**VCE Religion and Society 2017–2022**

School-based Assessment report

This report is provided for the first year of implementation of this study and is based on the School-based Assessment Audit and VCAA statistical data.

All official communications regarding the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) Religion and Society Study Design are provided in the VCAA Bulletin. It is recommended that teachers subscribe to the VCAA Bulletin to receive updated information regarding the study. Schools are required to alert teachers to information in VCAA Bulletins, especially concerning assessment schedules. Important Administrative Dates and assessment schedules are published on the School administration page of the VCAA website.

Unit 3

GENERAL COMMENTS

Responses to the Unit 3 School-based Assessment Audit for VCE Religion and Society indicate that most teachers have successfully made the transition to the reaccredited *2017–2022 VCE Religion and Society Study Design*. Almost all assessment tasks submitted reflected the new terminology and other changes for each area of study.

Completing the School-based Assessment Audit

Most of the questions in the audit were completed in detail. A common reason for schools going to the next stage of the audit was lack of detail, or too much irrelevant detail. The further evidence required was generally a copy of the School-assessed Coursework (SAC) tasks for each area of study.

There were a range of specific concerns with the responses to the audit questionnaire including:

* The questions asking for a description of each of the SAC tasks for each outcome. The question indicated that information should be provided on topics, types of questions and stimulus material. Schools that provided a summary of the study design key knowledge dot points and schools that provided brief and vague summary responses based on the outcome statements for each area of study were asked to submit further evidence. This was to ensure that the SAC tasks were designed appropriately at the individual item level, within as SAC as a whole and where relevant across a set of SACs.
* The question asking what two beliefs from selected religious traditions/denominations would be studied for Unit 3 Area of Study 2: Expressing meaning. Schools are required to clearly enunciate the distinctive belief for the selected religious tradition or denomination; for example ‘the belief in the trinity’ rather than merely a general reference to a category of belief such as beliefs about ultimate reality; the relationship between ultimate reality and humanity or death and the afterlife.
* The question that asked what strategies are in place to provide students with the opportunity to redeem an ‘N’ for Unit 3. Please note that students may submit further work, or resubmit a SAC task, for reconsideration to redeem an ‘S’ for an outcome. However, a student cannot resubmit work to improve a score of a SAC task. Teachers are referred to this policy in the *VCE and VCAL Administrative Handbook*.

Assessment Planning and Administration

It is evident from the audit questionnaire that most students are informed of the school and VCAA policies and procedures by the start of Unit 3 and that the timeline of assessment is well planned, with each area of study allocated a fairly lengthy period for learning, practice and review. Most teachers have used the time sample week-by-week planner in the Advice for Teacher’s. Almost all teachers return SAC tasks two weeks after they have been written which gives students the opportunity for reflection and to work on improving particular skills before the next outcome.

For each SAC task students should at least be given a clear and accurate written statement of:

* the outcome being assessed
* the task type
* the requirements and conditions of the task
* any resources permitted
* authentication process (if relevant)
* the contribution of the task to the final outcome score
* assessment advice as appropriate for example performance descriptors, rubrics or criteria for questions awarded higher marks.

School-assessed Coursework

The audit of the further evidence of School- assessed Coursework (SAC) tasks following the questionnaire stage revealed the following:

Conditions and Authentication

The majority of SAC tasks were completed under exam conditions and authentication is consequently not an area of concern. In addition all students completed the same task. Teachers who choose to set unsupervised tasks need to be aware of the authentication requirements set in the *VCE and VCAL Administrative Handbook*. Writing SAC tasks at home over an extended period of time or allowing students to write a response at home and then bring it into class to rewrite allows for the possibility that the work is not the students’ own work. SAC tasks must be completed primarily in class time. Any work set over an extended period of time should include a stringent process for authentication of student work, and teachers are referred to the School-assessed Coursework Authentication section of the *VCE and VCAL Administrative Handbook*.

Most SAC tasks were 90 minutes in length, providing an appropriate period in which students could demonstrate their understanding of the outcome.

