External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Investigation

The overall standard of investigations in 2015 was consistent with that of previous years. The most successful investigations featured:

- effective analysis of a range of sources, both primary and expert secondary, and a range of perspectives
- a focus on contemporary 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 report.

As in previous years, a wide and interesting range of investigation topics were selected by students. However, this year markers noted a trend away from very local issues, the majority featuring contentious issues for Australian society as a whole. While some perennial favourites again appeared, such as body image and under-age drinking, these topics were less popular than in previous years. Topics were also prompted by recent global events, such as the need for new anti-terrorism measures. 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.

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

- laws concerning disability in the workplace
- the legalisation of medical marijuana
- anti-halal campaigns
- racism in sport
- domestic violence
- the 'ice' epidemic
- online gaming
- LGBT acceptance
- the 3 a.m. curfew / 'one punch' legislation and violence
- closure of the Repat Hospital
- constitutional rights for Indigenous Australians
- nuclear energy and storage of nuclear waste.

Markers commented that global topics tended to be less successful where they lacked a specific focus, such as 'climate change' or 'the problem of drugs in society', as these topics are typically too broad to be dealt with in depth within 2000 words. Students achieved better results with clearly defined topics with a specific context.

Markers commented that most students chose relevant and current social issues. However, some students needed better guidance in their choice of topic, some of which were outside the subject scope and stretched the definition of a 'social issue',

such as 'the history of [an overseas sports team]', or were of limited relevance to Australian society, such as 'the modern police force in [another country]', or were too broad and lacking in focus, such as 'violence in society'. Many of these were not framed as issue investigations, but rather as topics for discussion. Better investigations also featured less reliance on a teacher-generated formula of response. There were some instances where all students in a class used the same focusing questions, or the same interviewee, such as the local MP. This scaffolding can be good for some students; however, it is limiting for others.

The most successful students challenged themselves by seeking a wide range of perspectives on their issue and making use of appropriate and authoritative sources, both primary and secondary. Although surveys remained a popular primary source, where students relied on surveys as their major source of information on a topic, this generally led to the lack of sophisticated levels of knowledge or analysis. Better investigations obtained valuable primary data from interviewees with relevant expertise. A variety of opinions were canvassed from local media reporting and local people who were willing to be interviewed. Better investigations also showed awareness of other forms of ethnographic research, such as action research in the form of observation, or the collection of photographic evidence. Better investigations synthesised sources, comparing the perspectives of interviewees with evidence provided by sound, up-to-date and expert secondary sources, identifying bias, and ultimately critiquing or supporting their hypothesis or guiding question.

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. Less successful students tended to use emotive language; words like 'appalling', 'vile', 'woeful', or 'disgusting' reveal student bias rather than contributing to considered analysis. Some students included interview data, but failed to reveal the expertise or relevance of their source. For example, references such as 'interviewee 1 said …' made it difficult for markers to determine the credibility and validity of these sources. Most students were able to use a consistent in-text referencing system in their investigation and included a bibliography. Teachers should note, however, that annotated bibliographies are not required or assessed in the investigation. Students generally adhered well to the word-limit. However, markers commented that as the 1000-word limit in the 10-credit subject makes it challenging for students to address the assessment design criteria in depth, students need to plan thoroughly and write especially concisely.

Better investigations engaged in authentic research, were structured around key ideas or arguments, and included a range of informed opinions. They 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 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
- considered complex interrelationships between individuals and groups in societies and cultures
- 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.