in future. They are:

- retain the Research Project as a compulsory Stage 2 subject but recognise that there are improvement initiatives that are necessary to overcome the more difficult aspects of its implementation
- retain the Research Project as a Stage 2 subject but make it optional with students having the choice either of a Research Project, another 10 credit Stage 2 subject, or replacing a 10 credit subject with a 20 credit subject
- make the Research Project a compulsory Stage 1 subject which must be completed at a satisfactory level but as a Stage 1 subject will obviously not contribute to the ATAR or TAFE Selection Score
- eliminate the Research Project and revert to the equivalent of five full year subjects at Stage 2.

Given that the Research Project as a compulsory Stage 2 subject was an explicit component of the Cabinet decision and therefore a policy decision, the Panel's focus has mainly been on the first of the options above.

However, for completeness the Panel has considered the options and documented the potential advantages and disadvantages of each of them, as follows:

Retain the Research Project as a Stage 2 subject but make it optional

Proponents of this option suggest that:

- there is clearly a significant research component to other Stage 2 subjects so that students are developing research skills in other ways
- the Research Project suits some students but not others who would be much happier and be better prepared for

their post senior secondary years by studying a fifth subject

- the reintroduction of the fifth subject will address the concerns documented elsewhere in this report relating to the narrowing of subject choices at Stage 2.

Detractors from this option suggest that:

- there would be considerable timetabling and associated difficulties for schools in managing a combination of students undertaking the equivalent of a fifth subject or the Research Project
- either because of the difficulties suggested above or through student counselling, the Research Project would gradually disappear as a Stage 2 option
- the 2005 SACE Review identified the requirement for five full year subjects for all students at Stage 2 as being a major reason for many students not enrolling for the SACE and contributing to low student participation and retention rates.

Make the Research Project a Compulsory Stage 1 Subject

Proponents of this approach suggest that:

- with the amount of research type skills needed by students for their Stage 2 subjects, the research skills need to be developed at Stage 1
- this would clear the way for a return of the equivalent of five Stage 2 subjects
- a number of schools are already enabling or requiring students to commence, and even complete the Research Project in Year 11 (normally Stage 1) even though it is a Stage 2 subject.

Detractors from this approach suggest that:

- not all students (particularly male students) are mature enough to undertake a Research Project of any substance at Year 11

- in particular, the first year assessments of student work suggest that male students are likely to be even more disadvantaged from being required to study the Research Project earlier
- with the compulsory requirements relating to literacy and numeracy at Stage 1 there could be a further narrowing of subject choices at Stage 1 similar to that already occurring at Stage 2.

Eliminate the Research Project Completely

Proponents of this approach suggest that:

- the Research Project could not be considered in any way to be a substitute for a course of study in a recognised subject area and introduces inequities in favour of students who have access to better resources, students from more advantaged economic circumstances and students for whom English is their first language
- the requirement for a Research Project to be a compulsory Stage 2 subject is detracting from South Australia's capacity to attract international students because agents sourcing international students find it (and the PLP) too difficult to explain to potential students. The Panel has also noted that there was a clustering in the 2011 results for international students around the C grade
- the adoption of the Australian Curriculum in due course (the timeframe for senior secondary adoption is unclear but likely to be later in this decade) will lead to an inevitable decision that the Research Project no longer has a place

Detractors from this approach suggest that:

- it fails to acknowledge the considerable benefits that many students have realised from the Research Project
- it devalues the time and effort that some schools have applied to the reassessment of their approaches to teaching and learning and to the effort that has been involved in building significant, beneficial relationships with industry related bodies and individuals external to the school.

The difficulty for the Panel and the SACE Board in assessing these options is that with 262 schools offering the SACE, over 30 000 students in Stage 1 and Stage 2 and several thousand senior secondary teachers involved in teaching aspects of the SACE, each of the above options and associated views has merit for some students.

The Panel's thoughts are that most of the criticisms of the Research Project as a compulsory Stage 2 subject were made by its detractors well before the last 12 months and do not appear to have changed. It would normally not be the case that a significant Government policy change would be overturned without some reasonable experience with its application – experience beyond one year. Furthermore, the Panel understands that a policy change will require significant modification of the SACE Board's computer systems.

One option for the Research Project which was not canvassed widely in the submissions to the evaluation was for the Research Project to remain as a mandatory requirement but with students having the choice of studying it as a Stage 1 subject or a Stage 2 subject.

If this were feasible, students who elect to study the Research Project as a Stage 1 subject would:

- be able to study five full year Stage 2 subjects but
- would need to understand that the Research Project results would not contribute to ATAR calculations

In part, the feasibility of this option and its timetable for implementation will depend on the impact on the SACE Board's computer systems.

Of all the options documented during this evaluation, the Panel is of the view that this option is the one worthy of most consideration if the SACE Board wishes to vary its current policy position.

However, should the Research Project continue to be a mandatory requirement (either at Stage 1 or Stage 2), there are some lessons from the first year of experience that should form part of the SACE Board's future work program.

They are as follows:

- although the intent has been that students research a topic of interest to them, some of the topics that have been chosen do not immediately or obviously lend themselves to skill or capability development or assessment appropriate to senior secondary education. Increased emphasis on the criteria for a sound Research Project topic would be beneficial to schools, students and parents
- there are two types of Research Project. By contrast with Research Project B, Research Project A does not require a 1 500 word written essay and cannot be counted towards an ATAR or TAFE Selection Score. However, the performance standards for Research Project A and Research Project B are the same. In the first full year of implementation, 90% of students submitted Research Project B. This seems to be much higher than would be expected suggesting that there are barriers to the study of Research Project A that need to be better understood and addressed. Anecdotal feedback provided to the Panel suggests that some schools do not offer Research Project A and others insist on students producing sufficient written evidence of their research process and progress that it is simpler to convert this evidence into a 1 500 word essay. The significance of this concern is that for students with English language difficulties and/or students with no aspiration for higher and further education, Research Project A may be a much better fit. Barriers to its use need to be lowered or removed with the aim of making Research Project A more relevant to students with a more immediate pathway to employment
- the reasons for the relative difference in performance between male and female students needs to be much better understood. Although in most Stage 2 subjects females outperform males, the extent of the “outperformance” in the Research Project as indicated earlier is much greater. Anecdotal feedback suggests that this relates to a difference in maturity levels, an overemphasis on presentation of the work and a difference in personal organisational capability. Other feedback suggests that the assessment framework over-emphasises the research process and under-emphasises the product of the Research Project
- linked to the above point is the view that, if approached “properly”, the Research Project involves more time and effort

than is consistent with a 10 unit subject. Again, this may suggest that some students, more likely to be female, are overemphasising their commitment to the Research Project. As with all subject areas, students will vary in the effort applied. Understandably in the first year the uncertainty may lead to the overemphasis referred to above. Again, this needs to be monitored by the SACE Board to ensure that there are no elements of the assessment regime that provide an unintended trend in this direction.

Panel discussions with SACE Board staff have indicated that there is an awareness of these situations and further monitoring and investigation by SACE Board staff will be undertaken. In the meantime, SACE Board staff have introduced several initiatives which the Panel supports. They are, as follows:

- from 2012, moderation of Research Projects will be based on the same sampling approaches as for other subject areas. This means that approximately 60% of school assessments will need to be submitted to the SACE Board for moderation instead of 100% as in 2011. Whilst this will reduce the moderation effect, the same comments relating to moderation overall in Section 8.4.5 apply
- from 2012, students will be able to resubmit their Research Project to meet the minimum completion requirements but not to improve their grade. This will establish a greater alignment with the policies and procedures for other subject areas
- the SACE Board staff will review the topics chosen by students to see if there is an increasing alignment with other subject areas and to see whether there is a trend in students choosing a topic that builds on a directed investigation that is part of another subject area. If this trend develops it will in part address several of the concerns raised about the open-ended nature of topics selected
- the SACE Board will continue to publicise, and encourage the development of, opportunities for external organisations to link with schools in identifying research topics and mentoring students during the course of the project
- with the increasing availability of electronic search tools, plagiarism presents a significant risk not only in senior secondary education but in higher and further education as well. The SACE Board staff are well aware of this potential in

the Research Project and are taking steps to assist teachers supervising the Research Project to identify where a student may not be presenting the results of his or her work. This effort needs to continue.

Recommendation

The Panel recommends that:

In relation to the Research Project, the SACE Board note the wide range of opinions expressed to this evaluation ranging from high levels of support to substantial criticism. Assuming the current policy position of the Research Project being a compulsory Stage 2 subject remains unchanged, the Panel recommends that the SACE Board's continuing improvement efforts concentrate on:

- *ensuring that teachers assigned to teaching the Research Project have access to sufficient materials to enable them to teach research skills to students and to supervise Research Projects with confidence*
- *assisting schools to identify, in conjunction with students, the essential components of a sound research project topic without diminishing each student's capacity to choose a topic of interest to them*
- *understanding whether there are unintended barriers to the greater adoption of Research Project A and taking steps to lower or remove them*
- *using experience to date to identify examples of students being able to meet the requirements of the Research Project successfully by taking further a directed investigation in another subject and promoting such examples to schools generally*
- *using experience to date to identify examples of students from non English speaking backgrounds, new arrivals and Aboriginal students undertaking soundly based research projects with innovative and relevant topic selection and innovative teacher support and promoting such examples to schools generally*
- *researching the reasons for the stark difference between the performance of male students and female students in the first year and discussing with schools ways and means by which this may be addressed in future*
- *helping schools and students, through the provision of guidelines based on experience, to deal with the undesirable potential for a student to apply more effort to the Research Project than intended for a 10 credit subject*

- *continuing to be vigilant to ensure that work submitted is that of the student and that any outside assistance is acknowledged.*

In addition, the Panel recommends that, in conjunction with schools, the SACE Board staff develop a program of good practice seminars in which learnings of the type envisaged above as well as the work of those schools which have used the Research Project to reconsider their overall approach to senior secondary education can be discussed more widely with peers.

Further, should the SACE Board wish to reconsider the current policy position, the Panel recommends that it gives specific consideration to the Research Project remaining as a mandatory requirement but with an option that it be studied as a Stage 1 subject or a Stage 2 subject.

This consideration would need to:

- *take account of the potential impact on the SACE Board's computer systems in determining an implementation time-table*
- *include the determination of strategies to encourage those students who elect to study the Research Project as a Stage 1 subject to study five full year Stage 2 subjects*
- *acknowledge that students who elect to study the Research Project as a Stage 1 subject will not be able to have its results contribute to their ATAR calculations.*

8.3.5 Subject Choices (Stage 1 and Stage 2)

There have been a number of concerns in submissions, particularly from teachers and their subject associations, expressing concern at the narrowing of subjects chosen by students particularly at Stage 2.

In the main these concerns (which were voiced well before 2011) relate to a reduction in the number of students who are choosing to study a language other than English or a humanities subject at Stage 2. These concerns are accompanied by suggestions that:

- *students are not being adequately prepared for their future citizenship within Australia*
- *our students are being disadvantaged compared with students in other countries where study of at least one language other than that of the home country is required*

- there is a significant reduction in the number of schools now offering certain subjects at Stage 2 which will impact on the availability of experienced teachers specialising in these subjects who will be available to teach these subjects in future years
- the development and implementation of the Australian Curriculum will almost certainly lead to an expectation that students will study five subjects, with an appropriate balance, at Stage 2

In addition, it is apparent that some schools, perhaps those that are better resourced, are already offering students five Stage 2 subjects in Year 12 along with undertaking the Research Project in Year 11 but as a Stage 2 subject.

The Panel has analysed the Stage 2 subject choices and changes in the number of schools offering subjects in 2011 and has confirmed as follows:

- there has been a variable impact on the subjects chosen by students but there has been a consistent decline in the number of schools offering subjects across most subject areas
- some subjects have been chosen in greater numbers or have been relatively unaffected including
 - Mathematics Applications with 556 additional selections (up 17%); 7 less schools offering
 - Physics with 61 less selections (down 3%); 32 less schools offering
 - Mathematics Studies with 170 less selections (down 5%); 15 less schools offering
 - English Studies with 106 less selections (down 5%); 14 less schools offering
 - Chemistry with 180 less selections (down 8%); 25 less schools offering

- of those which are most commonly selected (i.e. more than 1000 Stage 2 students in 2010 or 2011) the 20 credit subjects which have been most affected are shown in the table below:

Subject	Fewer Selections	% Reduction Relative to 2010	Fewer Schools Offering
Geography	723	69	43
Tourism	897	55	32
Society and Culture	771	48	21
Legal Studies	450	40	17
Psychology	709	31	1
Modern History	495	31	26
Physical Education	605	21	30
Food and Hospitality	418	18	-
Child Studies	264	18	10
English Communications	1 320	18	4
Biology	398	11	21

Where there are fewer schools offering a subject the Panel understands that more than one school may be combining classes in some instances.

Regarding the languages other than English, the number of Stage 2 selections have, for a number of years, been quite small with Chinese (for background speakers) being the most selected subject in each of the last four years (ranging from 418 in 2009 to 241 in 2011) presumably influenced by the number of international students selecting the subject.

Reductions have occurred between 2010 and 2011 in all of the languages most selected with the languages most affected being:

- Italian Continuers (down by 55 selections or 27%)
- Japanese Continuers (down by 40 selections or 21%)
- French Continuers (down by 32 selections or 20%)
- German Continuers (down by 28 selections or 17%)

The Panel has also examined the two year experience in subject choices at Stage 1 in 2010 and 2011 compared with previous years and has noted that there are both similarities and differences in subject selection compared with the former SACE. The most notable points are as follows:

- the reduction in selection of Geography, Tourism, Legal Studies and History has also occurred at Stage 1 with reductions in the range of 15% to 40% occurring between the current SACE (Stage 1 selections in 2010 and 2011) compared with the previous SACE in 2009
- the reduction in selection of Languages other than English has also occurred at Stage 1 with overall reductions in the order of 20%
- there has also been a significant reduction in Stage 1 subjects not offered at Stage 2; these include Community Studies, Business Studies, Information Processing and Publishing and Information Technology Systems
- the mathematics and science related subjects at Stage 1 have largely remained unaffected.

This data, albeit at a very early stage in the life of the current SACE, confirms the concerns of teachers of humanities and languages other than English about the narrowing of subject choices. However, it does not confirm the concerns of those critics who use the “dumbing down” pejorative to suggest that students are increasingly selecting non-academically oriented subjects.

Whilst this situation requires constant monitoring, the longer term policy question for the SACE Board and education authorities in South Australia is the potential impact the emerging Australian Curriculum could have on the SACE. If there is to be a reversal of some of the early subject selection trends in humanities and languages identified above, the availability of skilled teachers in those and other subject areas will need to be carefully considered (given the reduction in schools offering the most affected subjects as noted above).

Recommendation

The Panel recommends that:

The SACE Board note the early trends in subject selection and, in conjunction with education authorities, continue to monitor the trends in subject selection at both Stage 1 and Stage 2. Further, with the emerging Australian Curriculum in mind, the Panel recommends that the authorities consider and address possible difficulties in the availability of skilled senior secondary teachers in subjects for which a reversal of the early trend in subject choices may occur in future.

8.4 Assessment of Student Learning

As indicated earlier, the SACE Board has introduced a new regime for the assessment of student learning in the SACE.

Along with comments about the Research Project, the topic of assessment provided the basis for the most comment in submissions received by the Evaluation Panel and in face to face discussions. No-one denies the importance of a rigorous approach to assessment for the credibility of the SACE. However, it is clear from the material presented to the Panel that many schools and many teachers are finding difficulties with the implementation of the new regime.

As concerning as this is, the Panel understands that the introduction of the Australian Curriculum at senior secondary level is likely to require a standards based approach to assessment. Therefore, the lessons learned and experiences gained with the SACE should prove invaluable.

Each aspect of the assessment regime will now be discussed but by way of introduction, the Panel's conclusion is that the area of assessment should receive very high priority in the SACE Board's continuing improvement program.

Although some of the Panel's recommendations relate to specific components of the assessment regime, all assessment related recommendations are listed at the end of the Section.

8.4.1 Assessing and Credentialing Student Achievement in a Standards-based System

In a state-wide credentialing program the course assessment information submitted by a school, whatever form it takes, is

required to indicate the students' achievements at the end of the course.

In most assessment regimes multiple assessment tasks are administered to obtain this information. Measuring student achievement at several points during the course can provide a better indication of student achievement than a single, final assessment. However, greater weight is usually given to those tasks administered at, or near, the end of the course.

Conducting multiple measures also caters for the knowledge and skills outcomes that are better assessed in specific settings or at specific times.

For any credential one of the key requirements of an assessment program is that it provides information to enable judgements to be made about student achievement. In those systems that report student achievement in relation to performance standards, the assessment tasks are designed to provide information that will enable judgements to be made about the level (or standard) of achievement of the students.

In some standards-based systems, student responses to each assessment task are directly assessed against relevant aspects of the performance standards themselves and a grade awarded for each task. If this is the only information that is recorded, then at the end of the course the challenge becomes one of combining the grades awarded for every task to determine a final summative grade for the course.

