**VCE Outdoor and Environmental Studies (2018–2023)**

School-based assessment report

GENERAL COMMENTS

This report provides advice for the first year of implementation of the [*VCE Outdoor and Environmental Studies 2018–2023*](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/vce/outdoor/OutdoorES_SD_2018.pdf). The [VCE Outdoor and Environmental Studies Advice for teachers](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/vce/adviceforteachers/outdoor/introduction.aspx) provides teaching and learning advice for Units 1 to 4 and assessment advice for school-based assessment in Units 3 and 4. Other support materials for the study can be found on the [VCE Outdoor and Environmental Studies](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/vce/studies/outdoor/outdoorindex.aspx) study page on the VCAA website.

The newly accredited study design included some minor changes in terminology and the addition of a focus on the environmental politics in Australia to the Unit 3 key knowledge. A journal or report demonstrating links between theoretical content studied and practical experiences undertaken has been added as a compulsory School-assessed Coursework (SAC) task for each outcome.

This report refers to data collected from the School-based Assessment Audit as well as observations of the SAC tasks, marking schemes, student work, authentication records and other evidence received through the audit.

The audit questionnaire provided the Audit Panel with key information about each school’s assessment practice and planning and also study specific practices around SAC tasks used, marking schemes and practical outdoor experiences undertaken. It is essential that the material provided for the audit is well organised, clearly labelled and submitted by the due date.

Schools that progressed to the further evidence stage of the audit did so due to unclear questions, evidence of old study design terminology, commercially-produced tasks used without modifications, cross-marking and moderation procedures not documented and ambiguity in questionnaire responses. Of the schools audited, a majority used commercially-produced tasks or those developed within a network of teachers from other schools. While use of these tasks is acceptable, they are not endorsed by the VCAA and it is the school’s responsibility to ensure that the task selected meets the specifications of the study design and is modified to ensure students are making specific reference to the practical experiences undertaken.

Teachers should use their professional judgment to ensure that the SAC tasks selected meet the *VCE assessment principles*, in particular, that appropriate authentication measures are in place to ensure that the work of each student is genuinely their own. Any commercially-produced task or those developed within a network of teachers must be modified to ensure authentication of student work. As schools across the state adhere to different assessment timelines, these tasks may be completed earlier by another school and thus solutions may be in the public domain and accessible to students.

The audit highlighted that some schools are not providing students with sufficient prior knowledge of the conditions under which they will be assessed. Information such as assessment type, date, timing, mark allocation, permitted materials, key knowledge and key skills assessed and performance descriptors. This information should be provided well in advance of the assessment date. When setting a task, teachers need to ensure it will allow the students to demonstrate the outcome, and draws on the key knowledge and key skills pertaining to that outcome. Optimum opportunity for all students to achieve at the highest possible level requires teachers to design high quality SAC tasks and appropriate, transparent marking schemes.

It is important that SAC tasks include:

* the correct task type SAC as per the study design
* the date/s on which the SAC is conducted and submitted
* time allowed for the SAC task
* allocation of marks for the SAC task and its contribution to the final score
* nature of any materials students can utilise when completing the SAC task
* the opportunity for students to demonstrate their highest level of performance.

The evidence presented in the audit clearly indicated that schools generally designed SAC tasks that incorporate the key knowledge and key skills of the study design and provided appropriate opportunities for students to demonstrate the knowledge and skills required to achieve the outcomes. The design of tasks also provided students with opportunities to demonstrate high levels of performance. With a few exceptions, the tasks as presented to students were clearly described, without providing undue assistance. There was variation in how tasks were described; some were detailed and expansive, while others were presented very concisely.

SAC tasks must be part of the regular teaching and learning program and must not unduly add to the workload associated with that program. Not all key knowledge and key skills need to be assessed in a given task, provided each element of an outcome is assessed. SAC tasks are used to determine the level of achievement of an outcome. An S/N can be determined using a wider range of evidence, such as classwork.

Cross-marking should be employed to provide students with fair and equitable assessment. Teachers should be transparent in their discussions and understanding of performance descriptors and the expectations about the type of responses that will provide evidence of achievement levels. Students should be provided with genuine and authentic feedback after the completion of the task in order to review their understandings and application of the key skills and knowledge prior to the end-of-year examination.

Feedback from schools indicated that the School-Based Assessment audit process was useful in reviewing assessment practices to ensure tasks were updated to reflect the key knowledge and key skills of the study design and that VCAA requirements were being met. Overall, schools are to be commended for their efforts in ensuring students are being assessed according to VCAA assessment standards and requirements are being met. Schools are reminded that they are able to contact the VCAA for advice if needed and should be using the publications and resources available on the VCAA website for guidance.