Assessment

Most schools inform the students of the structure of the SAC tasks, however, not always how the task will be assessed. For all tasks, teachers should inform students not just of the format and structure of the task, but also how it will be assessed, for example providing a rubric that outlines the assessment criteria. This will allow students to understand what knowledge and skills they are expected to demonstrate in the tasks. The *VCE Religion and Society Advice for Teachers* provides examples of performance descriptors for each outcome, which teachers may use or adapt. Teachers who choose to use the performance descriptors without changes should ensure that the questions in the task are consistent with these. There were several schools that used one or more performance descriptors to mark a task but no item in the task related to the descriptor/s. Teachers developing their own marking guides, should consider providing students with qualitative advice describing expectations rather than simply a range of numbers or a scale or low, medium or high.

Format and Structure

It is evident that teachers are using a variety of SAC tasks in line with the choices presented in the study design for each outcome. For at least one of the outcomes for Unit 3 many teachers chose to structure the SAC task into Section A which consisted of short-answer questions and a Section B which consisted of extended-answer questions, including some with multiple parts.

In the setting of the SAC tasks teachers used a wide range of resources. These included: the study design, the Advice for Teachers, textbooks and past examination papers. Most teachers tend to use questions from past examination papers. These questions should be rephrased to reflect the changes in the current study design and for authentication reasons as students can access these questions and sample answers from the Examiner’s reports. Teachers are encouraged to create new questions using outcome and the key knowledge and key skills as a guideline as well as wider features of the study design such as area of study introductions.

It was also evident that some teachers are using commercial resources as the basis for SAC tasks. It should be noted that commercial materials are not vetted by the VCAA. They should be carefully checked against the study design and modified if necessary. Sometimes this did not occur. Teachers need to use their professional judgment when selecting commercially produced tasks, as it is the teacher’s responsibility to ensure that the tasks selected meet the requirements of the study design. In addition, commercial products should be modified for authentication reasons, in that students could have prior access to these materials and a response could be learnt by rote.

A few schools successfully used stimulus-based questions to provide a particular key knowledge focus and to avoid merely posing a key knowledge point/s as a question. Such unseen stimulus included material such as diagrams, visuals, quotations or cartoons.

Many schools included more than one SAC task for an outcome. If a number of tasks are set for an outcome, the marks allocated will be on a different scale, students need to be clearly informed of the way these marks are then recalculated or converted to a score for the outcome.

Highest Level of Performance

Many SAC tasks did not allow students to achieve the highest level of performance as the questions did not go beyond basic definitions, and simple explanations. The key terms used in such questions were typically: ‘define’, ‘outline’, ‘identify’ and ‘explain. Including only these types of questions does not allow for higher order thinking as required by the outcome statements. SAC tasks should include lower, medium and higher order thinking questions. Questions with a range of difficulty, for example including some open-ended questions, will allow for this. Drawing on the full range of task terms specified in the key skills for example: ‘analyse’ and ‘examine’ will provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate the outcome at the highest level.

Specific information

Unit 3 School-assessed Coursework

Outcome 1

*On completion of this unit the student should be able to discuss and analyse the nature and purpose of religion and religious beliefs.*

The students’ performance in Outcome 1 can be assessed using one or more of the following: a report, an essay, a case study, analytical exercises, structured questions, extended responses. Most schools used structured questions and extended responses for this outcome.

Generally, tasks were tightly structured and used language from the study design. The key knowledge dot points regarding the study of the aspects and the purpose of religion in general were covered well. However, some questions used old terminology for the aspects, for example ‘code of behavior’ for ethics; and for the categories of belief, for example ‘the meaning of life and death.’ Teachers must ensure that correct terminology is used. Questions should be designed using the area of study and then checked back against it before use.

In most tasks submitted, questions relating to the particular study of the range of religious beliefs for one or more religious traditions/denominations were weighted more than the general questions.

The main weakness in some of the SAC tasks was that the key knowledge dot point – ‘the connections between beliefs’ was either inadequately tested or not tested at all. The key knowledge dot point on the study design requires students to be able to connect all the categories of beliefs to one another, not just to one particular belief within a category.

The SAC tasks could be improved by creating a variety of questions; for example one that looks at the connection between a belief and one category of belief and then a question that connects at least three categories of belief. Teachers can refer to page 23 of the Advice for Teachers, which contains an example chart showing connections between beliefs, which students could complete together in class discussion in preparation for the task. According to the key skills dot point students should be able to “analyse the connections between religious beliefs.”