In other standards-based systems, student responses to the individual tasks are scored using marking schemes that are related to the course objectives and outcomes, and hence to the performance standards. These marking schemes can be designed to enable a finer degree of discrimination between students' performance. Students can also be given a grade for the task, if desired, and other more detailed feedback provided. At the end of the course the marks awarded for the individual tasks are combined using the appropriate weightings. Then, judgements are made about the appropriate cut-off score required for a student to receive each grade.

In both systems, teachers (and other professional educators) seek to ensure that the grade awarded to each student is the one that best represents his/her achievement in relation to the performance standards.

In the first case, the grades awarded do not act in the same manner as numbers (or marks). Unless the grade scale is constructed in such a way as to link it to an underlying interval scale, it is problematic trying to treat the grades as though they were numbers, even if they are converted from an alphabetic scale into a simple numerical scale. This may not be such a significant issue when teachers are reporting to students and parents on a simple five-point scale in earlier years of schooling. Many students will produce work typical of a particular standard for (virtually) all tasks administered. Even if a student's performance is uneven across the tasks, teachers can generally make an appropriate judgement using a five-point scale. In any case, teachers also will have a wealth of information from the assessment tasks that they can share with students and their parents when they report on the student's overall, or summative, achievement. (It becomes a much more complex task if there are many more points on the grade scale.)

In the case of high-stakes assessment associated with a senior secondary credential, where important decisions will be made about students' futures and opportunities, special care needs to be taken. In addition, where the achievement data is to be further processed to produce a rank (such as an ATAR) it is essential that the tertiary admissions authority can have confidence in the results obtained for each student and that they correctly rank the students based on their performances. Any procedural, mathematical or psychometric weaknesses in the assessment program and the determination of results will impact on the integrity of the outcomes.

8.4.2 Performance Standards and Associated Criteria and Assessment Tasks

As indicated in Section 8.4.1 above, at the heart of the SACE Board's new assessment regime for each Stage 2 subject and for the compulsory elements of the SACE is a set of performance standards and criteria. Each subject has two or three assessment criteria. The performance standards are written in relation to these criteria. Under each criterion there are usually two, three or four elements relating to that criterion. These standards describe for each of the five overall grades (from A to E) the learning that each student's work should demonstrate. However, teachers are required to assign a grade level from A+ to E- i.e. 15 actual grade levels.

No submission is critical of the concept of performance standards or of the attempts by the SACE Board to differentiate, in the standards and associated criteria, between the various grades.

However, it is clear that teachers are having difficulty with their application as this relies on the interpretation of adverbs and adjectives used in the statements. There is a call for greater clarity based on simplicity with which the Panel concurs.

Of equal significance to teachers is that as part of the application of performance standards, teachers are required to prepare assessment tasks which enable students' learning to be assessed. These assessment tasks need to be broader than in previous years (even where the curriculum has not changed much).

Each subject requires that quite a large number of assessment tasks (usually 9 to 12) be administered during Stage 2. Taken across a student's total learning program, this could mean that a student is undertaking a total of more than 50 tasks. In addition, given that a student undertakes so many tasks for a subject it means that each task will not carry a great deal of weight in determining the final grade awarded. On the other hand, provided the tasks are not lengthy and do not require a lot of time or effort on the part of the student, the assessment regime may not impact too heavily on the teaching/learning program.

The SACE Board requires teachers to determine a grade level (A+ to E-) for each student for each assessment task for each Stage 2 subject. At the end of the year these grade levels are then combined to produce a grade level for each assessment component of the subject. These are then combined using the weightings specified in the subject outline. The school assessment grade levels are then combined with the external assessment grade levels in the ratio 70:30.

The SACE Board gives schools the option to use marks as part of the assessment program to assist in determining students' grade levels. Many schools do this in order to obtain greater discrimination between the performances of students in the tasks. If marks are not used the grade levels awarded are simply converted into a numerical scale and the resulting numerals processed to produce the final grade levels.

When combining the results from various assessment tasks, care needs to be taken to ensure that the various tasks carry the

weights specified in the school's assessment plan and in the subject outlines. The weight that any particular assessment task or assessment component will contribute to the final result depends upon the spread of student performance in that task. Some of the data for particular subjects in 2011 considered by the Evaluation Panel showed that the distribution of grade levels for some components was more compressed than for other components. Unless some adjustments were made it is possible that, in some subjects at least, the components may not have contributed to the overall subject scores in the proportions intended.

As referred to above teachers are required to make judgements on a 15 point scale in relation to each assessment criterion. However, the standards actually consist of a 5 point scale. Even when the performance standards are finally clarified and simplified as proposed above, it cannot be expected, particularly if marks are not used, that teachers will always agree with each other at the grade level. In fact, a variation of one grade level (or perhaps even two) could be expected.

The SACE Board requires teachers to submit Learning and Assessment Plans and approves such plans with or without suggested improvements. However, the SACE Board does not provide a feedback service to teachers in the design of their individual assessment tasks.

In 2011 it is apparent from submissions to this evaluation that the absence of feedback on assessment task design has caused considerable anxiety for a number of teachers. The anxiety is exacerbated when teacher assigned grades have been reduced in the moderation process (discussed in Section 8.4.5 below) and where the moderation feedback sheet indicates that the assessment task was insufficient for the full range of student learning to be assessed.

The Panel has received considerable comment that the performance standards and associated criteria aim to treat every subject in a similar way insofar as the expectations of assessment tasks (number and nature and acceptable word limits for student work) are concerned. Critics suggest that more flexibility is needed, particularly taking account of the intrinsic nature of the subject.

Similarly, there has been comment that the expected number of assessment tasks seems to be extremely high and that there

would be no loss of rigour if there were fewer, but broader, assessment tasks used as the basis for the teacher assessment. An implication of the high number of assessment tasks is the impact on the available time for teaching compared with assessment.

The Panel supports a continuing dialogue between the SACE Board and practising teachers in respect of these matters.

8.4.3 Link between Performance Standards and Exemplars

The SACE Board understood the likely difficulty for teachers of applying the performance standards and their associated criteria. It aimed to address this difficulty in part by the development of exemplars that would enable teachers to identify the essential characteristics of a student's work at the various grade levels.

As with the statements of the performance standards and their associated criteria, this was a large amount of work. Moreover, in the first year of Stage 2, the exemplars could not be examples of a student's work based on an actual assessment task.

With the experience of 2011 and the existence of assessment tasks and related examples of student work at each grade level for each subject, the opportunity now exists for the SACE Board to review all exemplars and to establish a more complete set of current exemplars.

The Panel understands that this process has commenced. In assembling the exemplars, the SACE Board staff should seek out sufficient examples of student work that were assessed as being marginally in their particular grade (eg. at the A/B and B/C borderlines) as feedback to the Panel suggests that these would be most helpful to teachers. Moreover, each should be published alongside its associated assessment task and annotated in ways that emphasise the application of criteria to the particular grade. Special attention should, in this process also be paid to exemplars at the borderline of the A and A+ grade levels given their significance.

8.4.4 Clarifying Forums

Recognising the extent of the changes embedded in the new assessment regime, the SACE Board staff conducted clarifying

forums in 2011. The purpose of the forums was to assist teachers to apply the performance standards by asking them to examine, in a workshop setting, examples of student work relating to the respective grade levels in the performance standards.

Clarifying forums were well attended with 4 335 attendees recorded for the 238 clarifying forums held. Forums covered every subject area including the Research Project and for the Modified SACE (for students with disability).

Understandably in the first year, clarifying forums were difficult for the presenters as well as for the attendees. The concept of clarifying forums is strongly supported. However, the difficulties arose because:

- all presenters and participants were in a position of working with the performance standards for the first time
- the exemplars were not completely developed for all grades in all subject areas
- the SACE Board staff leading the forums were not always as expert in the subject areas as some of the attendees (given that SACE Board staff may have coverage of several subject areas)
- some attendees had expectations that the forums would provide a detailed understanding of good assessment task design.

Clarifying forums have continued in 2012 although the attendances have been slightly impacted because the SACE Board has not been able to offer replacement teacher funding for attendees who have participated previously.

One encouraging aspect is that for the 108 forums held so far in 2012, 508 of the 1 418 attendees have responded to a feedback survey and more than 90% have rated the forum as useful or very useful.

As encouraging as this result seems to be, it must be regarded as “work in progress” because 65% of attendees chose not to respond to the survey. In addition, despite the high result on the usefulness aspect referred to above and although the overall program of forums has been brought forward, more than 30% of the respondents indicated that the scheduling of the forum was not suitable for their

subject (presumably meaning that they would prefer a forum earlier in the year).

Anecdotally the Panel has been made aware of an overall perception that the 2012 forums are being better received by attendees than those in 2011. A key reason put forward is that exemplar material is being enhanced based on actual examples of student work in 2011.

In the Panel's view, clarifying forums should remain an important component of the SACE Board's engagement with teaching staff. Furthermore the Panel is proposing in its recommendations that:

- exemplar materials continue to be developed as more examples of student work become available (with an emphasis as noted above on work that is marginally in its grade)
- the intent and focus of forums be continually assessed and that, in so doing, SACE Board staff take note of a desire by attendees for guidance on assessment task design
- the forums also incorporate an element of feedback from attendees, as practising teachers, as to how the wording of the performance standards might be made clearer
- the SACE Board reconsider whether it can provide a greater level of relief teacher support if this year's constraints are unduly restricting attendance (noting the encouraging feedback on the usefulness of the 2012 forums).

8.4.5 Moderation

Moderation is an essential component of the assessment regime as it aims to ensure consistency in assessment across all teachers and all students in all subject areas.

As part of the changes associated with the new SACE, the SACE Board decided to abandon the statistical moderation processes that had previously been used. It decided instead to use a process involving the use of experienced teachers to review portfolios of student responses to school administered assessment tasks to either confirm or modify teachers' decisions. In addition, the Board introduced random sampling in its selection of student work to be reviewed to ensure a greater level of fairness in the moderation process.

From a review of the documentation and from discussions with teachers and SACE Board officers, the moderation process, if well implemented and resourced, appears overall to be a reasonably sound process as it uses teams of experienced teachers to review and, where necessary, moderate school assessments.

It is, nevertheless, a highly resource intensive operation that relies on the experience, professionalism and training of those involved in order to deliver the quality of decision making required. The Panel has made a number of recommendations aimed at improving the process.

It is not surprising in the first year of the new SACE, in the absence of sufficient and the most suitable work samples (exemplars) to clearly exemplify the performance standards, that many teachers found it difficult to develop a clear understanding of the performance standards and to apply them with confidence. Equally, the absence of such work samples will also have made the task of the moderators difficult. It should be expected that once the descriptions, tasks and work samples that illustrate the standards are finalised, there will be an increase in confidence in, and a greater acceptance of, the moderation process. It must be noted, however, that even at this point a difference of one grade level, and perhaps two grade levels, could reasonably be expected when teachers and moderators make 'on balance' judgements about the standards demonstrated in students' responses.

The Panel has examined the statistics regarding the background of moderators in 2011 and satisfied itself that overall the selection of moderators accurately reflects the mix of teachers and students between location, school sector and socio-economic status.

Moderation is not new to the current SACE. The former SACE also relied on moderation in its assessment processes but there are some subtle but significant differences.

Attachment 9 to this report summarises the main differences. The Panel has noted each of the differences but has confined its analysis below to those aspects which it has examined independently or have been drawn to its attention either by authors of submissions, moderators or SACE Board staff.

There is no doubt that the interest in the moderation process has been heightened because:

- student performance in all subjects is now being 70% assessed by classroom teachers so the moderation process now more widely impacts on teachers overall
- previously, teachers submitted what they regarded as representative samples of student work whereas the current approach has introduced a randomness in the selection of the work to be assessed by moderators (an aspect specifically supported by the Panel)
- there is no longer a statistical moderation process in which students' external assessments were used to "moderate" the teacher assessments; (although the basis of statistical moderation was not well understood, it was relatively easy for a downward assessment of a teacher's grade to be attributed to a student's poor examination performance)
- teachers in most subject areas have had to redesign their assessment tasks to be consistent with the performance standards and, as referred to earlier, some long standing teachers have been distressed to see their assessments of student learning downgraded at least in part because of their assessment task design.

Attachment 9 lists, by subject, the impact of the moderation process for all Stage 2 subjects in 2011. In summary:

- 41.5% of the teacher assessments were not altered by the moderation process
- 35.8% of classes were moderated down by one grade level, 7.5% of classes were moderated down by two grade levels and 3.4% of classes were moderated down by three grade levels (46.7% in total moderated down)
- 10.8% of classes were moderated up by one grade level, 0.6% of classes were moderated up by two grade levels and 0.4% of classes were moderated up by three grade levels (11.8% in total moderated up).

An analysis of the moderation impact on each subject indicates very little variation in the extent of moderation between subjects in 2011 although Research Project B was the most heavily

moderated (both up and down changes totalled 65% of all classes).

The Panel understands that these overall percentages of teacher assessments being moderated are not significantly different from those of the former SACE.

However, as discussed below, if the aim is to have a system of assessment that values and is reliant on teacher judgement, processes are needed to reduce the percentages of classes where the results need to be adjusted by moderation.

This leads to the inevitable conclusion that the moderation process needs to incorporate a much higher degree of feedback to teachers than is currently the case.

If the comments both in person and in submissions to the Evaluation Panel are a reasonable indication, teachers are clamouring for more feedback.

Of direct interest to the Panel has been the workload impact on teachers, administrative staff in schools, on moderators and on SACE Board staff of the amount of student work that needs to be submitted for moderation.

Predictably in the first year or two as understanding of the new assessment regime is developing, the tendency will be to select larger samples of student work for moderation and for the moderation process to be seen as challenging teacher assessments rather than confirming them. As confidence grows in the assessment capability of teachers, the samples should be able to be reduced and the moderation process streamlined. This will reduce the workload without diluting the confidence in the assessment regime. Elsewhere in this report, the Panel has noted that the SACE Board has already implemented changes to the material required to be sent for central moderation in respect of the Research Project and where teachers are responsible for more than one class in a subject area. These initiatives are supported.

A number of the submissions received, particularly those from teachers of mathematics and science called for a return to statistical moderation. While such a move would result in a much faster and more efficient process it would require some substantial changes to be made to the assessment regime in order to ensure a viable and valid procedure. Before such a change was made

substantial consideration would need to be given to finding an appropriate approach and conducting thorough testing to ensure the approaches used had integrity and supported the standards-based assessment regime.

It may be that after careful consideration and analysis the SACE Board might wish to consider such a change, if not for all subjects, for those for which statistical procedures can be shown to work more efficiently.

As indicated earlier, a student's final grade for a subject is determined by adding the results of the teacher assessment after moderation to those of the external assessment in the ratio of 70:30.

An examination of some of the 2011 Stage 2 data indicates that a number of outcomes of the assessment process warrant further investigation and consideration. This may result in some adjustments being required in the future.

A consideration of 16 of the largest candidature subjects showed that for most of these subjects:

- students, as a group, obtained higher grades for the teacher assessment than for the external assessment
- female students tended to obtain higher grades in the school assessment component than male students. In some cases quite large differences were apparent
- female students tended to obtain higher grades in the external assessment component than male students. These differences were generally not as pronounced as for the school assessment, and the subjects for which the differences were most pronounced were not necessarily the same as for the school assessment component.

Some concern has been raised that the external assessment tasks may not have always been entirely consistent with the performance standards and that the same balance in the widely-based selection of moderators was not replicated in the selection of Chief Assessors. The Panel has received some largely inconclusive SACE Board data that could be interpreted as supporting this view and suggests that this aspect needs to be kept under review.

The reasons for differences in student performance referred to above need to be investigated to see whether there are any aspects of the assessment arrangements for particular subjects that provide an unfair advantage to female students that will remain even when the new SACE is 'bedded down'.

Some concerns have also been expressed that, in spite of measures being taken to avoid it, moderators were aware of the schools attended by the students whose work they were moderating. This is a concern and further steps are being taken (and need to be taken) to ensure that moderators are not aware of the identity of the schools.

The Panel has considered another aspect of the moderation procedure. For obvious reasons, the moderators only look at the work of a sample of students from the school at each grade level. In many cases this has no adverse consequences. However, if the moderation procedure determines that an adjustment is necessary, all students from the class awarded that grade level have their grades lowered or raised. In some cases, simply as a consequence of the particular works chosen randomly in the sample, this will impact on the grades of some of the students whose work was not considered.

A system where schools not only submit a grade level, but also submit assessment marks (say out of 100) that show the rank order and relative differences between students would assist in addressing this issue. This aspect should also be further considered in light of the procedural change relating to submission of material where a teacher is teaching a subject in more than one class but submitting the work of only one class.

There is one final point that needs to be made on moderation. A number of long standing teachers in certain subjects (such as technical studies, visual art, physical education) have reported on the value of what is known as visiting moderation. In that approach, moderators visit schools and look at student work rather than studying photographed examples of student work sent to the central moderation point.

In previous times, moderators were authorised to discuss their assessments with teachers thereby providing direct feedback. However, anecdotal evidence before the SACE Board suggested that the process of feedback had the tendency to lead to debate with some teachers attempting to influence the moderation outcomes.

The current system has visiting moderators for two subjects but moderators, consistent with the approach required of people involved in moderation centrally, are not authorised to provide direct feedback to teaching staff. The Panel encourages the SACE Board to find ways of providing feedback in these situations whilst avoiding the potential for 'debate' referred to above.