When designing SAC tasks, schools are encouraged to refer to the guidelines in the VCE and VCAL Administrative Handbook and the Sample approach to developing an assessment task in the *Advice for teachers*. In particular, teachers are asked to familiarise themselves with the advice on *Demonstrating the highest level of performance* and *Authentication***.**

Teachers need to be familiar with the task types listed in the study design. It should be noted that ‘Test’ is a condition of assessment, not a task type.

In order for students to complete the journal or report demonstrating links between theoretical content studied and practical experiences undertaken, the first experience of the year must be completed before the first SAC task in Unit 3. Asking students to draw on experiences from Units 1 and 2 is not appropriate and does not meet the requirement that all assessment must be completed in the current academic year. With the mandatory requirement to include practical outdoor experiences in mind, it is essential that there is a comprehensive timeline for each unit that clearly schedules practical outdoor experiences to occur before SAC tasks. This will allow both the student and teacher to be best prepared for both the practical experience as well as the assessment of the coursework.

It is essential that authentication guidelines are in place, to ensure that the work of each student is genuinely their own. It is important that no exact tasks from previous years are reused. Some schools have reported that they were not returning the SAC tasks to them to enable the use of similar tasks in future years. It is essential students have their work returned to allow for formative assessment to take place and to aid them in their revision for the end-of year examination.

Over 90% of the schools audited indicated that they used the VCAA performance descriptors for their marking. It is important that students are able to access the performance descriptors prior to each task in an easy to understand format so they are able to effectively prepare and then be able to interpret their marks to identify areas for improvement.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Unit 3: Relationships with outdoor environments

Outcome 1

*Explain and evaluate how relationships with Australian outdoor environments have changed over time, with reference to specific outdoor experiences.*

**Task type**

* A journal or report demonstrating links between theoretical content studied and practical experiences undertaken

AND

* at least one task from the following:
  + a case study
  + a multimedia presentation or podcast
  + a written report.

To achieve this outcome, students needed to demonstrate understanding of key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 1.

All schools audited for Unit 3 indicated they were working from the reaccredited study design, however, there were a few examples of some SAC tasks using terminology from a previous study design, particularly in Outcome 2. It is imperative that teachers use the current terminology from the current study design to ensure that students are not disadvantaged in the end-of-year examination.

The accredited study design saw the addition of a compulsory journal or report demonstrating links between theoretical content studied and practical experiences undertaken. In most cases, students were provided with an appropriate task type. Difficulties arose when schools allowed students to complete their task while on camp, or under conditions that made it difficult to authenticate student work. Most schools opted to provide students with a camp booklet to complete while on their practical experience, which was then used as data to complete the journal or report under test conditions at school. The vast number of the audited schools adopted the breakdown of marks outlined in the *Advice for teachers;* *Unit 3: Sample approach to developing an assessment task*. If schools choose to increase the mark allocation for this task to enable greater differentiation between student responses, it is imperative that the mark is then converted and submitted into VASS as a mark out of 10.

Most audited schools opted to use the practical experiences journal or report to assess the following points of key knowledge in Unit 3 Outcome 1:

* an overview of Australian outdoor environments before humans, including characteristics of biological isolation, geological stability, and climatic variations
* relationships with Australian outdoor environments expressed by specific Indigenous communities before and after European colonisation
* relationships with Australian outdoor environments as influenced by the first non-Indigenous settlers’ experiences; increasing population; industrialisation; nation building.

Nearly all schools chose one additional SAC task to complete with the majority selecting a case study. Some schools chose to complete the case study on the environment of their practical experiences, while others chose their selected environmental movement. Either of these choices were suitable to meet VCAA requirements. Examples that were particularly good always included clear and specific instructions for the students, the task expectations and the mark allocation. Students were also provided with stimulus information and prompts about practical experiences they had undertaken.

A few schools chose to complete two additional tasks in addition to the practical experiences journal or report. If this choice is made, teachers must ensure that the weighting of marks is well balanced, depending on the length of the task and the key knowledge and skills covered. The SAC tasks should also demonstrate the level of difficulty reflected in the outcome statement and the key skills.

The Outcome 1 key knowledge of ‘the impact of increasing environmental awareness in Australia on the policies of political parties’ was not as widely covered in SAC tasks as were other key knowledge dot points. Although it is not mandatory that all key knowledge be assessed in SAC tasks, students should be able to demonstrate achievement of the outcome and be fully prepared to respond to questions that address the key knowledge and key skills in the study design for the end-of-year examination.