Most schools assessed tasks using the performance descriptors in the Advice for Teachers.

Outcome 2

*On completion of this unit the student should be able to examine how beliefs and their expression in other aspects of religion are intended to respond to the search for meaning.*

The students’ performance in Outcome 2 can be assessed using one or more of the following: a report, an essay, a case study, analytical exercises, structured questions, extended responses.

Most schools used a report, structured questions and extended responses for this outcome.

This area of study requires students to understand the role of the aspects in responding to the search for meaning and how the aspects connect with each other. Questions on the general study of religion were well written. Some questions presented students with three or four aspects and asked how they are connected. Occasionally a question appeared asking students to connect all the aspects.

This area of study also requires students to explore two beliefs from selected religious traditions/denominations through the aspects and their connections and how they engender and nurture meaning. Students are required to clearly articulate the distinctive belief; for example the belief in ‘God the creator’ or ‘the belief in the trinity’ or ‘the belief in resurrection’ and not just make reference to a category of belief such as beliefs about ultimate reality; the relationship between ultimate reality and humanity or death and the afterlife. This was not always evident in the way questions were structured. Teachers should articulate the distinctive belief clearly to ensure that students are provided with the opportunity to demonstrate the full range of key knowledge and key skills for the outcome in a precise way.

Many teachers structured questions for the SAC tasks directly from the key knowledge and key skills dot points. One area for improvement in some teacher designed tasks was to design questions that ask students to consider how the particular aspects expressing each belief ‘engender and nurture meaning.’

Outcome 3

*On completion of this unit the student should be able to discuss and analyse the interplay between religious beliefs and their expression through related aspects and significant life experience.*

The students’ performance in Outcome 3 can be assessed using one or more of the following: a report, an essay, a case study, analytical exercises, structured questions, extended responses. Most schools used an essay or a report for this outcome.

Most of the SAC tasks phrased the essay or report question in such a way that no general discussion of the key knowledge dot point regarding the relationship between a range of significant life experiences and religious beliefs for religion in general was required. This meant that the outcome was not adequately assessed. Religion in general could be incorporated into the design of the essay question.

Another weakness of tasks set for this outcome was that the expressions of belief were ignored. This was particularly evident when questions from past examination papers were used. While the relationship between significant life experience and religious belief has remained in the new study design there is a new focus – “faith and the expression of beliefs through the related aspects.” These SAC tasks could be improved by carefully reviewing the key knowledge and skills in the revised study design.

Unit 4

GENERAL COMMENTS

Responses to the Unit 4 School-based Assessment Audit for VCE Religion and Society revealed some general concerns. While the results of the audit questionnaire indicated that most schools were aware of the reaccredited *VCE Religion and Society Study Design 2017–2022* many of the School-assessed Coursework (SAC) task/s for Area of Study 1 did not meet the requirements of the outcome statement.

Schools are advised to review the 2017 *VCE Religion and Society Study Design* carefully to ensure that the SAC tasks are compliant with the outcome statements for each area of study and the relevant key knowledge and key skills dot points in the study design.

Most schools addressed the general study of religion in Area of Study 1, however, there are still a few schools who have ignored this. Schools should carefully note the requirements of the first three key knowledge points for Area of Study 1 in the study design.

Completing the School-based Assessment Audit

The majority of the questions in the audit were completed in adequate detail. The challenges studied for areas of study 1 and 2 were described in detail, showing how they covered the three categories of challenges – theology, ethics and continued existence. Most schools chose to study four challenges for Area of Study 1. Some schools chose to study more than four challenges opening up the selection for students. For Area of Study 2 most schools chose to study one challenge in detail.

One question on the audit that was often answered too briefly, this was the question asking for a detailed description of each of the SAC tasks for each outcome. Detailed information should be provided on topics, types of questions and stimulus material. Schools that provided information directly from the VCE study design or briefly stated there would be questions on the general study and questions on each challenge, were asked to submit further evidence. The further evidence required was a copy of the SAC tasks for each area of study and associated marking schemes.