8.4.6 Scaling Subject Results and the Calculation of the ATAR

The prime purpose of the SACE is to credential student achievement in the subjects that students have taken as part of the SACE program. By establishing the performance standards and using them during the teaching and the school-based assessment program the SACE Board has made a strong commitment to a standards-based approach to reporting student achievement in the subjects that are part of the SACE credential.

A subsequent, but important use of the subject achievement data for each student is to calculate the ATARs for South Australian students. The ATAR is a rank. For each student who applies to go to university his/her ATAR is used to make an offer of a particular university course. Receiving an offer depends upon where their ATAR places them compared to other students who have applied to do that same course. The competition for university places in some courses is very strong. Hence, the processes used to scale the course results must be soundly based and conducted with considerable care and precision.

The SACE Board has developed a scheme for converting the grade levels awarded to assessment tasks into numerical scales and then combining them with results from the external assessments to create scores for each subject that are used in the calculation of the ATAR.

The Evaluation Panel was made aware that following the 2011 SACE some suggestions were made for refining aspects of this aspect of the program. It is recommended that the SACE Board give further consideration to how the scores used in the calculation of the ATAR are processed to identify any improvements that could be made.

8.4.7 Valuing Teacher Judgement

The 2005 SACE Review paid much attention to the importance of the assessment processes for the SACE. It recognised that the assessment regime needed to be rigorous and credible so that students and their parents could be confident in it. It also recognised that organisations external to the senior secondary schooling system (Universities, TAFE, employers) needed to rely on it.

The 2005 Review acknowledged that this shift would demand a higher emphasis on assessment and assessment training than had traditionally been provided to teachers in their tertiary studies. It proposed that there be a system of accredited assessors under the auspices of an Assessment Institute to be established, possibly in conjunction with a University.

That proposal has not yet been taken up. However, the Panel is aware that the Chief Executive Officer of the SACE Board has commenced a series of discussions with Universities and other stakeholders with the objective of pursuing these recommendations.

However, the SACE now does incorporate the general directions of the SACE Review regarding assessment in that:

- all subjects are now teacher assessed to the extent of being 70% of a student's total assessment
- the remaining 30% of the total assessment is from an external assessment
- students are being assessed throughout the Stage 2 year via assessment tasks designed and assessed by the class teacher with the class teacher's assessments being reviewed (or moderated) by a central SACE Board process
- the assessment tasks are expected to be sufficiently broad as to enable several aspects of a student's learning to be able to be assessed and graded on a 15 point scale from A+ to E-.

It is important to note that these changes have impacted more on some subjects than others with the most significant changes occurring in the science and mathematics subjects.

The Evaluation Panel has received much comment about the difficulties experienced by teachers as referred to earlier. A key underpinning of this commentary has been that if the assessment regime is to value teacher judgement than it must have as one of its primary goals the continued improvement in:

- the understanding by teachers of the detailed application of the performance standards
- the knowledge of teachers in the design of assessment tasks which enable the students to demonstrate their learning consistent with the expectations of the performance standards
- the understanding by teachers of the reasons for the outcomes from the moderation process being different from the assessment of the teacher (where that has occurred).

The Panel agrees with this view. It also recognises the difficulty, from a resource and logistics viewpoint of the SACE Board staff providing direct feedback to teachers about each of their assessment tasks as well as the reasons for the outcomes from the moderation process.

The Panel acknowledges that the SACE Board has made a start in broad terms by increasing the detail in each subject's Chief Examiner's report. This process should continue and be expanded upon.

There has also been a commencement by several of the Teacher Associations of attempts to fill the gaps in teacher understanding and knowledge. However, it appears that the Associations are approaching this area with some tentativeness as they are not using SACE Board authorised material. Rather, they seem to be reliant in the main on informal feedback from moderators.

Recommendation

In light of the importance of assessment and consistent with the objective of ensuring a rigorous approach whilst valuing teacher judgement, the Panel recommends that the SACE Board assign high priority in its continuing improvement program to the area of assessment and in particular that it:

- *note the difficulty which a number of teachers in a number of subject areas are having with the new approach to assessment*

- *use the first year experience of practising teachers to take steps to simplify the statements of performance standards and associated criteria*
- *in association with teacher associations and using the first year experience of practising teachers, provide professional development opportunities in assessment task design*
- *extend the reach and content of clarifying forums so that they are more accessible to all teachers and include a component of assessment task design and other aspects requested by teachers*
- *continue to compile a more complete set of annotated exemplars of student work at each grade (alongside the related assessment task) with an emphasis on exemplars that are at the borderline between the five grades (and also between A and A+ grade levels)*
- *in conjunction with practising teachers, continue to refine the expectations regarding the number and nature of assessment tasks for each subject with a view to requiring potentially fewer assessment tasks and a greater degree of subject specific flexibility*
- *consider whether teacher assessment and moderation outcomes would be strengthened through the use of marks to complement the use of grades*
- *reconsider whether the teacher assessment and moderation outcomes would be strengthened by requiring teachers, either through marks or other form, to indicate the teacher's assessment of the relative position of each student in samples of work submitted for moderation*
- *closely monitor the relativity between external assessment results and internal assessment results to ensure that all assessment tasks are based on the same performance standards and criteria*
- *consider whether the use of school assessment marks would contribute to the improvements in the calculations of the ATAR*
- *investigate whether there are any aspects of the assessment arrangements for particular subjects that provide an unintended advantage to female students even when the SACE is 'bedded down'*
- *consider whether there should be a return to some form of statistical moderation of school assessments in those subjects or subject components where it would be appropriate to do so*

- *continue the initiative of providing more detail in Chief Assessors' reports*
- *authorise SACE Board staff and moderators to provide expanded and direct (i.e. including face to face) feedback to each teacher whose internal assessment has been moderated by more than two grade levels and/or where the key determinant in the moderation outcome being different from the teacher's assessment has been the assessment task design*
- *authorise SACE Board staff and moderators to assist teacher associations to prepare materials to assist in the continuing development of teacher understanding and skills.*

9. THE SACE BOARD'S CONTINUING IMPROVEMENT PRIORITIES

The Evaluation Panel expected that the SACE Board staff would have thought deeply about opportunities for improvement as part of its commitment to continuing improvement.

Therefore, the Panel met with the members of the SACE Board Leadership Team collectively and individually and other SACE Board staff to learn about the areas identified within the organisation.

This Section of the report lists those matters and provides limited commentary, from the Panel's perspective, as to the relative priority of these initiatives in the light of the material provided to this evaluation.

Immediately after the completion of the results cycle in 2011, the SACE Board Leadership Team initiated a process of reviewing all aspects of the 2011 processes.

A number of the areas identified for improvement related entirely to the internal operations of the SACE Board. They are not reported in detail in this report but they include such aspects as:

- improvements in the receipting and moving of materials received from schools
- improvements in processes to minimise the potential for moderators to be aware of the school from which student work was submitted
- storage of materials
- improved access to technology such as copiers and scanners
- better use of internal accommodation and
- earlier notification to schools of the SACE Board results release date.

These are all sensible improvements.

In addition there are several areas identified for improvement which are strongly supported by the Evaluation Panel and which are consistent with the emphases in submissions to the evaluation.

The main initiatives which should have either a positive impact on workload pressures or on the relationship between schools, teachers and the SACE Board are as follows:

- commencing in 2012 the teacher assessments of the Research Project will be moderated according to the same sampling technique as applies to other subjects. This will mean schools being required to prepare approximately 60% of Research Projects for moderation (rather than 100% as in 2011)
- commencing in 2012, schools will have the option of entering the combined grade from all of the school assessments on a covering result sheet or not. In 2011 this was not optional and authors of a number of submissions to the evaluation found the electronic calculator provided on the SACE Board's website to be difficult to use and not always available
- commencing in 2012, teachers taking more than one class in the same Stage 2 subject, will be able to submit, for moderation, samples from one class rather than from each class.

The SACE Board's list of improvement initiatives also deals with other aspects of the moderation and external assessment processes including:

- improving the feedback from the moderation process to schools by encouraging consistent comments from moderators on moderation summary sheets and assisting schools to interpret the feedback
- updating the moderation procedures overall and in particular providing clearer instructions for moderation of samples assessed by the teacher as A+
- reducing the length of the "moderation day" for moderators so that there can be no suggestion of moderation being affected by moderator fatigue
- improved supervision of the external assessment process for investigations submitted including the use of 'blind' marking by a supervisor where significant discrepancies exist between the assessments of initial markers
- continuous monitoring of the marking results of external assessors for examinations and investigations so that any abnormal trends are identified and dealt with early.

To this list, the Panel suggests adding a consideration of the potential for computer based, on-screen marking of external assessments.

Many assessment and credentialing agencies now employ onscreen approaches in the marking of students' responses in external assessments. This practice is used for parts of the NSW Higher School Certificate (HSC), the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE). It is also used in the marking of the NAPLAN tests.

Such approaches bring significant improvements in the quality control processes associated with marking and save considerable time associated with administrative procedures. This initiative also provides the opportunity for a much wider group of experienced teachers to become involved in the marking and other related procedures.

A starting point would be for the SACE Board to undertake a project to investigate the various systems in use and to recommend an approach that would best suit the marking of the SACE external assessments.

The SACE Board's list has also covered areas which have become apparent to the Panel during the course of this evaluation. They include (noting that some of them have been commented on or dealt with more fully elsewhere in this report):

- identifying the schools which have streamlined the clerical and administrative processes required by the SACE assessment processes (and have therefore minimised administrative effort in aspects such as photocopying, filing, storage etc.) and informing all schools of these practices
- developing a greater understanding of the reasons for the difference in Research Project performance between male and female students
- critically assessing whether there is a need to reduce the research type effort required of Stage 2 students by investigating the workload and performance standards associated with the research related activities of Stage 2 subjects alongside those of the Research Project
- increasing the emphasis on Stage 1 literacy and numeracy by promoting more consistent understanding and application of performance standards in Board accredited English and mathematics subjects and by enhancements to moderation at Stage 1 for these subjects
- strengthening the connection between the SACE and Vocational Education and Training (VET) by extending the VET recognition register and providing greater links between SACE Board subjects (including the Personal Learning Plan) and initiatives in the VET sector (such as the Training Guarantee for SACE students)

- strengthening the relationships with professional teacher associations in ways that can assist the communication between the SACE Board and teachers and can provide increased professional development opportunities for teachers (initially in areas related to assessment)
- finding ways to assist schools to avoid the temptation for students to employ plagiarism techniques in the Research Project.

Mention was made earlier of the importance of the SACE Board's IT systems. Although the implementation of the SACE required significant enhancement to the IT systems this is an area in which a significant amount of work remains to be completed. The main areas identified by the SACE Board staff are as follows:

- enhancing the ease of use by schools of DATEX which is the main system for enrolling students and listing their subjects. The SACE Board has received many requests over some years for enhancements to this system. These have not, because of other pressures, been dealt with but are still required as has been confirmed in recent visits to schools by IT staff
- strengthening the responsiveness of the SACE Board Service Desk so that schools and teachers can be assured of an acceptable level of service
- increasing the use of electronic transactions and moving away from paper based systems. Early targets will be the Learning and Assessment Plans and the Results Sheets for teacher assessments
- improving the structure and accessibility of the SACE Board's website.

In relation to the planned improvements to the SACE Board website, the Panel commends the Board for making SACE results available to students via the website.

However, it has delayed the release of results in this manner until the results can also be delivered on the same day by post. This means that the release of results is delayed until all printing, packing and posting arrangements have been finalised. This delays the opportunity for students to reflect on their results, make career and further education choices, and even make enquiries about their results if need be.

It is suggested that the SACE Board develop a plan for separating the electronic release of SACE results from the paper documents. There are several approaches that could be considered. Naturally such a plan will need to ascertain whether there are any students who might not be able to get their results electronically. If there are any such students it is likely that the number would be very small, and special arrangements could be made in those cases.

Each of the information technology related initiatives will be worthwhile, recognising that resource constraints may limit the speed of implementation. Where priorities need

to be assigned to competing initiatives, the Panel proposes that those which will impact positively on teacher and SACE Board staff time and workload be assigned higher priority.

The examples listed above do not comprise the full list of SACE Board improvement initiatives. The Panel accepts that with this evaluation being commissioned at this time it might have been seen as pre-emptive or confusing for the SACE Board to make its internally determined improvement agenda widely known. That should not be a constraint in future years.

As has been mentioned previously in this report, schools and teachers have varied considerably in their readiness for key aspects of the new SACE. To avoid the possibility that this situation might also apply to the changes that flow from the continuing improvement agenda, it is important that the SACE Board adopt a comprehensive change management and communications plan, relevant to the initiatives being taken.

Recommendation

The Panel recommends that:

The SACE Board note the considerable effort that SACE Board staff have applied to the development of an initial program of improvement. Further, the Panel supports the thrust of the program and recommends that the practice of annual review of the results cycle be continued and that the SACE Board makes its improvement agenda widely known in seminars, forums and by other less personal ways such as via the website, direct emails to schools, teachers and professional associations, newsletters etc.

Where identified initiatives including IT initiatives are competing for limited resources the Panel recommends that higher priority be assigned to those which will impact positively on teacher and SACE Board staff time and workload.

Further, the learning from the first year evaluation is that alongside the Board's improvement agenda should sit a comprehensive change management and communications plan which aims to ensure that all schools and teachers are kept as up to date as possible on the progress of the various initiatives.

The Panel also recommends that added to the SACE Board's list be a consideration of the potential for introducing on-screen marking of external assessments and separating the electronic release of SACE results from the paper documents.

10. SUMMARY OF INTENDED AND UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

The Terms of Reference for the evaluation require the Panel to document the intended and unintended consequences from the implementation of the SACE.

At this early stage in the life of the new SACE it is extremely difficult to determine or predict any long term trends. Therefore, a number of the points recorded below should be regarded by the SACE Board as areas to monitor rather than as areas for immediate action.

As indicated throughout this report, the implementation of the SACE would not have occurred without the commitment and professionalism of many people - SACE Board and its staff, schools, teachers, moderators and assessors.

Though not listed as an intended consequence below, the successful finalisation and publishing of the SACE results and the determination of ATAR and TAFE Selection Scores provides much cause for commendation and even celebration.

In addition to the intended and unintended consequences the Panel has been mindful of the aspirations of the 2005 SACE Review and has listed four areas which will also require monitoring if these aspirations are to be realised.

Intended Consequences

Acceptance of the single SACE Certificate

There has in the past been debate as to whether the concept of a single senior secondary certificate should be replaced by a two certificate system in which the type of certificate depends on the student's course of study (such as in Victoria where a separate certificate is awarded for courses with a VET orientation).

There has been no evidence presented to the Panel suggesting that the SACE as a single certificate should be replaced by a two certificate system. This is clearly an intended outcome.

Understanding the Importance of Assessment

As described in other sections of this report, the SACE Board has implemented an assessment regime which is aiming to ensure a high level of confidence in the SACE and the NTCE as a recognised statement of student learning. This has required a substantial change in teacher practice and elsewhere in this report the Panel has framed recommendations which it expects will further assist the implementation of this change.

However, there is no doubt that there has been an intended consequence of increasing the emphasis on rigorous assessment.

This has led to the intended outcome of the acceptance by the Universities and TAFE of the SACE and NTCE results for ATAR and TAFE Selection Score calculations. Associated with that outcome has been the acceptance by the Universities of the notion that no longer is the category of HESS (Restricted) subjects required (noting that this distinction was not made under the former SACE by the Charles Darwin University).

Professional Development of Teachers

Although there is still some way to go, teachers have reported their appreciation of the opportunity, which the new SACE structure and its assessment regime has provided, for professional development in the understanding and application of performance standards.

The activities of the SACE Board have stimulated considerable discussion and learning opportunities for groups of teachers, often but not exclusively with the involvement of teacher associations.

Providing a Stimulus for Rethinking Teaching and Learning

Several submissions referred to the opportunity which the current SACE has provided for rethinking the school's approach to teaching and learning. This has demonstrated the importance and the value of leadership at the school level.

Submissions made reference to the way in which they have used the introduction of the PLP and the Research Project to reassess such aspects as advising

students on subject choices, the structure of timetables and length and format of lessons.

Ensuring Access for Students to Higher Education

The “Success for All” theme of the 2005 SACE Review suggested that the SACE has an important part to play in enabling students to pursue a wide range of post-school pathways.

In 2011, 85.9% of SACE enrolling students received an ATAR compared with 82.6% in 2010. Moreover, 8 393 of the 10 819 students, who achieved an ATAR (77.66%) received a University offer.

This means that in 2011 the implementation of the SACE has had the effect of ensuring a high level of access of students to higher education.

Against this trend has been the smaller number of students (37.7% in 2011 compared with 42.1% in 2010) who presented at least one Vocational Education and Training (VET) related unit as part of their SACE. However, that does not appear to be caused by the current SACE as the trend was developing prior to 2011. In 2007 and 2008 the respective percentages were 46.4% and 45.9% respectively.

