## External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Investigation

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

* effective analysis of a range of sources and perspectives
* a focus on current and/or controversial social issues
* adherence to the structure suggested in the current subject outline
* the use of consistent referencing.

Markers commented that students were successful when teachers had supported them to understand and use the skills of social inquiry. Students should also be encouraged to draft and edit their investigations.

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

Local topics, or topics recently in public debate and the media, led to the most successful and most interesting investigations. Examples were based on issues such as:

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

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

Good local topics included:

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

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

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

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

In summary, the most successful investigations:

* involved contemporary social or cultural issues that were open to discussion and debate, and had an Australian context
* had tightly worded hypotheses or guiding questions
* structured the analysis around focus questions
* used expert primary sources, supported by secondary sources
* evaluated the sources for validity, reliability, and bias
* provided evidence of multiple perspectives on the issue
* explicitly addressed the nature and causes of social change
* demonstrated clearly an understanding of the ways in which societies and cultures are connected and interdependent
* used a consistent referencing system
* contained an insightful conclusion which addressed the limitations of the study
* adhered to the word-limit
* were carefully drafted and edited to ensure the effective communication of ideas, knowledge, analysis, and conclusions.