Assessment Planning and Administration

It is evident from the audit that students are suitably informed of School and VCAA policies and procedures and that the timeline of assessment is well planned, with each area of study allocated an adequate period for learning, practice and review. Almost all teachers return SAC tasks within a week to two weeks after they have been written which gives students the opportunity for reflection and time to work on improving particular skills before the next outcome.

School-assessed Coursework

The audit of the School- assessed Coursework (SAC) tasks revealed the following:

Conditions and Authentication

The audit revealed that School-assessed Coursework tasks were almost exclusively completed under test conditions. This may mean that assessed work is more readily authenticated but may not ensure that students are given the opportunity to perform at the highest level. Schools are encouraged to deliver assessment in a range of ways to support students and to enable clear differentiation of student achievement.

In addition, all students completed the same task. In some instances students were permitted to bring in a page of summary notes or one page of quotes.

Most SAC tasks were 90 minutes in length.

Assessment

All schools informed students of the structure of the SAC tasks, however, not always how the task would be assessed. For all tasks, teachers should inform students in writing not just of the format and structure of the task, but also how it will be assessed. For example, providing performance descriptors. This will allow students to understand what knowledge and skills they are expected to demonstrate in the tasks.

Most schools used the suggested performance descriptors in the Advice for Teachers to assess the SAC tasks, while others adapted these performance descriptors. Teachers who choose to use these performance descriptors or develop their own performance descriptors should ensure that the questions in the task are compliant with the associated element of the performance descriptor. This was not always evident. For example, some students were marked for work that they were not actually required to do in that some aspects of the performance descriptors were not reflected in the questions on the assessment task.

Format and Structure

* Most teachers set short questions, structured questions and extended response questions for areas of study 1 and 2. The writing of a report for Area of Study 2 was also a popular option for many schools.
* In the setting of SAC tasks, teachers tended to formulate questions only based on each of the key knowledge dot points (Area of Study 1 in particular). It is the teacher’s responsibility to ensure that the SAC tasks selected meet the requirements of the outcome statements in the study design and the key knowledge and skills.
* There were no stimulus-based questions in the SAC tasks that were submitted by schools. Teachers could in the future develop some questions using stimulus material; for example diagrams, visuals, quotations or cartoons. This is one strategy to strengthen authentication and to effectively discriminate between student responses.

Specific information

Unit 4 School-assessed Coursework

Outcome 1

*On completion of this unit the student should be able to discuss, analyse and compare stances and supporting responses taken by religions as they are challenged.*

The students’ performance in Outcome 1 can be assessed using one or more of the following: a report, an essay, a case study, analytical exercises, structured questions, extended responses. Most schools used structured questions and extended responses for this outcome.

This outcome contributes 50 marks out of 100 marks allocated to School-assessed Coursework for Unit 4.

The main weakness in the SAC tasks submitted was that they did not fully meet the outcome statement: ‘compare stances and responses taken by religions as they are challenged.’ Tasks often only contained questions on each of the challenges. The study design clearly indicates that students must be able to analyse and compare challenges, as well as stances and responses to challenges, in relation to a specific religious tradition or denomination. Schools are directed to the key skills of Area of Study 1.

Assessment

Most SAC tasks used the suggested performance descriptors in the Advice for Teachers or modified them. Two of the elements of the descriptors focused on ‘comparisons’ of the challenges (‘A comprehensive analysis and comparison of a range of significant challenges’ and – ‘A highly developed analysis and comparison of the stances and responses to the challenges’), yet there were often no questions on the assessment task that provided students with the opportunity to demonstrate this.

Outcome 2

*On completion of this unit the student should be able to discuss the interactions within a religious tradition or denomination and between a religious tradition or denomination and wider society in relation to a significant challenge, and examine the effects of these interactions.*

The students’ performance in Outcome 2 can be assessed using one or more of the following: a report, an essay, a case study, analytical exercises, structured questions, extended responses.

This outcome contributes 50 marks out of 100 marks allocated to School-assessed Coursework for Unit 4.

This area of study requires students to understand the interaction between religion and society. Teachers achieved this by using structured questions for the SAC tasks directly from the key knowledge, key skills dot points and the outcome statement. Questions were clearly phrased or in the case of a report, clear headings were provided. No tasks included stimulus questions.

Assessment

Most SAC tasks used the Performance Descriptors in the Advice for Teachers.