Less Apparent Student Stress

As part of the 2005 SACE Review, many students reported high levels of stress. Colloquially and unfortunately, Stage 2 or Year 12 had become known in student circles as a potential “glandular fever year”.

The Panel has noted some reports of the stress on students struggling to complete their Research Project by the end of Semester 1 in Year 12.

However, there has not been a consistent reporting of student stress. To the contrary, a number of submissions have referred to the negative effects of students having too much “spare time” in Semester 2 of Year 12 if they have completed the Research Project by the end of Semester 1 (as mostly occurred in 2011).

Unintended Consequences

Variability in the Readiness of Schools, Increased Teacher Workload and Teacher Anxiety

As indicated earlier, schools have varied considerably in their readiness for the requirements of the SACE. This relates largely to the extent of the change to teacher practice required by the new assessment regime as has been referred to earlier in this report.

Many submissions from teachers and teacher associations referred to the additional workload required in the development of new assessment tasks and in the assessment of student work according to the performance standards. Unconfirmed estimates of teachers taking three times as long to assess a student's response to an assessment task have been made.

This has been further exacerbated in circumstances where the moderation process has significantly downgraded a teacher's assessment. Teachers have reported on their personal anxiety in these situations, their concern for their students if the teacher's design of assessment tasks has been deemed to be deficient and for their personal reputation. This has clearly been felt by many teachers of long standing for whom the change may well have been the greatest.

It remains to be seen whether this is a long term consequence of the SACE or whether it is largely a first year effect.

A related aspect of this is the number of anecdotal references in submissions to the Panel of the number of long standing senior secondary teachers who have decided to avoid the changes. They have done this apparently by either retiring or making themselves available (perhaps on a part time basis) to teach in the earlier years of secondary schooling.

The difficulty for the Panel in assessing this aspect of the consequence is two-fold. First, it is well known that the age distribution of teachers is heavily skewed towards those aged 55 and over, many of whom may have been contemplating retirement or semi-retirement anyway. Second, it may be argued that in the long term students will benefit markedly from being taught in their earlier years by long standing senior secondary teachers.

At some stage a separate research study into this consequence may well be justified.

Moderator Pressure

Most moderators are active senior secondary teachers. Understandably, by offering their services to the SACE Board as moderators they are potentially more vulnerable to the teacher workload pressure described above.

Much of the moderation workload occurs during Semester 2 of the school year and is intense. Earlier in this report there is discussion about ways of reducing that pressure without diluting the rigour of the assessment process. That discussion is pertinent because the Panel has had several submissions from moderators suggesting:

- that the moderation experience provided excellent professional development for them as teachers, but
- they would not make themselves available for a second year because of the workload pressure.

Teacher confidence in the moderation process is essential. Enabling the most experienced teachers to participate as moderators must remain a priority for the SACE Board so this aspect needs to be carefully monitored.

The Panel is aware that elsewhere there is greater use of technology to enable on-line moderation. This may well be worth exploring further.

SACE Board Internal and External Pressure

A direct consequence of the end of year time and workload pressure on moderators is the pressure on SACE Board staff who are required to support the moderators and to take the results of the moderation process and enter them into the Board's computer systems.

The data entry requirements are enormous as the data is entered for all components of all assessment tasks for each subject for each student as well as the external assessment results. The importance of the SACE Board's computer systems being robust cannot be overstated.

The cross-referencing in 2011 of the external assessment results to the internally assessed and moderated results was a final step in the quality assurance aspects of the assessment regime. This added to the pressure on SACE Board staff as it could only occur after the external assessments had been completed at the end of the year.

This pressure has been exacerbated by the intense media interest in, and continuing critical media comment about the SACE.

Increased Administrative Workload in Schools

A number of submissions from schools and individual teachers referred to the substantial increases in administrative workload in submitting student work for moderation. Comments related to the large increases in photocopying of documents as well as to technical difficulties in meeting digital material submission requirements.

SACE Board staff have acknowledged these concerns and have expressed some surprise that this aspect has created such high levels of administrative pressures on schools. It appears that some schools may have implemented approaches which are excessive. Further SACE Board guidance on this aspect is warranted and has been included already in the SACE Board's internal improvement plans.

Storage Difficulties for the SACE Board

In 2011 the SACE Board received and moderated the teacher assessments of 16 064 Research Projects. This was an understandable aspect of the quality assurance process in the first year of implementation.

A decision has been made to reduce the amount of material required in 2012. However, in 2011, it did create a significant storage problem for the SACE Board whose accommodation appears to be under significant pressure already.

Narrowing of Subject Choices, Impact on Subject Offerings and Teacher Availability

The removal of the former SACE pattern and the reduction in total requirements has had a disproportionate impact on the enrolments in the subjects being studied at both Stage 1 and Stage 2.

Understandably this has led to a reduction in the number of schools able to offer the subjects most affected. As reported earlier many teachers in those subject areas at senior secondary level seem to have faced the alternatives of:

- teaching in the earlier years of secondary education and/or
- teaching the Research Project (for which many of them report feeling somewhat unprepared), or
- retiring.

Whether this has longer term consequences is difficult for the Panel to assess. However, the SACE Board will need to monitor this trend particularly as the Australian Curriculum takes shape and as the teaching requirements across all subject areas from its adoption become clearer.

The Orientation towards Research Project B

As described in Section 8.3.4, most students undertaking the Research Project in 2011 presented Research Project B i.e. the form of the Research Project for those students wishing to have its assessment count towards their ATAR.

The Panel has been made aware that this decision of students has not necessarily been made because the student has any University entrance aspirations but because:

- even though the performance standards for both types of Research Project are the same, students seem to regard Research Project B as more straightforward
- for the purposes of teacher supervision, students find it necessary to prepare written statements of activity and progress and these statements are more easily converted into the written requirement of Research Project B.

Conversely a high proportion of students in 2011 who submitted Research Project A obtained an ATAR without needing the score from the Research Project.

There may always be a much larger number of students wishing to study Research Project B. However, the Panel considers it would be useful for the SACE Board to keep the assessment aspects under review to ensure that students better suited to Research Project A are not being steered towards Research Project B for reasons other than those intended.

The Challenge of Communication and Reliance on the Website

In any major change initiative, communication plays a major part in securing the “buy-in” of all people affected by the change.

SACE Board staff have addressed the communication challenge through a variety of means including regular forums for School Principals and SACE Coordinators in schools, subject leader forums, newsletters, circulars, clarifying forums, SACE champions and other face to face meetings and discussions.

In addition, schools and teachers want the information received via face to face initiatives backed-up by endorsed written material. The extent of the SACE Board's written material is impressive. The website is jam-packed with this material.

Unfortunately, in today's fast moving world, people are increasingly seeking to receive information that is pertinent both in terms of being easily understood and easily accessed at the time they need it.

A risk for the SACE Board is the inevitable temptation of expecting the placement of material on the website as providing the solution to the continual communication challenge.

Various people in various ways have commented to the Panel that SACE Board written material can be difficult to understand and could benefit from a simpler English style. Further, many people claim that information is not as easily accessed via the website as it might be.

From the Panel's viewpoint, the SACE Board may need to monitor whether over reliance on the website has the unintended consequence of reducing communication rather than increasing it. It would also be useful in this context for the Board's staff to note the feedback regarding the desirability of a simpler English style in written material and to encourage the receivers and users of SACE Board written material to highlight, in their communication with the Board, areas for potential simplification.

The Impact of Media Attention

The implementation of the SACE was a major change initiative even if superficially it might not have seemed to be.

As many people came to understand the impact of the change it was inevitable that this would attract media attention. As is generally the case, the media attention highlights aspects which are considered to be more newsworthy and are often related to unforeseen implementation issues or unintended consequences.

It is apparent that in the face of this attention, the SACE Board staff and those schools that are embracing the SACE enthusiastically have struggled to be heard.

It is difficult for the Panel to assess whether, overall, this is leading to a decline in the community's confidence in the SACE but this must be continually monitored by the Board and the Government.

The Panel has also received comment that any impact on community confidence is already flowing on to the State's ability to attract international senior secondary school students, although no supporting evidence has been provided to the Panel.

Without a detailed study it would be impossible to make a valid assessment as the market for international students has been affected by other factors such as the strength of the Australian dollar, visa restrictions and personal safety concerns of international students living and studying in Australia.

Aspirational Areas for Monitoring

As mentioned above, the Panel has identified four areas for continual monitoring in respect of the "Success for All" aspiration of the 2005 SACE Review. They are summarised below.

Consistent Achievement across the Education Systems

South Australian students generally complete their senior secondary education in the Government system, the Independent sector or the Catholic education sector.

It is currently not SACE Board policy to make public the completion rates of students in the respective sectors. However, the Panel understands that they varied considerably in 2011 with Government school students having a lower completion rate compared to the other sectors.

The Panel understands that the 2011 completion rates are similar to those of the previous SACE. Although the results of one year cannot constitute a trend, the aspiration of the 2005 SACE Review will not be met until these percentages of completion increase and become more closely aligned in future years.

SACE Completion by Aboriginal Students

The SACE Board quite reasonably applauded the achievement by Aboriginal students in 2011. The percentage of students enrolled in Stage 2 who achieved the SACE increased from 78.5% to 84.3%.

The Panel has noted, however, that the actual number of Aboriginal students who completed in 2011 was slightly lower than in 2010.

Of some concern is the continuing low number of Aboriginal students who enrol for the SACE in Stage 1 but who do not complete the SACE and

also the low number of completions compared with the number of Aboriginal students in the earlier years of schooling. The Panel is not in a position to make an accurate assessment of this but believes that completions could be less than 15% of the total potential pool of Aboriginal students.

There is no evidence to suggest that this can be attributable to the SACE itself; nevertheless, the aspirations of “Success for All” cannot be met unless this percentage, whatever it actually may be, is increased substantially.

The Panel has noted that the SACE Board has a comprehensive Aboriginal Education Strategy 2012-2016 which builds on a previous 2008-2011 strategy. As with all strategies, implementation is crucial and leadership is a key factor in the implementation process. In this situation, the implementation of the Board’s Aboriginal Education Strategy will require considerable attention to be paid to securing culturally relevant leadership, input and guidance.

SACE Completion by Students with Disabilities

The SACE provides a Modified SACE designed to be appropriate for students with disabilities. This is applauded. The number of students presenting a Modified SACE in 2011 was quite small. For a Modified SACE, students may present a combination of Modified and non-Modified subjects.

Although very few submissions referred to the Modified SACE, anecdotal feedback to the Panel suggested that schools with numbers of student with a disability in mainstream classes were in need of greater levels of support and advice from the SACE Board staff.

Again, this area lends itself to continuing professional development of teachers based on good practice experience in schools that have successfully met this challenge.

Participation in Vocational Education and Training (VET)

The 2005 SACE Review foreshadowed that, for many students, a greater component of VET studies would be an appropriate aspect of their SACE.

As indicated earlier, there has been a continuing trend (which preceded the current SACE) against this aspiration. The SACE Board’s internal improvement agenda has placed a priority on this area consistent with developments more broadly in the VET sector. That priority is supported by the Panel.

Recommendation

The Panel recommends that:

The SACE Board note the Panel's early assessment of the areas of possible intended and unintended consequence as well as the areas of unfulfilled aspirations with a view to:

- *reinforcing in publicity about the SACE the positive effects that the SACE has stimulated*
- *monitoring whether any of the possible unintended consequences and unfulfilled aspirations become a longer term trend and, in conjunction with schools and practising teachers taking steps to offset or eliminate them.*

11. FUTURE AND ONGOING EVALUATION ACTIVITY

The Terms of Reference for this evaluation include a requirement for the Panel to provide advice to the SACE Board on future and ongoing evaluation activities.

The Panel applauds the SACE Board's commitment to continuing improvement of the SACE. The Panel also notes that it will not be possible for some time to assess such long term matters as:

- the readiness of SACE completers for higher and further education and for the workplace
- the changing practices in schools as they adjust to the new assessment regime of the SACE
- the differing rates of SACE completers between the school systems and sectors
- the enrolment and completion rates for Aboriginal students and the completion and enrolment rates for other students with special needs.

Mostly, these matters will be evaluated via formal evaluation activities commissioned at the appropriate time by the SACE Board.

Continuing improvement is much more of an on-going, behind the scenes activity. It should not lend itself to high degrees of public comment and intense media interest.

A fundamental principle of a continuing improvement agenda is that the views of the users of a product or service are paramount in identifying areas for priority attention. Furthermore, the problems and difficulties which users put forward generally provide the basis for improvement initiatives.

This can be a much more difficult environment within which to manage. No organisation or set of managers within an organisation really enjoys being inundated with its users raising concerns and problems continuously.

This is even more the case when the organisation has put – as is the case with the implementation of the SACE – a monumental effort into its implementation program.

The SACE Board has established a number of forums which provide the vehicle through which staff can receive critical comment from users (mainly schools, teachers and moderators).

The Panel encourages the SACE Board and its staff to be open to receiving these critical comments and to use them as the opportunity for improvement. There is no harm in staff explaining to a person making critical comment why the current situation might exist. However, if such explanations are defensive and not open to receiving the critical comment, then the basis of a continuing improvement program is lost.

In Section 10 of this report, the Panel has identified possible unintended consequences recognising that it is too early to tell whether long term undesirable trends will emerge in these areas. Monitoring of these situations by the SACE Board will be a key foundation for a continuing evaluation program.

Of continuing interest to the SACE Board will, no doubt, be the views of students. Although this evaluation has included a student survey, time did not permit it to be as wide-ranging as potential future surveys could be. A particular challenge will be to ensure that such surveys are as inclusive of all student views as possible (acknowledging that the survey and focus group meetings facilitated by the Panel had, in some aspects, an unintended orientation towards higher achieving students).

Finally, the Panel notes the emergence of the Australian Curriculum, the implementation of which could have profound implications for the structure of the SACE. The Panel expects this to be an on-going topic for the Board's consideration, particularly as the implementation timeframes become clearer.

It is likely that the main impacts on the SACE will relate to the number of subjects expected for a senior secondary certificate and the compulsory nature of some subjects compared with the SACE. It is also likely that an assessment regime with the rigorous objectives of the SACE will be required so in that sense the SACE will have provided schools and teachers with a firmer foundation for the assessment challenges expected by a national approach.

It is, however, important to note that the adoption of the Australian Curriculum could be more along the lines of a sea-change than a part of a continuing improvement program. By definition, a continuing improvement program involves a large number of relatively small changes implemented continuously and progressively.

This evaluation process has placed very high demands on SACE Board staff for data. All requests have been met for which the Panel records its appreciation.

However, it has been apparent that the requests have been met only with a considerable staff effort. On the surface, it would seem that a commitment to continuing evaluation efforts (even those that are more internally based than this evaluation) would be aided if the Board staff had the benefit of a modern data warehouse. This would provide easier and faster access to data whether in response to ad hoc requests or more formal research questions.

Recommendation

The Panel recommends that:

Further to earlier recommendations dealing with the commitment to a continuing improvement program, including the monitoring of possible unintended consequences and unfulfilled aspirations, the Panel recommends that the SACE Board, by the end of 2014, commission separate external research into the longer term impacts of such matters as:

- *readiness of SACE completers for further study and the workplace*
- *changing practices in schools and*
- *variability in SACE enrolment and completion rates between groups of identified and traditionally disadvantaged students, particularly Aboriginal students.*

In this regard, the Panel suggests that the research effort, as well as the effort involved in satisfying ad hoc requests for data would be aided considerably if SACE Board staff had access to a modern data warehouse.

12. CONCLUSION

This evaluation of the first year of implementation has been an important component of the SACE Board's commitment to continuing improvement.

Continuing improvement programs are normally comprised of many "behind the scenes" sets of activities. By contrast, the media interest in this evaluation has been high – much higher than would normally be the case for a program of continuing improvement.

The SACE has its critics but it also has its supporters. To satisfy the critics completely would almost certainly turn many of the supporters into critics. Some may say that puts the SACE Board in a "no-win" situation.

In this evaluation the Panel has aimed to listen to all views whether they be negative or positive. Its aim has been to address as many of the negatives as practicable such as to strengthen aspects of the SACE rather than to weaken it overall. It hopes that is reflected in the way in which this report is received.