Assessment

The VCAA performance descriptors were the most commonly used marking scheme by schools. A number of schools simply reproduced the descriptors or used commercially produced descriptors. Most schools had used the performance descriptors in some form to assess student responses. Adapting the descriptors into a well-presented assessment sheet enabled students to see clearly what they had to do to succeed in the task. It is essential that these marking schemes not only include sufficient detail with a clear explanation of marks, but also an equitable and consistent mark allocation.

Outcome 2

*Analyse and evaluate the factors influencing societal relationships with outdoor environments since 1990, with reference to specific outdoor experiences.*

**Task type**

* A journal or report demonstrating links between theoretical content studied and practical experiences undertaken

AND

* at least one task from the following:
  + data analysis
  + structured questions

The vast majority of journal or report/s submitted by schools demonstrated appropriate links between the theoretical content studied and practical experiences thus meeting VCAA requirements.

Most schools opted to use the practical experiences journal or report to assess the first two key knowledge points of Unit 3 Outcome 2.

All schools that were audited chose one additional task to complete with the vast majority (over 80%) selecting a structured questions task. Most tasks submitted demonstrated a full coverage of the Unit 3 Outcome 2 key knowledge and used the key skills terminology in the range of short answer and extended response questions.

Schools are reminded that depending on the wording of the question, students are required to provide specific information not just descriptions of the concepts within the key knowledge. For example, if students are asked to analyse, they are being asked to explore complex concepts or relationships. This requires breaking down a concept into its component parts in order to better understand it. Questions asking students to analyse should go beyond a description of ‘what’ and should include reflection on ‘how’ or ‘why’.

When students are asked to evaluate, they are being asked to assess information and make a judgment with reasons. An evaluation may be a subjective determination by the student based on criteria, evidence and/or data collected. An evaluation includes an analysis of information that is used to support a judgment.

The use of taxonomy, such as Bloom’s revised taxonomy, can be useful when developing SAC tasks.

Fifteen per cent of the schools audited selected a data analysis for the second task in Outcome 2. All tasks included data (images, graphs etc.) for students to interpret, analyse and respond to. Schools need to be wary of using commercially-produced tasks that include data not relevant to students’ own outdoor experiences or their investigated/visited environments. As all commercially-produced tasks require modification to meet authentication requirements, it would be appropriate for schools to include data from their own practical experiences and investigated/visited environments.

The Outcome 2 key knowledge point ‘an overview of environmental politics in Australia’ was not as widely covered in SAC tasks. Teachers are reminded that while all aspects of the key knowledge and skills do not have to be covered, it is essential to ensure that there is good coverage of the content and students have the ability to demonstrate the full extent of their knowledge. The SAC tasks should also demonstrate the level of difficulty reflected in the outcome statement and the key skills.

All SAC tasks for this outcome made direct links to specific outdoor experiences. This is an essential component of the course as stated in the outcome statement. Tasks for this outcome could be further improved by having more succinct questions.

Assessment

Schools reported they were either using the VCAA performance descriptors or a modified version as a marking scheme. It is essential that these marking schemes not only include sufficient detail, with a clear explanation of marks, but are also equitable and have a consistent mark allocation.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Unit 4: Sustainable outdoor relationships

Outcome 1

*Evaluate the contemporary state of Australian outdoor environments and analyse the importance of healthy outdoor environments and sustainability for individuals and society, with reference to specific outdoor experiences.*

**Task type**

* A journal or report demonstrating links between theoretical content studied and practical experiences undertaken

AND

* at least one task from the following:
  + data analysis
  + structured questions
  + a written report.

All schools audited for Unit 4 indicated that they were working from the newly accredited study design. The audit revealed that most schools have adjusted their SAC tasks to reflect the changes and meet the demands of the study design. There were a few examples of some SAC tasks using terminology from the previous study design, e.g. indicators rather than observable characteristics of healthy outdoor environments. It is imperative that current terminology is used to ensure students are not disadvantaged in the end-of-year examination. Reference was made by schools to using the Frequently Asked Questions and Advice for Teachers for guidance.

The Unit 4 audit questionnaire asked teachers to list their practical experiences, and when they were undertaken. This is to ensure that the timing of the experience/s is appropriate for when the SAC task is undertaken and to enable students the opportunity to draw on the experience in the assessment. Teachers should be able to clearly indicate the timing of outdoor experiences and that of the SAC task. SAC tasks should be written in such a way that students can draw on their outdoor experiences and make specific mention of them in their responses.