FIRST YEAR EVALUATION OF THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION (SACE)

Attachments

- Attachment 1: Members of the SACE Evaluation Reference Committee**
- Attachment 2: Evaluation Brief**
- Attachment 3: List of submission authors**
- Attachment 4: List of Individuals and Organisations interviewed by Panel Members**
- Attachment 5: List of questions asked in student survey**
- Attachment 6: Thematic analysis of open-ended responses from student survey**
- Attachment 7: Focus Groups with Students**
- Attachment 8: Comparison table of the requirements of Senior Secondary Certificates**
- Attachment 9: Moderation differences previous/current SACE**
- Attachment 10: Moderation variations by class and subject**

MEMBERS OF THE SACE EVALUATION REFERENCE COMMITTEE

Ms Donna Shillingford	Policy & Program Officer	Aboriginal Education and Employment Services
Dr Lynda MacLeod	Assistant Director Educational Services	Association of Independent Schools of SA
Ms Cheryl Bauer	President	Association of Independent Schools of South Australia - Secondary/Combined Heads Committee
Mr Phil Lewis	Chair	Association of Principals of Catholic Secondary Schools
Mr David Smith	Branch Vice President	Australian Education Union (SA Branch)
Mr Rick Cairney	Director of Policy	Business SA
Ms Georgina Smith	Assistant Director Leading Learning	Catholic Education Office South Australia
Ms Helen Wildash	Executive Director Teaching and Learning Services	Department for Education and Child Development
Ms Adrienne Nieuwenhuis	Director, Quality, Tertiary Education, Science and Research	Department of Further Education, Employment, Science & Technology
Mr Stephen Jones	Director of Academic and Student Services	Flinders University
Ms Louise Firrell		Independent Education Union (SA)
Mr Jamie Price	Principal	Kensington Centre representing South Australian Special Schools Principals Association
Mr Paul Dowd	Managing Director	Phoenix Copper Ltd representing Training & Skills Commission
Mr Pat Maloney	President	SA Area School Leaders Association
Ms Jenice Zerna	President	SA Association of School Parents Club (Inc)
Ms Frankie Bray		SA Association of State School Organisations Inc
Ms Dianne Mack	Vice President	The Federation of Catholic School Parent Communities (SA)
Associate Professor Simon Pyke	School of Chemistry and Physics	The University of Adelaide
Mr Malcolm McInerney		Thebarton Senior College representing Council of Education Associations of South Australia
Professor Joanne Wright	Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice President - Academic	University of South Australia
Ms Susan Cameron	Principal	Unley High School representing South Australian Secondary Principals Association



SACE
Board of SA

SACE FIRST YEAR EVALUATION

EVALUATION BRIEF

1. Purpose of SACE First Year Evaluation

The purpose of the SACE First Year Evaluation is to analyse and interpret the initial effects of the new arrangements for the SACE following its first year of full operation and to identify areas where improvements should be introduced.

The SACE First Year Evaluation is not an audit of the 2011 SACE results. It will use the results and other information to analyse and interpret the first year of the SACE.

As defined in the SACE Board of South Australia Act, the responsibility and authority for determining the completion requirements and policies of the SACE reside with the Board as the governing body of the SACE Board of SA.

Just as the Board has previously based the SACE completion requirements and policies on the outcomes of the SACE Review and the advice of the SACE Review Implementation Steering Committee, it will undertake the SACE First Year Evaluation through a process that engages the Minister, the three school sectors in South Australia and the key stakeholder groups with an interest in the SACE.

2. Strategic Context

2.1 Implementation of new SACE

During the period 2009-2011, the SACE Board has progressively implemented the new arrangements for completing the SACE. In 2009 the first Year 10 students studied the Personal Learning Plan under the new arrangements, and at the end of 2011 the first Year 12 students were awarded the new SACE.

The new arrangements for the SACE are based on the South Australian Government's Review of the SACE and its subsequent acceptance of the Review Report's recommendations at the end of 2006. The Review Report recommended a number of reforms to strengthen the capacity of the SACE to recognise the achievements of the full range of students and the different places in which they can learn. It focused on the capabilities that young people need for life and work in the 21st century.

The SACE Board has based the approval of the SACE completion requirements and policies on the advice it received from the SACE Review Implementation Steering Committee consisting of the heads of the three South Australian school sectors, the Chief Executive of DFEEST and a nominee of the Vice-Chancellors from the South Australia universities.

The SACE Board has further worked to ensure the SACE is consistent with the Government's policies to improve school retention and to increase the school education age to 17 and the Government's School-to-Work Strategy.

The SACE contributes to the achievement of key targets in the South Australian Strategic Plan.

The SACE Board also provides the curriculum, assessment and certification for the Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training.

2.2 SACE Board commitment to SACE evaluation

The SACE Board is committed to the evaluation of the SACE as an essential element of its legislative responsibility to ensure the SACE meets the diverse needs and pathways of the full range of students completing their senior secondary education in South Australia.

The SACE Board's strategies for monitoring and evaluating the SACE are used to identify and implement improvements to the SACE. They incorporate the analysis of qualitative and quantitative information. They are based on consultation with SACE key stakeholders.

In 2012 the SACE Board will undertake the SACE First Year Evaluation to identify and analyse the initial effects of the new arrangements for the SACE and to determine where it would be appropriate to implement improvements. This analysis will take into consideration the time that is needed for the effects of change to become clear.

In recognition of the strategic context in which the SACE First Year Evaluation will occur, the SACE Board will appoint an Evaluation Panel that will operate under the auspices of the Board to oversee the SACE First Year Evaluation and to bring a high level of independent experience and expertise to the operation of the evaluation.

In addition to focusing on the evaluation of the first year of the new arrangements for the SACE, the Evaluation Panel will also advise the Board on further evaluation activity that should be undertaken based on its findings.

2.3 Government commitment to SACE evaluation

In response to the 27th Report of the Social Development Committee of Parliament in 2008, the then Minister for Education and Children's Services agreed that an independent evaluation of the new SACE should take place within two years of the first cohort of students graduating under the new SACE arrangements.

The Minister stated at the time that the SACE Board would undertake the independent evaluation and would report on the outcome in its Annual Report.

The Minister further stated at the time that evaluation should relate to both the seven principles developed in the Report of the SACE Review to underpin the new SACE and the set of legislative principles outlined in the SACE Board Act, upon which the operation of the SACE must be based.

The SACE Board's commitment to undertake the SACE First Year Evaluation in 2012 respects the Minister's agreement.

The SACE Board has decided to undertake the evaluation in the year immediately following students completing the SACE under the new arrangements for the first time, so that it can address any areas of concern that have emerged during the implementation process.

2.4 Implementation of Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum

The SACE Board has publicly given its in-principle support for the development and implementation of the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum as endorsed by the Ministerial Council.

It has also publicly stated that the earliest possible time that the SACE Board will be in a position to implement the first four subjects of the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum in the SACE is likely to be 2015 for Stage 1 subjects and 2016 for Stage 2 subjects.

The timeline for the introduction of any improvements to the arrangements for the SACE will need to take into account the articulation of these changes with the timeline for the development, preparation and implementation of Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum subjects in the SACE.

3. SACE First Year Evaluation Panel

3.1 Role of Evaluation Panel

For the SACE First Year Evaluation, the Board as the governing body of the SACE Board of SA. will establish an independent Evaluation Panel to gather, analyse and interpret relevant information and data about the SACE, following the first year of its new arrangements.

The Evaluation Panel will use this information and data to identify how the new arrangements have contributed to the policy purposes of the new SACE.

The Evaluation Panel will use this information and data to identify improvements that can strengthen the SACE. It will identify any areas of concern that have been raised during the first year of the SACE operating under the new arrangements, including but not limited to the new compulsory requirements of the SACE, the relationship between the Research Project and Year 12 subject enrolments, and the operational impact of the SACE for schools and the SACE Board.

The Evaluation Panel will report to the Board on how and when any improvements would best be introduced.

The Evaluation Panel will determine the methodology for gathering the information and data about the first year of the new SACE arrangements. It will take steps to ensure that the evaluation methodology gives stakeholders of the SACE the best opportunity to present information of importance to them.

3.2 Evaluation Panel Terms of Reference

The Evaluation Panel operates under the auspices of the Board to undertake the following responsibilities:

- a) To determine the evaluation strategy for the SACE First Year Evaluation with reference to the SACE Reform Principles in the SACE Review Report and to the Legislative Principles in the SACE Board of SA Act.
- b) To determine the most effective means of including the perspective of students in the evaluation process.
- c) To consult with key stakeholders about the first year of the new arrangements for the SACE, including the establishment and operation of an Evaluation Reference Committee consisting of nominees from, but not limited to:

- the three South Australian school sectors (AISSA, CESA and DECD);
 - secondary principals associations of the three school sectors;
 - South Australian parent organisations;
 - the Australian Education Union;
 - the Independent Education Union;
 - the Council of Education Associations of SA (CEASA)
 - the South Australian Universities;
 - Aboriginal Education;
 - South Australian Training and Skills Commission;
 - DFEEST; and
 - Business SA.
- d) To consult with the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training and Charles Darwin University about the new arrangements for the Northern Territory Certificate of Education.
 - e) To identify areas of concern that have been raised during the first year of the SACE operating under the new arrangements, including but not limited to, the new compulsory requirements of the SACE, the relationship between the Research Project and Year 12 subject enrolments, and the operational impact of the SACE for schools and the SACE Board.
 - f) To gather relevant information and data relating to the new arrangements for the SACE.
 - g) To analyse and interpret the information and data it receives to identify and analyse progress towards the achievement of the principles of the SACE and the intended and unintended consequences of the new arrangements for the SACE.
 - h) To take into appropriate account the relationship between the SACE results and the university entry selection process operating in South Australia and the Northern Territory.
 - i) To advise the Board on improvements to the arrangements for the SACE that are consistent with the SACE Reform Principles outlined in the SACE Review Report and the Legislative Principles defined in the SACE Board of SA Act.
 - j) To advise the Board on matters that should be considered in the introduction of any improvements to the arrangements for the SACE, including the most effective implementation timeline.
 - k) To advise the Board on future and ongoing evaluation activity in relation to the SACE.
 - l) To provide progress reports and a final report to the Board according to the defined timeline.

3.3 Evaluation Panel membership

The Evaluation Panel will comprise the following members:

- Mr Bill Cossey AM (Convenor);
- Professor John Bennett;
- Ms Miriam Silva;
- Dr Petra Lietz (ACER).

The membership of the Evaluation Panel combines a depth of knowledge and experience relating to the place of senior secondary education in the South Australian context and professional expertise in the analysis of the effectiveness of new initiatives:

- *Mr Cossey* possesses a depth of understanding of the place of education in the South Australian society and economy through his work with the South Australian Strategic Plan Audit Committee and the Social Inclusion Board. He possesses extensive experience in evaluation and review processes, including the schooling sector. He currently convenes the Skills Industry Board Executive Officers Group and the Higher and Further Education Task Group.
- *Professor Bennett* is currently Conjoint Professor in the School of Education at the University of New South Wales, where his focus is on curriculum, assessment and measurement, and their impact on schools. Previously he was the Chief Executive of the New South Wales Board of Studies. At the national level he has undertaken evaluation, review and development projects in assessment and certification in Queensland and at the international level he has provided advice and assistance to Government assessment and credentialing authorities in New Zealand, Scotland, Brunei, Qatar and Indonesia.
- *Ms Silva* is currently the Deputy Chair of the Training and Skills Commission in South Australia and has overseen the development of the strategic connections between the SACE Board and the Commission in the recognition of Vocational Education and Training qualifications in the SACE, including such allied initiatives as the introduction of the Training Guarantee for SACE students. She has a depth of senior management experience in major businesses in the commercial and financial sectors, including the introduction of major change initiatives.
- *Dr Lietz* is a Principal Research Fellow at the Australian Council for Education Research (ACER). Dr Lietz has been a Consultant for the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). Since joining ACER, she has worked on a number of national and international projects in evaluation and data analyses. Her specific role on the Evaluation Panel will be to provide independent advice on evaluation methodology and data analysis.

4. Governance arrangements relating to SACE First Year Evaluation

- 4.1 Role of Board:** Under the SACE Board of SA Act, the Board is the governing body responsible for the SACE and possesses the legislative responsibility and authority for determining the completion requirements and associated policies of the SACE. The Board is responsible for the approval and implementation of the outcomes of the SACE First Year Evaluation.
- 4.2 Role of Minister for Education and Child Development:** One of the legislative principles of the SACE Board of SA Act is the cooperation and collaboration between the Board, the Minister and the school education sectors. Accordingly the Board has committed to implementing the Minister's agreement to undertake an evaluation of the SACE within the first two years of the first cohort of students graduating under the new arrangements for the SACE.
- 4.3 Role of Evaluation Panel for the SACE First Year Evaluation:** The Evaluation Panel operates under the auspices of the Board to oversee the evaluation strategy and to bring a high level of independent experience and expertise to the operation of the strategy. The Chair of the Evaluation Panel will provide public statements about the SACE First Year Evaluation.

- 4.4 Role of SACE Board Chief Executive and organisation:** The SACE Board is not a member of the Evaluation Reference Committee. However the Chief Executive will provide the Evaluation Panel with information, data and administrative services that will assist it in fulfilling its terms of reference.

Timeline for SACE First Year Evaluation

The following is the proposed timeline for the SACE First Year Evaluation. Each step in the sequence is directly dependent on the preceding steps.

February 2012	Evaluation Panel begins preparation of evaluation strategy in consultation with key stakeholders.
March – May 2012	Evaluation Panel manages SACE First Year Evaluation.
June – July 2012	Evaluation Panel presents Evaluation Report to Board. Board provides a statement to the education community and wider community about the implementation and associated timeline for improvements to the SACE with specific reference to the Evaluation Report.
March, 2013	Board presents a final summary of SACE First Year Evaluation and its outcomes in the SACE Board 2012 Annual Report.

Paul Kilvert
Chief Executive

17 February 2012

Attachments:

- 1 (a) Principles to guide the reform of the SACE, *SACE Review: Final Report*
- 1 (b) Legislative principles from *SACE Board of South Australia Act*

ATTACHMENT 1 (a)

Extract from ‘Success for all’, Ministerial Review of Senior Secondary Education in South Australia, SACE Review: Final Report.

Towards a new SACE for all

Overview

The core term of reference given to the Review Panel was to: ‘achieve a curriculum and assessment framework that will meet the diverse needs of all students and result in high and more socially equitable levels of retention, competition and pathways beyond school’ and, in that context, ‘Identify the characteristics of a relevant and contemporary certificate of education’

The first part of the Chapter responds to that reference by identifying seven Principles to guide the reform of the SACE and senior secondary education in South Australia. The Principles are based in large part on the analysis presented in Part A of the report, and affirm the need for the SACE to be:

- **flexible and responsive** to the needs of individual students and groups of students
- **credible** in terms of rigour of the learning process, the standards used to assess students’ achievements, and the reliability of the certificate’s attestation to what SACE graduates know and can do
- **inclusive** of all students, cultures and study pathways so that success for all is the prevailing dominant culture
- **connected** to learning that precedes it, to work and study destinations beyond it, and to local and global communities
- **worthwhile** in terms of benefits perceived by students
- **futures orientated** so that students have the capacities to not only survive in a globally competitive world, but to shape it
- **supportive** of quality learning and teaching.

The Panel believes that the new qualification will be seen as a credible certificate in its own right—one that is fresh, relevant, forward looking, dynamic, and rigorous; and valued by students, employers, unions, higher and further education providers, and the communities in South Australia, the Northern Territory and other states and territories and overseas—and therefore a qualification that fulfils the Panel’s core brief.

Extract from page 83, Success for all: SACE Review Part B.

Extract from SACE Board of South Australia Act 1983

5—Legislative principles

The following principles will apply in connection with the operation of this Act:

- (a) all young people are to be encouraged to obtain a formal education qualification that helps them to live and participate successfully in the world as it constantly changes, after taking into account their goals and abilities;
- (b) it is recognised—
 - (i) that young people acquire skills, values and knowledge associated with their education through their individual endeavours and through a range of learning experiences and in a variety of situations that may include, as well as schools, workplaces and training and community organisations; and
 - (ii) that young people require a range of skills and knowledge, including literacy and numeracy skills, to assist them to succeed in the wider community;
- (c) the qualification that is awarded by the Board should—
 - (i) acknowledge the skills and knowledge that have been acquired through formal education and training and other learning processes; and
 - (ii) reflect rigorous standards and community expectations; and
 - (iii) be consistent with an appropriate Australian qualification framework;
- (d) cooperation and collaboration between the Board, the school education sectors and the Minister are to be recognised as fundamental elements to achieving the best outcomes for students seeking to qualify for the SACE.

Extract from SACE Board of South Australia Act, Part 1, Section 5.