All schools audited indicated that they were assessing students with the compulsory practical experiences journal or report. Some schools indicated that students completed this report entirely while on an outdoor experience but this can raise authentication concerns. The majority of journal or report tasks submitted demonstrated appropriate links between the theoretical content studied and practical experiences. Most journals and reports submitted through the audit assessed key knowledge dots points 2, 4 and 5 in the study design.

Some schools marked the task out of 20, thereby enabling a greater differentiation between student responses. This mark was then converted and submitted into VASS as a mark out of 10.

Ninety per cent of schools chose one additional task with the vast majority (over 80%) selecting a structured questions task. Most tasks submitted demonstrated a full coverage of the Unit 4 Outcome 1 key knowledge dot points and used the key skills terminology in the range of short answer and extended response questions. There was considerable variation in the quality of question construction. A general observation is that many questions included in SAC tasks are direct adaptations of the key knowledge points. Questions of higher quality were those that did not give students the opportunity for rehearsed responses, for example inviting students to consider how they need to apply their understanding.

Of the schools that selected a data analysis for the second task in Outcome 1, appropriate data (images, graphs etc.) was included for students to interpret, analyse and then respond to. It would be appropriate for schools to include data from their own practical experiences and investigated/visited environments.

There was some evidence of questions based on the Outcome 1 key knowledge of ‘the state of outdoor environments in Australia, with reference to common themes used in the current national State of the Environment (SOE) report’. However, very little evidence requiring students to draw specific findings from the current national SOE Report was seen.

SAC tasks in this outcome could be strengthened by increasing the connection to practical experiences. For this to happen, students must undertake their practical outdoor experiences prior to completing the task and the experience must be related to the outcome. Providing the students with journal questions for them to respond to while on the practical experience is a good way for them to make connections from the practical experience back to the theoretical assessment.

Assessment

The vast majority of schools audited indicated that they were using the VCAA performance descriptors to inform assessment in an unmodified form. Teachers are reminded that it is possible to modify the performance descriptors in a given task. 85 per cent of schools indicated that they were the only teacher of the study in the school. It was pleasing to see schools working with fellow experienced staff either within their school or at nearby schools to cross-mark and develop tasks.

All schools audited used the correct weighting as stipulated in the study design, with the practical experiences journal or report worth 20% and additional task/s worth 80% of the SAC marks for Unit 4 Outcome 1.

Outcome 2

*Analyse conflicts over the use of outdoor environments, and evaluate practices and strategies for sustaining outdoor environments, with reference to specific outdoor experiences.*

**Task type**

* A journal or report demonstrating links between theoretical content studied and practical experiences undertaken

AND

* at least one task from the following:
  + a case study
  + structured questions.

Most schools audited opted to use the practical experiences journal or report to assess the Unit 4 Outcome 2 key knowledge dot points 4–6 in the study design. This enabled students to directly demonstrate links between the theoretical content studied and their practical experiences.

Over ninety per cent of schools audited chose one additional task with the vast majority (75%) selecting a structured questions task. Most structured questions tasks demonstrated a full coverage of the Unit 4 Outcome 2 key knowledge and key skills terminology in the range of short answer questions. Task questions should be carefully worded to allow students to demonstrate the breadth of their knowledge and understanding of the curriculum and application to their investigated outdoor environments. When assessing each outcome, teachers should include SAC questions that assess students’ higher order thinking. There was evidence of questions which were worded very similar to the study design key skills, which presents authentication concerns as students would potentially be able to use rehearsed responses.

Schools are reminded to use the instructional terms (identify, describe, predict, explain, analyse, and evaluate) associated with each key knowledge as outlined in the key skills. This enables discrimination in performance amongst students and allows students to demonstrate the highest level of performance. Students should be familiar with the demands of various instructional terms. Schools must ensure the formatting of tasks enables sufficient writing space for students to respond accordingly. Past VCAA examinations could be used as a guide for appropriate formatting of tasks.

Twenty-five per cent of schools audited selected a case study for the additional task. Schools are encouraged not to simply restate key knowledge and key skills as questions, but to concentrate on how these points are being addressed in the context of the selected case study.

Assessment

As for Outcome 1, the vast majority of audited schools indicated that they are using the VCAA performance descriptors or modifications of these. It is essential that marking schemes are well presented and contain sufficient detail so that marking is straightforward and students can clearly see what areas they need to improve on.

The study design specified a minimum of two tasks for this outcome. Schools must ensure the tasks are weighted according to expectations outlined in the study design (20% Journal or Report and 80% other task/s).