**SACE FIRST YEAR EVALUATION
REGISTER OF THE AUTHORS OF THE WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS**

From	School/organisation
Adelaide High School	
Amanda Pedder	Roma Mitchell Secondary College
Andrew Bendikov	St Columba College
Andrew McKenzie	
Andrew Weiland	Marryatville High School
Annette Morphet	
Anonymous	
Arthur Nankivell	
Assoc Professor Alaric Maude	Flinders University
Association of Independent Schools of SA (AISSA)	
Australian Education Union (SA Branch/ Independent Education Union (AEU/IEU)	
Banksia Park International High School	
Catholic Education SA (CESA)	
Cathy Manser	
Charles Campbell College	
Cheryl Webber	Cabra Dominican College
Chinese Language Teachers Association of SA	
Cornerstone College	
Council of Australian Secondary Tourism Teachers (CASTT)	
Daniel Irvine	Murray Bridge High School
David Gooley	Marryatville High School
Department for Education and Child Development (DECD)	

From	School/organisation
Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST)	
Diana Geary	
Dina Dellas	Underdale High School
Dr Bob Such MP	
Dr Pam Bartholomaeus	School of Education, Flinders University
Elisa Resce	Booleroo Centre District School
Ethnic Schools Association of South Australia Incorporated	
G & P Turrill	
Gay Stock	Australian Refugee Association
Geetha Chandran	
Global Education Centre (SA) Inc	
Greg Allen	Thomas More College
Hamilton Secondary College	
Hamish Redden	St Michael's College
Henry Crossley	Peterborough High School
Heritage College	
History Teachers' Association of South Australian (HTASA)	
Home Economics Institute of Australia (HEIA(SA))	
Isabel Heath	Cabra Dominican College
J & L Cronshaw	
James Grant	Sacred Heart College
Jane Morris	Cabra Dominican College
Jo Morton	Heathfield High School
Jonathan Mikos	

From	School/organisation
Karen White	
Kevin Marzahn	Temple Christian College
King's Baptist Grammar School	
Kylie Hill	
L Woods	
Learning Together	Christies Downs Primary School
Legal Education Teachers' Association of South Australia (LETASA)	
Leon Rogers	Loxton High School
Linda Miller	King's Baptist Grammar School
Louise Hall	South Australian Association of State School Organisations Inc. (SSASSO)
Marden Senior College	
Mark Barnett	Pulteney Grammar School
Mark Grantham	Glenunga International High School
Martin Ellis	Unley High School
Martyn Pearce	
Mathematical Association of SA	
Michael Borgas	Faith Lutheran College
Michael Salter	Eynesbury Senior College
Millicent High School Governing Council	
Mitcham Girls High School	
Modbury High School	
Modern Language Teachers' Association of SA	
Morris Allen	University Senior College
Mount Gambier HS Governing Council	
Multicultural Education Committee	

From	School/organisation
Natalie Prior	St Francis de Sales College
Nazareth Catholic College	
Niki Baratosy	
Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College (NT)	
Pembroke School	
Penny Spencer	Gawler High School
Peter Duffett	Mt Gambier High School
Peter O'Dwyer	
Peter Wagner (NT)	St Phillip's College
Research Centre for Languages and Cultures	
Ros Mattner	St Francis de Sales College
Roxby Downs Area School	
SA Secondary Principals Association	
School of Languages	
Sharon Proctor	
South Australian French Teachers' Association Inc. (SAFTA)	
South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre	
St Dominic's Priory College	
St Michael's College	
St Peter's Girls' School	
St Phillip's College (NT)	
Student	Urrbrae Agricultural High School
Students	St Francis de Sales College
Sue Boyce	

From	School/organisation
Suzanne Farrington	
Taminmin College (NT)	
Tess O'Callaghan	Cabra Dominican College
The Norwood Morialta High School	
Thelma Tantalos	
Thomas More College	
Tom Coultas	St Aloysius College
Torrens Valley Christian School	
Trevor Nicolai	Reynella East College
Ty Cheesman	Westminster School
University Senior College	
Urrbrae Agricultural High School	
Valley View Secondary School	
Vanessa Gorman	Pedare Christian College
Walford Anglican School for Girls	
Weimin Zhang	
Western Adelaide Secondary Schools Network	
Wise Lum	Marryatville High School
Woodcroft College	

SACE FIRST YEAR EVALUATION
INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANISATIONS INTERVIEWED BY PANEL MEMBERS

Ms Grace Portolesi MP, Minister for Education and Child Development
Mr David Pisoni MP – Shadow Minister for Education and Child Development with Dr Paul Kilvert - Chief Executive SACE Board, Michela Schirru – Ministerial Adviser, Office of Minister for Education and Child Development
Dr Paul Kilvert, Dr Tony Mercurio, Ms Jan Raymond, Mr Spencer Briggs, Mr Andrew Green, Ms Nancy Schupelius, Ms Michaela Bensley, Ms Cathy Schultz, Ms Snez Maio, Mr Dave Harris, Ms Kate Cooper - SACE Board Leadership Team
Mr Garry Le Duff, Chief Executive, Association of Independent Schools of SA (AISSA)
Ms Helen O'Brien, Assistant Director - Ms Georgina Smith, Assistant Director Leading Learning - Mr John Smith, Senior Secondary Consultant - Catholic Education Office of SA (CESA)
Mr David Frith, member of the SACE Board
Ms Elaine Miranda, SACE Board Team Leader Information Analysis & Reporting
Ms Jillian Miller, member of the SACE Board
Ms Sue Healy, General Manager, Curriculum, Teaching and Phases of Learning, Northern Territory Department of Education and Training
Mr Graeme Oliver, Deputy member of the SACE Board
Ms Kerrie Nussio – Skilled Workforce Manager, Mr Chris Burns CEO Defence Teaming Centre
Council of Educations Associations of SA
Ms Pam Ronan and Mr Kim Hebenstreit, members of the SACE Board
Members of STEM Skills Strategy Executive Reference Group - Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology
Mr Alan Criere, Deputy Principal Curriculum; Ms Bronwynn Kemp, Director of Teaching and Learning, St Michael's College
Mrs Carol Moule, President and Dr Pauline Carter, Professional Officer - Maths Association of SA
Mr Malcolm Cheffirs, Open Access College; Mr Tony Jeffrey, Seaton High School; Mr Peter Hughes, Gladstone High School - Visual Art teachers
Urrbrae Agricultural High School staff
Federation of Catholic School Parent Communities members
Torrens Valley Christian School
Mr Martin Ellis, Unley High School
Mr Ty Cheesman, Westminster School
Mr Don Grimmet, Ms Fiona Godfrey, Ms Katherine Teague and Ms Carolyn Parker - Non Govt Schools Advisory Committee Members
Dr Bob Holloway, Principal – Dr Murray Thomson, Director of Studies – University Senior College
AEU SACE Reference Group - Australian Education Union (SA Branch)

Questionnaire

Attachment 5

START

Q1. STATUS

"Q1 Which of the following best describes your current status?

1. I have completed a SACE certificate.
2. I have completed a Certificate 2.
3. I have not yet completed any certificate.
-
4. Don't know / not sure

Q2. EMPLOYMENT

"Q2 What are you currently doing in terms of employment or studies?

1. I am studying at a university - FULL TIME
2. I am studying at a university - PART TIME
3. I have returned to study / I am studying at secondary school - FULL TIME
4. I have returned to study / I am studying at secondary school - PART TIME
5. I am studying elsewhere (not at a secondary school) - FULL TIME
6. I am studying elsewhere (not at a secondary school) - PART TIME
7. I am doing (a) VET / TAFE course(s) - FULL TIME
8. I am doing (a) VET / TAFE course(s) - PART TIME
9. I am doing a traineeship / apprenticeship - FULL TIME
10. I am doing a traineeship / apprenticeship - PART TIME
11. I am having a gap year
12. I am not working and not looking for work
13. Part-time employment
14. Full-time employment
15. Unemployed
16. Looking for work
17. Home duties

18. Refused

Q3. MAIN STATUS

"Q3 Which of those is the MAIN thing that you are currently doing?"

Q4. LIKES ABOUT SACE

"Q4 What did you like about the SACE? _IF NECESSARY, for example, about how it is structured, assessed and taught rather than about your school experience"

1. I liked the school
2. I liked the teachers
3. I liked my friends
4. I liked the 'Research Project'
5. I liked the 'Personal Learning Plan' (PLP)
6. I liked my grades (the actual results that I got)
7. I liked how I was graded (e.g. different types of assignments, exams, presentations)
8. I liked the range of subjects I could choose from (i.e. breadth, number, variety)
9. I liked 'Arts subjects'
10. I liked 'Business, Enterprise and Technology' subjects
11. I liked 'Cross-Disciplinary' subjects (e.g. Research Project)
12. I liked 'English' subjects
13. I liked 'Health and Physical Education' subjects
14. I liked 'Humanities and Social Science' subjects
15. I liked 'Language' subjects
16. I liked 'Mathematics' subjects
17. I liked 'Science' subjects

Questionnaire

18. Having only 4 subjects and a Research Project in Stage 2
19. Other (SPECIFY Q401)

20. Don't know/not sure

Q401 OTHER LIKES

Q5. SUGGESTIONS

"Q5 What elements of the SACE do you think could be improved? _UNPROMPTED_"

1. The school itself
2. Teachers
3. Interaction with other students
4. Subject choices (breadth, number, variety)
5. Workload/homework
6. 'Research Project'
7. 'Personal Learning Plan' (PLP)
8. Grades (the actual result that I got)
9. How I was graded (e.g. different types of assignments, exams, presentations)
10. 'Arts' subjects
11. 'Business, Enterprise and Technology' subjects
12. 'Cross-Disciplinary' subjects (e.g. Research Project)
13. 'English' subjects
14. 'Health and Physical Education' subjects
15. 'Humanities and Social Science' subjects
16. 'Language' subjects
17. 'Mathematics' subjects
18. 'Science' subjects

19. Only 4 subjects and a Research Project in Stage 2
20. Other (SPECIFY Q501)

21. Don't know/not sure

Q501 OTHER SUGGESTIONS

Q6. RETRO VIEWS

"Q6 Would you do anything differently if you had the chance to do the SACE again?"

1. Subject choice
2. Assignment/homework choices in general
3. Research project choice/topic
4. Personal Learning Plan (PLP)
5. Better organised
6. More hardworking
7. Should have been better informed
8. Other (SPECIFY Q601)

Q7. RESULT EXPECTATIONS

"Q7 Were your results in line with your expectations?"

1. Yes, worked hard
2. Yes, deserved that low result
3. Yes, I was assessed fairly
4. Yes, other (PROBE WHY) (SPECIFY Q701)
5. No, I was expecting higher results

Questionnaire

6. No, I was expecting lower results

7. No, wasn't assessed fairly

8. No, but deserved that result

9. No, because the assignments/exams were too hard

10. No, assignments/exams were unclear (what is expected of a student)

11. No, other _PROBE WHY_ (SPECIFY Q702)

GO Q8

Q701 OTHER YES

Q702 OTHER NO

Q8. PLP USEFULNESS

"Q8 On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is 'not at all useful' and 10 is 'extremely useful', how useful or otherwise did you find the personal learning plan (PLP)? "

Q9. RATING REASON

"Q9 Why did you give that score, what can be improved? _PROBE POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS IF 0-5_ "

1. OTHER (SPECIFY Q901)

2. Not sure/don't know

GO Q10

Q901 REASON

Q10. RESEARCH PROJECT USEFULNESS

"Q10 On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is 'not at all useful' and 10 is 'extremely useful', how useful or otherwise did you find the research project?"

Q11. RATING REASON

"Q11 Why did you give that score, what can be improved? _PROBE POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS IF 0-5_ "

1. OTHER (SPECIFY Q1101)

2. Not sure/don't know

Q1101 REASON

Q12G STATEMENTS

1. The new SACE has been responsive to my needs.
2. My performance was assessed fairly.
3. The new SACE utilises what I had learnt before Year 11.
4. The new SACE is relevant to what I am doing now.
5. The new SACE has benefited me.
6. The new SACE is inclusive of students from different backgrounds.
7. The new SACE prepares students with different plans after school (e.g. employment, university, TAFE).
8. I have received quality teaching.

FOR EACH

Q12 STATEMENTS

"Q12 Using a scale from 0-10, but this time where 0 means you strongly disagree and 10 means strongly agree, please rate your level of agreement with the following statements

Q13. FINAL COMMENTS

"Q13 Is there anything further you wish to add regarding the new SACE?"

1. Yes (SPECIFY Q1301)

2. No

Q1301 FINAL COMMENT

Thematic Analysis of Open-Ended Responses from Student Survey

1. 118 respondents provided an open-ended response from the telephone interview. These responses were disaggregated into 133 distinct comments.

2. Regarding the initial questions to be addressed by the open-ended comments:

- *What elements of the new SACE could be improved?*
 - *What could be improved for the two types of research projects, projects A and B?*
- *What was confusing about the new SACE?*
- *Are there any comments on specific subjects?*
 - *Are there any comments on the reduction of 5 to 4 subjects?*
- *Are there any comments about the Research Project, or the Personal Learning Plan?*

3. A thematic analysis of the open-ended comments slightly amended the research questions to more accurately address the data:

- *What was confusing about the new SACE and what elements could be improved?*
- *Are there any comments on the reduction of 5 to 4 subjects?*
 - *Are there any comments on the reduction of subjects AND the introduction of the research project?*
- *Are there any comments about the Research Project?*
- *Are there any comments about the Personal Learning Plan?*
- *Are there any comments regarding positive aspects of the SACE?*

Initial and Revised Themes	Frequency of Comments
Elements that could be improved	41
Elements that were confusing	28
Comments about the research project	28
Positive comments	10
Reduction of 5 to 4 subjects AND research project	8
Personal learning plan	8
Reduction of 5 to 4 subjects	7
Comments about specific subjects	3
Comments about research projects A and B	0
Total	133 comments by 118 respondents

4. *What was confusing about the new SACE and what could be improved?*

In order to address aspects that were confusing about the new SACE, comments which explicitly mentioned confusion were coded. However, comments that mentioned confusing elements are highly inter-related with comments that address elements for improvement. Therefore, themes that were cross-coded as confusing elements that could also be improved, are marked with an asterisk in Table 1.

Elements of the new SACE which caused most confusion for the respondents were related to teachers' lack of knowledge and professional development regarding the marking and assessment criteria for SACE subjects. Also, in general, respondents noted that teachers lacked general information and knowledge of the new SACE, which many respondents ascribed to poor communication channels.

Table 2 reports that most improvements suggested by respondents focused on the improvement of information dissemination and training to teachers regarding the new SACE, especially in regards to the understanding and use of assessment and marking frameworks.

No comments addressed the original research question regarding research projects A and B.

Table 1 Confusing elements of the new SACE

What was confusing about the new SACE?	N=28
*In general, transition from old to new SACE was complicated and confusing. Processes were unclear- no information for teachers or students	4
*Poor teacher professional development, preparation and knowledge of the new SACE; led to student confusion	6
* Teachers lacked knowledge and had confusion about marking/assessing/scaling and learning goals; these were not well communicated to students	12
* Marking framework (matrix) was not able to meaningfully interpret student results; confusing to use	4
Confusing for students to know where to get support services and materials for difficult subjects	1
Unclear how SACE relates to university pathways	1

* Comments cross-coded as areas for improvement indicated with an asterisk

Table 2 Elements that could be improved

What elements could be improved?	N=41
Disorganised and lack of information Not enough information and training overall for students and teachers regarding processes, assessment, practice materials, results books, etc.	4
Improve teacher knowledge/teaching/assessing regarding SACE Respondents noted that the following could be improved: content knowledge of SACE subjects, improved pedagogy, knowledge, use and communication of assessment frameworks, organisation and communication of general information	7
SACE not a valid measure/assessment of student ability Respondents noted that the following could be improved: scaling/moderation/marking, too many people pass, too difficult	5
Dissatisfaction with weighting of external assessments Want external assessments to be weighted more (50%)	3
Respondents in general did not perceive any benefit of the new SACE, or did not understand why it was reformed	6
Perception that SACE did not benefit/was not relevant for all post-school destinations More beneficial for university/tertiary education than for vocational/labour market destinations (N=5) Not relevant for university pathways or 'high-achievers' (N=2) Not relevant for inter-state tertiary pathways (N=1)	9
SACE did not accommodate students with special circumstances The respondents noted that SACE could improve to help accommodate students with the following circumstances: students who are carers, who have mental health issues, who have special education needs, who are adult students, who have different contexts for education delivery - open access	5
Need improved career counselling and guidance regarding the SACE	2

5. Are there any comments on the reduction of 5 to 4 subjects?

Are there any comments on the reduction of subjects AND the introduction of the research project?

There were only three comments regarding specific SACE subjects, which are reported in Table 3.

Table 3 Comments on specific subjects

Comments on specific subjects	N=3
SACE requirements for visual arts and design are too rigorous	1
Teachers did not have knowledge for specialised subjects (accounting)	1
SACE has impacted humanities as there are less course offerings in the humanities	1

Comments on the reduction of 5 to 4 subjects were most often made in conjunction with the introduction of the research project. Comments that just related to the reduction of subjects are reported in Table 4. Comments that linked the reduction of subjects to the research project are reported in Table 5. Overall, respondents perceived that the reduction of 5 subjects to 4 adversely impacted their opportunity for university entrance and pathways by reducing the breadth of the curriculum. When linked to the research project, respondents suggested that alternatives be made available to be able to increase the number of subjects.

Table 4 Comments on the reduction of 5 to 4 subjects

Comments on the reduction of 5 to 4 subjects	N=7
5 subjects provide more options and choice for study and pathways for tertiary education Prefer 5 subjects or the option of 5 subjects	6
Workload reduced and curriculum not as in-depth	1

Table 5 Comments on the reduction of 5 to 4 subjects AND the research project

Comments on the reduction of 5 to 4 subjects AND research project	N=8
<p>Respondents perceived that the introduction of a research project adversely impacted their opportunity to study other subjects.</p> <p>Respondents noted that they would like opportunities to increase the number of subjects: make research project optional, require 5 subjects and the research project</p>	8

6. Are there any comments about the Research Project?

Comments on the research project are reported in Table 6. In general, respondents did not perceive any utility or relevance of the research project for them. More specifically, respondents who expanded on the perceived lack of relevance noted that the research project was not useful for their planned post-school destination, either tertiary/university education, or vocational education or employment in the labour market.

Table 6 Comments on the research project

Comments on research project	N=28
General dislike- no value or perceived utility for student	11
<p>Perception that research project did not benefit/was not relevant for all post-school destinations</p> <p>Research project more beneficial for tertiary education post-school destinations (N=3)</p> <p>Research project more beneficial for vocational/employment post-school destinations (N=2)</p>	5
<p>Research project should be implemented at earlier year level to build research skills necessary in Year 12</p> <p>Or there should be an option to fulfill requirement with previously demonstrated research skills</p>	4
Teacher lack of knowledge for research project adversely impacted students	3
Research project should be formatively assessed throughout the year	2

Disadvantaged rural students who do not receive one-on-one teacher guidance	1
Not enough flexibility for research topic choice	1
Research project too time-consuming	1

7. Are there any comments about the Personal Learning Plan?

Comments on the personal learning plan are reported below in Table 7. Not many respondents commented on the personal learning plan, but those that did generally did not perceive the personal learning plan to be useful. Comments did not expand on what aspects of the personal learning plan were perceived to not be useful. At the same turn, comments did not outline any aspects of the personal learning plan which could be improved.

Comments on the personal learning plan	N=8
General dislike- no value or perceived utility for student	7
Liked the personal learning plan	1

8. Are there any comments regarding positive aspects of the SACE?

Comments on positive aspects	N=10
No suggested improvements- like the new SACE	4
Satisfied with the marking/assessment system Reduced weight contribution of external assessments reduces student stress	3
Appreciated contribution of research project toward SACE completion	1
Bonus points useful for gaining entry to preferred area of study	1
SACE is beneficial for independent learners	1

FOCUS GROUPS WITH STUDENTS – NEW SACE EVALUATION

1. Welcome and introduction

Introduction of Panel members. Purpose of the first year new SACE evaluation, purpose of focus group; no individual comments will be recorded it is mainly to get an impression of their experience; organisations and schools have provided written submissions, this is a way of getting feed-back from students; we'll also do a few other focus groups with students.

2. Warm-up exercise

Distribute sheet with rating exercise (see below). Allow 2-3 minutes. Leave sheets with students and only collect at the end of the focus group. This allows students to have their rating as a reference.

3. Questions

The following questions are guiding questions only and are taken from the student survey. Actual questions and follow-up will depend on the topics emerging during the session.

1. To take up ratings from the warm-up exercise, ask several students to give their rating; then ask about reasons.
2. What did you like about the SACE? _Please think about the SACE, how it is structured, assessed and taught rather than about your school experience in general.
3. What elements of the SACE do you think could be improved?
4. Would you do anything differently if you had the chance to do the SACE again?
5. What do you think about the research project? What could be improved?
6. What do you think about the personal learning plan? What could be improved?
7. What do you think about the assessment program? What could be improved?
8. Did you find the SACE Board communication appropriate? What, if anything, could the SACE Board do to improve the advice and messages it sends to students?
9. Any other comments?

4. Thank you and closure

Collect the rating sheets from the warm-up exercise. Paraphrase some of the main topics/themes that emerged. Thank students for their time.

New SACE first year evaluation – Student focus group – Warm-up exercise

1. On a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 means “not at all useful” and 10 means “extremely useful, how useful or otherwise did you find the following subjects?
(Please tick the appropriate box.)

	I didn't take this subject	Not at all useful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Ex- tremely useful
Biology		0										10
Chemistry												
English Communications												
English Studies												
Food and Hospitality												
Mathematic Studies												
Mathematical Applications												
Personal Learning Plan												
Physical education												
Physics												
Research Project												

2. Choose one of the subjects from the list that you studied. What did you like about it? Was there anything about that subject that you think could be improved?

Senior Secondary Certificates in Australia – some comparisons

1. Subject study requirements

SACE	HSC	VCE (not VCAL)	QCE	IB Diploma
Each subject or course successfully completed earns 'credits' towards the SACE, with a minimum of 200 credits required for students to gain the certificate. The compulsory requirements are: Personal Learning Plan (10 credits at Stage 1); literacy – at least 20 credits from English subjects or courses (Stage 1 or Stage 2); numeracy – at least 10 credits from mathematics subjects or courses (Stage 1 or Stage 2); Research Project (10 credits at Stage 2); other Stage 2 subjects totaling at least 60 credits. The remaining 90 credits can be gained through additional Stage 1 or Stage 2 subjects or Board-recognised courses (such as VET or community learning).	Students must study courses totaling at least 12 units in Year 11 and at least 10 units in Year 12. Most courses are two unit courses requiring 120 hours of scheduled study in one year. In some subjects there are extension courses. These are usually one unit courses studied in Year 12, which are more challenging than the two unit courses. In both years students must study: at least six units from Board Developed Courses (examinable); at least two units of a Board Developed Course in English; at least three courses of two units value or greater (either Board Developed or Board Endorsed Courses); at least four subjects. Most study 6 subjects in Year 11 and 5 subjects in Year 12.	Courses studied for the VCE are organised into units, with Units 1 and 2 benchmarked to a Year 11 standard and Units 3 and 4 benchmarked to a Year 12 standard. Students can commence the study of a course at any of Unit 1, 2 or 3 levels. Students must satisfactorily complete at least 16 units which must include: three units from the English group, with at least one unit at Units 3 and 4 level; at least three sequences of Units 3 and 4 studies other than English, which may include any number of English sequences once the English requirement has been met. Most students study 22 – 24 units, the equivalent of 6 subjects in Year 11 and 5 or 6 subjects Year 12.	Students undertake a program of study involving at least 20 credits. Most courses carry 4 credits and entail four semesters of study across Years 11 and 12. The pattern must involve a minimum of 12 credits from completed Core courses - each subject exited after four semesters of study at a Sound level of achievement (SA) or higher contributes 4 credits. Preparatory courses can contribute a maximum of 6 credits. Enrichment courses can contribute up to 8 credits. Most students would undertake the equivalent of five subjects in Year 11 and Year 12.	Students study six courses – normally 3 at higher level (240 hrs) and 3 at standard level (150 hrs). They must choose one subject from each of groups 1 to 5, to ensure breadth of study in languages, social studies, the experimental sciences and mathematics. The sixth subject may be an arts subject chosen from group 6, or the student may choose another subject from groups 1 to 5. Also there are three core requirements: the extended essay - students engage in independent research through an in-depth study of a question relating to one of their subjects; the theory of knowledge course; and creativity, action, service

2. Satisfactory completion of a course (or subject)

SACE	HSC	VCE	QCE	IB Diploma
A student will have satisfactorily completed a course if he/she receives a grade A to E (or A+ to E-) for the school assessment and sits for any external examinations	A student will be considered to have satisfactorily completed a course if, in the principal's view, there is sufficient evidence that the student has: followed the course developed or endorsed by the Board; and applied themselves with diligence and sustained effort to the set tasks provided in the course by the school; and achieved some or all of the course outcomes.	A student will have satisfactorily completed a VCE unit if the student demonstrates achievement of all the outcomes for the unit. Most units have 2 – 4 outcomes. The decision about satisfactory completion of outcomes is based on the teacher's assessment of the student's overall performance on assessment tasks designated for the unit. Satisfactory performance on these tasks is sufficient evidence to award an S for the unit. The student receives S for a unit when the school determines that all outcomes are achieved satisfactorily. A student must: produce work that demonstrates achievement of the outcome/s; submit work on time; submit work that is clearly his/her own; observe the VCAA and school rules.	To get credit for a course students have to meet a minimum standard for that course e.g. Sound Achievement, Pass, Competent – depending on the course's type of assessment grade.	A student can be awarded a grade from 1 to 7 in each course, but must achieve a total of at least 24 points in the program and participate satisfactorily in the creativity, action, service requirement to be awarded an IB.

3. Achievement required to be awarded the credential

SACE	HSC	VCE	QCE	IB Diploma
<p>Students will receive a final grade from A to E for each Stage 1 subject and A+ to E- for Stage 2 subjects. For compulsory requirements, to gain their SACE they will need to achieve: a C grade or better at Stage 1; C- grade or better at Stage 2. That is, they need to receive at least a C or C- in subjects courses totaling 110 credits that meet the compulsory requirements.</p> <p>Most students study 5 subjects in Stage 1 + the PLP and 4 subjects in Stage 2 + the RP</p>	<p>To be eligible for the award of the Higher School Certificate students must have gained the School Certificate or such other qualifications as the Board of Studies considers satisfactory; have attended a school or a college of TAFE; have completed HSC; All My Own Work (or its equivalent); have satisfactorily completed courses that comprise the pattern of study required by the Board for the award of the Higher School Certificate; and sit for and make a serious attempt at the requisite Higher School Certificate examinations. A student who has received a Band 1 result (the lowest) in all subjects will still receive an HSC.</p>	<p>To be awarded the VCE a student must satisfactorily complete at least 16 units of study in accordance with the minimum program specified above. It is not necessary to receive a study score (course result) in any course to receive a VCE.</p>	<p>A QCE is awarded to a person who, in addition to achieving 20 credits in the required pattern of learning, and has met the requirements for literacy and numeracy (viz. At least a result of Satisfactory Achievement (SA) in an English and a Mathematics course studied for at least one semester, or equivalent).</p>	<p>Students take written examinations at the end of the program, which are marked by external IB examiners. Students also complete assessment tasks in the school, which are either initially marked by teachers and then moderated by external moderators or sent directly to external examiners.</p> <p>The diploma is awarded to students who gain at least 24 points, subject to certain minimum levels of performance across the whole program and to satisfactory participation in the creativity, action, service requirement. The highest total that a Diploma Program student can be awarded is 45 points.</p>

4. Assessment and reporting achievement in a course

SACE	HSC	VCE	QCE	IB Diploma
<p>At Stage 1 subjects are 100% school assessed. Students are awarded a grade A to E for each subject or course based on performance standards.</p> <p>At Stage 2 subjects are 70% school assessed using grades A+ to E-. A central moderation program reviews the grades submitted by schools.</p> <p>At Stage 2, the SACE Board marks the 30% external assessment component of all subjects. A procedure is used to determine grade cut-off scores for the external assessments. The marks from the external assessment are combined with numerical equivalents of the school assessments to produce the students' overall subject results.</p>	<p>Year 11 courses are assessed within the school, as are Year 12 Board endorsed courses. Year 12 Board developed courses are assessed by the school according to Board of Studies' requirements and by external examination. School assessments are statistically moderated against the school group's performance in the examination. A standards – setting procedure is used to align the examination marks to the course standards-based achievement scale. The moderated assessment marks are thus aligned to this scale as well. The examination mark and the moderated school assessment are averaged to determine the HSC mark and performance band in a course. All four are reported.</p>	<p>Results of school-based statistically moderated assessments and examinations contribute towards a student's study score in each VCE course. VCE studies generally have three Graded Assessments in each Units 3 and 4 sequence, at least one of which is an examination. Usually examinations contribute 34 – 66%. The study score is obtained by standardising the final score for each assessment; multiplying the standardised score for each assessment by its required weighting; and summing these scores. Further statistical processing results in scores with a mean of 30 and standard deviation of 7. Graded Assessments are reported as performance levels A+ to E, UG, NA.</p>	<p>Courses are 100% school assessed against performance standards. Most are reported on a five point scale – Very High Achievement (VHA), High Achievement (HA), Sound Achievement (SA), Limited Achievement (LA), Very Limited Achievement (VLA). Other types of courses may be assessed as Pass/Fail or competent/not competent.</p> <p>An external moderation process involving panels of teachers is used to ensure consistency of application of the performance standards across schools, districts and the whole state.</p>	<p>The grades awarded for each course range from 1 (lowest) to 7 (highest). Students can also be awarded up to three additional points for their combined results on the theory of knowledge and the extended essay. The grades awarded are standards-based. Assessments conducted by the school are checked by external moderators and normally contribute between 20% and 30% of the total mark.</p>

5. Calculation of the ATAR based on

SACE	HSC	VCE	QCE	IB Diploma
<p>The ATAR is based on an aggregate of scaled marks in 80 credits (equiv. 4 subjects). Students must: complete the SACE; complete at least 80 credits of SACE Stage 2. Of the 80 credits, at least 60 must be from Tertiary Admissions Subjects (TAS) and the other 20 either from TAS subjects, Recognised Studies, or a mix of the two; complete any prerequisite requirement for a chosen university course; comply with rules regarding subject combinations; obtain an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR).</p>	<p>The ATAR is based on an aggregate of scaled marks in 10 units of ATAR courses comprising: the best two units of English and the best eight units from all the remaining units studied. No more than two units of Category B courses (viz. VET examinations) can be included.</p>	<p>The ATAR is developed from an aggregate produced by adding: the ATAR subject score in English, English Language, Literature or ESL; the next best three ATAR subject scores permissible; and 10% of the fifth and sixth permissible ATAR subject scores that are available.</p>	<p>School group results in the Queensland Core Skills (QCS) Test are used in the statistical scaling of school assessment data to calculate the OP s and FPs used to select students for tertiary entrance. To be eligible for an OP rank, students must study 20 semester units of courses, including at least three subjects for four semesters each, and sit the test. Students are placed in one of 25 OP bands from OP1 (highest) to OP25 (lowest). OP calculations begin with the results awarded in the subjects studied in Year 12. The five point scale is too coarse for scaling, so teachers submit marks (SAI) from 200 to 400 for each course that indicate the relative achievements of the students in each subject.</p>	<p>The TACs in each state use a table to convert IB total scores out of 45 into ATARs.</p>

Moderation of Stage 1 Subjects

Previous SACE (prior to 2010)

No moderation of Stage 1 Subjects except Personal Learning Plan. The Personal Learning Plan was moderated by school visit of a SACE Board Officer in 2009 and 2010.

Present SACE

At Stage 1, only English and mathematics subjects and the Personal Learning Plan are moderated.

The role of moderation at Stage 1 is to confirm the school's assessment decisions at the end of the teaching and learning program and before the SACE Board reports students' results. Moderation does not involve remarking student work. Moderation at Stage 1 validates the consistent application of the C grade, with reference to the performance standards described in each subject outline.

The purposes of moderation are to:

- ensure the performance standards in Stage 1 English and mathematics subjects and the Personal Learning Plan have been applied consistently
- ensure that the school assessed results awarded to students across schools are comparable and fair
- provide valid and fair assessment results for students.

When moderating student work moderators assume that:

- students have been taught and assessed according to the specifications of the relevant subject outline
- the performance standards for the subject have been applied consistently across an assessment group.

A school participates in at least one moderation activity per year for each of the English and mathematics subjects it offers and the Personal Learning Plan until the school's results in the subject(s) are confirmed in two consecutive years.

Schools with confirmed results in a subject in two consecutive years move into a extended cycle of moderation and may be exempt from moderation for up to 3 years.

Schools select a sample of students' work for moderation from those identified by teachers as demonstrating evidence of learning in the C and D grades, including the C/D borderline. When there are no results in the C and D grades, including the C/D borderline, schools select students from the adjacent grades for the moderation sample.

For each subject to be moderated, the moderation sample is up to a maximum of 12 folios to represent the school's assessment decisions at each of the C, C borderline, D borderline and D grades. It also includes a Stage 1 Moderation Sample Form and a copy of the approved learning and assessment plan(s).

Schools nominate teacher(s) to act as moderators in English and mathematics subjects and the Personal Learning Plan, when requested. Nominated moderators attend moderation at a central venue for between 1 and 3 days. Moderators participate in a benchmarking activity and training at the start of the moderation process, and abide by the SACE Board's Code of Conduct.

Moderators work in pairs with the pairings changed each day during the moderation process.

The pairs of moderators discuss their recommendations to either confirm and/or adjust results with the SACE Officer who checks the proposed recommendations reflect the state-wide standard interpretation and application of the performance standards.

When the moderation process confirms a school's assessment decisions in a subject required for moderation at the end of Semester 1, a subsequent moderation in that subject is not necessary in Semester 2.

Moderators complete a Stage 1 moderation feedback sheet to confirm the grades assigned in the moderation sample and/or recommend assigned grades be adjusted. The SACE Officer checks and signs the Stage 1 moderation feedback sheet.

The SACE Board provides feedback to schools via the principal.

Schools and teachers carefully consider the feedback to ensure their final results are consistent with the grades recommended for the moderation sample.

Stage 2 Final (Central) Moderation

Prior to 2011	Present SACE – 2011 onwards
<p>Moderation was a process undertaken to ensure that the school-assessed marks awarded to students were comparable from school to school and that the criteria for judging performance had been applied consistently.</p> <p>Moderation involved reviewing student work to support teachers' assessment processes and did not involve re-marking of student work.</p> <p>Not all subjects had components that were required for final (central) moderation; the school-based assessment for some subjects was statistically moderated against the external examination.</p> <p>Assessment components required for final moderation also varied between subjects.</p> <p>Some subjects e.g. Chemistry had group moderation.</p>	<p>The SACE moderation procedures are central to the confirming phase of the SACE Assuring Assessment Integrity policy, as it relates to school assessment for Stage 2 subjects.</p> <p>The procedures for assuring the integrity of assessment measures used for SACE assessments are based on the interconnected and complementary responsibilities of students, teachers, principals, and the SACE Board in the moderation process.</p> <p>Students' results for school assessments are moderated at the A+ to E- standard in all Stage 2 subjects at Final Moderation (Central).</p> <p>Final moderation (on-site) is conducted for Visual Arts and Physical Education for the practical assessment type.</p> <p>The role of moderation at Stage 2 seeks to confirm the school's assessment decisions and does not involve remarking student work. In each Stage 2 subject, student achievement is assessed using three assessment grade levels (+, mid-grade, and -) within each grade band (A, B, C, D, E). Final moderation is used to confirm that, for school assessment in each subject, the application of A+ to E- assessment grade levels is consistent with the performance standards described in each subject outline and consistent across all assessment groups.</p> <p>The school assessment (component) are assessments set by the school, in accordance with the subject outline, and carried out by the school.</p> <p>An assessment group is a group of students to whose work a common marking standard is applied by both the school and the SACE Board.</p>
<p>Principles of Moderation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderation validated teacher judgment of student achievement. (validity) • Moderation was based on evidence provided in a sample of student work from a class. (sampling) • Changes deemed necessary to a range of marks in the sample affected all students within that range. (consistency) • The teacher's rank order of class members was maintained. (maintaining rank order) • A student was not advantaged or disadvantaged by having their work included in the sample submitted for moderation. (fairness). 	<p>Principles of Moderation</p> <p><i>Validity</i> Moderation seeks to confirm the school's assessment decisions about student achievement, based on the assumption that the learning requirements and assessment design criteria described in the subject outline have been followed, and that the performance standards have been interpreted consistently.</p> <p><i>Sampling</i> Moderation is based on evidence provided in a sample of student work from an assessment group, representative of the range of achievement grade levels.</p> <p><i>Consistency</i> Moderation decisions confirming or recommending adjustments to school assessment results are applied to all students in an assessment group with the same result. Moderation decisions seek to ensure that the interpretation and application of the performance standards in a subject are consistent across all schools.</p> <p><i>Achievement order</i> Moderation decisions maintain the order of student</p>

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<p>Process</p> <p>The Chief Assessor assisted by a SACE Board Officer was responsible for overseeing the Final (Central) Moderation process. The aim was to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish consensus among panellists using the criteria for judging performance and bench mark samples. • ensure that the criteria for judging performance were applied consistently by all panel members in the moderation process. • determine the minimum mark range at which is it deemed appropriate to make adjustments. <p>Moderators followed the ordered list of schools provided by the Chief Assessor for the moderation process and all classes from one school were moderated by the same pair of moderators.</p> <p>Moderators worked in teams of two. The pairing of moderators was changed on a regular basis (at least daily).</p> <p>Moderators did not moderate classes from their own schools, or from any school in which they had provided support moderation, or had a potential conflict of interest.</p> <p>Any adjustments to a teacher's marking standard had to be based on the criteria for judging performance and on information and conditions specified in the relevant Curriculum Statement, Learning Area Manual, or the SACE Operations Manual.</p> <p>Adjustments to results (other than clerical/arithmetic) occurred as a result of variations in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interpretation of the specifications of the Curriculum Statement; • assessment task design; and • marking against the criteria for judging performance. 	<p>achievement within assessment types for each assessment group (that is, the range A+ to E-).</p> <p><i>Fairness</i></p> <p>A student is not advantaged or disadvantaged by having his or her work included in the sample submitted for moderation.</p> <p>Process</p> <p>The SACE Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appoints an assessment panel for final moderation consisting of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the Chief Supervisor — School Assessment – the Chief Supervisor — Materials Development (if available) (the Chief Assessor may be one of the Chief Supervisors listed above) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – additional subject supervisors, depending on the size of the student cohort and the number of moderators appointed – a number of moderators, depending on the size of the student cohort • lists all schools, by school number, in the order they are to be moderated, where <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – moderators do not choose the schools they moderate – moderators are not allocated their own school to moderate, a school with which they have an association or a school with which they have a conflict of interest • trains all moderators in moderation procedures • ensures that all assessment panel members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – declare any conflicts of interest – maintain confidentiality throughout and after the moderation process <p>A SACE Board Officer and the Chief Supervisor — School Assessment lead and support the moderation process for each subject.</p> <p>A SACE Board Officer, in conjunction with the Chief Supervisor — School Assessment, allocates a supervisor to each pair of moderators. Moderation pairings are changed on at least a daily basis throughout the moderation process.</p> <p>The Chief Supervisor — School Assessment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conducts a benchmarking exercise in the subject before the start of moderation using common sets of student materials for each subject, training moderators to use evidence of learning in student materials to support assessment decisions • ensures that moderators consistently apply the performance standards throughout the moderation process • ensures that moderators monitor adherence to the subject outline specifications and the rules for students undertaking SACE assessments (potential breaches of rules) • oversees the outcome of the moderation process by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – monitoring moderators' decisions during the moderation process – ensuring the integrity of the moderation process – referring potential breaches of rules to the Manager, Moderation and Standards (when this
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Stage 2 Final (Central) Moderation

<p>Procedure</p> <p>The materials viewed by the moderating pair was initially limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the highest-achieving student; the lowest-achieving student in each of the A, B, C, and D grade bands. <p>Each sample of student work was viewed once.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderator 1 viewed and made notes regarding the work of the <i>highest-achieving student</i>, and the <i>lowest-achieving student</i> in each of the B and D grade bands (3 pieces of students work) Moderator 2 viewed and made notes regarding the work of the <i>lowest-achieving student</i> in each of the A and C grade bands (2 pieces of student work) If after this viewing agreement was reached to support the teacher's results the pair did not swap samples and the moderation process was concluded. If marks for at least one of the pieces of student work could not be confirmed and the moderation adjustment proposed represented at least the minimum allowable mark change, the moderators would swap the student work samples. Discussion then occurred between the two moderators. If, after this discussion only one of the pieces of student work in the sample appeared to require adjustment, the moderation process concluded and no mark adjustments were made. If after discussion, both moderators believed that more than one of the five pieces of student work required adjustment that represented at least the minimum allowable mark change, the moderators viewed the student's work in the mid-grade(s) adjacent to the sample(s) in question. Moderators reviewed and made notes regarding the mid-grade pieces of student work. If after viewing the additional pieces of student work the moderators agreed that at least two pieces (of the initial five and the mid-grade samples) required an adjustment that 	<p>occurs, additional student work may be sought from the school)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – reviewing moderators' decisions before any adjustments are made to student results – supervising potential merit review, when applicable – confirming that any adjustments to students' results are valid and fair <ul style="list-style-type: none"> maintains the accuracy of student data and related moderation records. <p>In addition, the Chief Supervisor — Materials Development (if available) and/or the Chief Supervisor — School Assessment supervise the collection of potential examples of assessment tasks and student work to be used as future benchmarking and support materials.</p> <p>Procedure</p> <p>Each moderation pair reviews one assessment type initially, moderator 1 reviews a sample that represents the lowest grade level in the A and C grade bands and one or more A+ samples if available</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> moderator 2 reviews a sample that represents the lowest grade level in the B and D grade bands and one or more A+ samples if available if both moderators can confirm all the assessment results for the sample used they do not swap samples if both moderators are not able to confirm all the assessment results for the sample used they swap samples and repeat the review process above, additional samples are reviewed if changes are recommended. moderators may review additional samples, if available <p>For reporting confirmed results moderators complete a moderation summary, the feedback is provided for each assessment group.</p> <p>For reporting adjusted results moderators discuss proposed adjustments with the supervisor and complete the moderation summary to enable feedback to be provided</p> <p>After moderation</p> <p>All final results sheets in a subject are checked to ensure consistency of moderation processes and procedures across assessment groups and schools. All feedback sheets are also checked in the same way, including alignment with the final results sheet(s) for the subject.</p> <p>The Chief Assessor, Chief Supervisor — School Assessment, and Chief Supervisor — Materials Development, supervisors, and moderators contribute to a report for each subject, which includes information and data from the school assessment (moderation) and external assessment (marking) processes.</p>
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<p>represented at least the minimum allowable mark change, they then determined the range and magnitude of adjustments.</p> <p>Adjustment to marks occurred only if the Chief Assessor endorsed the changes, rank order of students was not changed.</p> <p>Changes to marks were made on the Confirmation Results Sheets.</p> <p>A <i>Final Moderation (Central) Report</i> was completed for each class making sure the information accurately reflected the outcome of the moderation process. A separate report was generated for each subject.</p> <p>The <i>Final Moderation (Central) Report</i> indicated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the range of marks that were adjusted• the assessment components that were adjusted and the• grounds for adjustment.	
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2011 Central (Final) Moderation Effects on the School-Assessment Component - South Australia

Summary of Moderation Effects	No of classes	% of classes
Moderated Up	884	12%
Moderated Down	3507	47%
Unchanged	3113	41%
Total	7504	

Impact of moderation up / down

	Shift upto 7%	Shift upto 14%	Shift greater than 14%
Moderated Up	10.8%	0.6%	0.4%
Moderated Down	35.8%	7.5%	3.4%

Caveats

These moderation effects are based on the average shift across all assessment types of the school-assessment component for each subject

The average shift is calculated as the average difference between the total moderated marks and the school marks for each class

One grade level shift is approximately 7% hence impact data has been presented to show moves by multiples of 7%

Impact of Central Moderation by Subject, by class - 2011 results for South Australia

SAC E	Subject Name	Number of classes Moderated Down			Number of classes Unchanged		Number of classes Moderated Up		Total Number of Classes
		<= -14%	-7 to -14%	0 to -7%	0%	0 to +7%	+7 to +14%	>= +14%	
ABD	Aboriginal Studies	0	1	1	4	2	0	0	8
ACG	Accounting	1	2	19	18	8	0	0	48
AHT	Agricultural and Horticultural Applied Technologies	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	3
AHE	Agricultural and Horticultural Enterprise	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
AHM	Agricultural and Horticultural Management	2	3	4	5	1	0	0	15
AHP	Agricultural and Horticultural Principles	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	4
AHC	Agricultural and Horticultural Science	0	1	6	2	2	0	0	11
AHD	Agricultural and Horticultural Studies	2	2	6	3	0	0	0	13
ARC	Arabic (continuers)	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	4
AAAY	Arts and the Community	13	1	5	77	2	0	3	101
AUC	Auslan (continuers)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
AIP	Australian and International Politics	0	0	1	4	1	0	0	6
ASY	Australian History	0	0	5	4	1	0	0	10
BIG	Biology	3	15	108	93	20	0	0	239
BOC	Bosnian (continuers)	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
BUE	Business and Enterprise	4	7	50	36	16	0	0	113
BES	Business and Enterprise: Local Program	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
BAY	Business and the Community	7	3	2	24	0	0	0	36
CME	Chemistry	2	15	79	85	6	1	0	188
CSD	Child Studies	1	3	32	66	6	0	0	108
CHD	Chinese (background speakers)	1	2	10	8	0	0	0	21
CHC	Chinese (continuers)	0	0	2	9	1	0	0	12
CLS	Classical Studies	0	3	14	6	5	0	0	28
CAY	Communication and the Community	9	3	1	66	2	0	0	81
CCA	Communication Products I	1	14	36	32	4	0	1	88
CCB	Communication Products II	0	4	13	23	2	0	0	42
MCG	Composing and Arranging	1	4	7	12	2	0	0	26
CVA	Creative Arts	4	4	11	18	11	3	0	51
CRC	Croatian (continuers)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
CXD	Cross-disciplinary Studies	0	4	2	3	1	0	0	10
DAE	Dance	3	3	15	4	1	0	0	26
DAY	Design, Construction, and the Community	3	1	2	48	1	0	0	55
DRM	Drama	8	19	31	21	15	0	0	94
EMS	Economics	0	0	13	13	1	0	0	27
EGA	English as a Second Language	2	6	22	16	2	0	0	48
ELG	English as Second Language Studies	3	7	17	37	1	0	0	65
ECS	English Communications	2	12	186	116	58	2	0	376
EPW	English Pathways	1	4	16	8	12	0	0	41
END	English Studies	0	9	64	34	39	0	0	146
MBL	Ensemble Performance	4	6	34	53	14	2	1	114
EAY	Environment and the Community	6	0	0	21	0	1	2	30
FOH	Food and Hospitality	1	8	55	112	7	1	0	184
FAY	Foods and the Community	4	2	4	59	0	1	3	73
FRB	French (beginners)	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
FRC	French (continuers)	0	1	8	12	3	0	0	24
GPY	Geography	2	2	21	14	2	0	0	41
GOY	Geology	0	0	0	5	2	0	0	7
GEB	German (beginners)	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
GEC	German (continuers)	0	2	16	12	1	0	0	31
HEH	Health	1	2	22	11	6	0	0	42
HAY	Health, Recreation, and the Community	9	6	10	90	0	2	3	120
HIC	Hindi (continuers)	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
HUC	Hungarian (continuers)	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
INB	Indonesian (beginners)	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
INC	Indonesian (continuers)	0	2	6	1	4	0	0	13
IPR	Information Processing and Publishing	2	15	50	57	12	0	0	136
IFT	Information Technology	5	3	11	14	4	0	0	37
ILG	Integrated Learning	5	21	50	29	13	2	4	124
ITB	Italian (beginners)	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	3
ITC	Italian (continuers)	1	0	10	12	1	0	0	24
JAD	Japanese (background speakers)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
JAB	Japanese (beginners)	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	5
JAC	Japanese (continuers)	1	7	15	9	1	0	0	33
KHC	Khmer (continuers)	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
KOD	Korean (background speakers)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
LAC	Language and Culture	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
LRA	Language Revival I	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
LRB	Language Revival II	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
LTC	Latin (continuers)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
LEG	Legal Studies	3	4	24	27	5	0	0	63
MTC	Maltese (continuers)	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
MMA	Material Products I	0	5	45	64	15	2	0	131
MMB	Material Products II	1	7	17	25	4	0	0	54
MCN	Mathematical Applications	0	22	137	69	55	3	0	286
MHD	Mathematical Methods	0	4	49	7	13	0	0	73
MDS	Mathematical Studies	1	5	82	89	47	1	0	225
MPW	Mathematics Pathways	1	0	4	8	5	0	0	18

Impact of Central Moderation by Subject, by class - 2011 results for South Australia

SAC E	Subject Name	Number of classes Moderated Down			Number of classes Unchanged	Number of classes Moderated Up			Total Number of Classes
		<= -14%	-7 to -14%	0 to -7%		0 to +7%	+7 to +14%	>= +14%	
MES	Media Studies	1	2	18	4	5	0	0	30
MGC	Modern Greek (continuers)	2	2	0	2	0	0	0	6
MOH	Modern History	1	6	49	29	15	0	0	100
MCX	Music in Context	0	1	3	9	2	0	0	15
MVS	Music Individual Study	4	8	20	28	9	4	2	75
MHY	Music Technology	3	0	11	4	6	0	0	24
MNP	Musicianship	2	7	35	15	16	0	0	75
NUT	Nutrition	1	2	23	12	4	0	0	42
OUE	Outdoor Education	0	6	11	13	6	0	0	36
MPF	Performance Special Study	1	3	9	15	1	0	0	29
PND	Persian (background speakers)	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	3
PPS	Philosophy	0	0	0	5	1	0	0	6
PHE	Physical Education	1	14	65	91	17	3	0	191
PYS	Physics	2	14	68	80	14	1	0	179
POC	Polish (continuers)	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
PSC	Psychology	0	3	34	64	9	0	0	110
REL	Religion Studies	2	2	11	13	3	0	0	31
RPA	Research Project A	14	25	131	150	43	1	0	364
RPB	Research Project B	16	67	459	338	109	3	1	993
RUD	Russian (background speakers)	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
RUC	Russian (continuers)	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	4
SAY	Science and the Community	1	0	0	7	0	0	0	8
SCF	Scientific Studies	0	1	4	7	0	1	0	13
SOR	Society and Culture	6	4	13	52	6	0	0	81
MFC	Solo Performance	1	6	44	48	20	1	0	120
SPB	Spanish (beginners)	0	0	1	3	1	0	0	5
SPC	Spanish (continuers)	0	1	0	4	0	0	0	5
MSC	Specialist Mathematics	0	3	24	59	24	0	0	110
SSA	Systems and Control Products I	1	3	8	14	3	0	0	29
SSB	Systems and Control Products II	1	0	6	5	0	0	0	12
TAC	Tamil (continuers)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
TAY	Technology and the Community	10	2	2	41	0	1	3	59
TOS	Tourism	0	4	32	14	7	0	0	57
UKC	Ukrainian (continuers)	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
VND	Vietnamese (background speakers)	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	5
VNC	Vietnamese (continuers)	0	0	4	2	0	0	0	6
VAA	Visual Arts - Art	37	47	52	48	5	1	1	191
VAD	Visual Arts - Design	12	32	38	27	7	0	0	116
WOM	Women's Studies	0	0	5	7	2	0	0	14
WAY	Work and the Community	16	5	6	87	1	1	6	122
WPC	Workplace Practices	0	8	32	72	29	4	0	145
WPA	Workplace Practices A	0	2	6	7	2	1	0	18
WPB	Workplace Practices B	0	1	2	6	3	1	0	13
TOTALS		257	560	2690	3113	810	44	30	7504
As a percentage of the total classes (7504)		3.4%	7.5%	35.8%	41.5%	10.8%	0.6%	0.4%	

Note: One grade level shift is approximately 7% hence data has been presented to show moves by multiples of 7%