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Evaluation of the Social & Community Studies Study Area Specification

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CONTENTS

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ABSTRACT

At the time of writing, 21 schools had students enrolled in the study area specification (SAS) for Social & Community Studies. This figure includes six special schools; other schools indicated they have special education units. In phase 1 of the evaluation in 2000, 15 schools participated, completing 17 data collection forms. Twenty schools participated in phase 2 of the evaluation. Sixteen data collection forms were obtained from the schools that participated in phase 3 of the evaluation out of the 21 with students enrolled. Students completed 281 data collection instruments.

Our data show that teachers are generally positive about the clarity and the internal consistency of this SAS document. They have appreciated the flexibility of the SAS and its compatibility with previous special-needs learning programs and approaches. They are also positive about the extent to which the content can be adapted and individualised to the needs of their students, including those with special needs.

Comments about writing the study plan were not generally as positive as comments about the SAS itself, although phase 2 comments suggest that some of the earlier difficulties had been dealt with. These difficulties appeared to relate first to the perception that the Form R9 was less flexible than the SAS; second, to some teachers' lack of familiarity with Board processes; and then, for special education teachers especially, to the ever-changing situation for which they must cater. Workshops and support from the Board were appreciated. Despite this, the quantitative data indicated that about one-third of the responding teachers disagreed or were unsure that the Board provided useful feedback and support during the development and approval of their study plan.

Teachers commented favourably about the SAS as a basis for developing learning experiences, again because of its flexibility and also because of the variety of practical, community-based learning experiences that it promotes. However, it was suggested that success in exploiting the flexibility permitted by the document depends on the expertise and experience of the teacher. Some teachers disagreed or were unsure that work experience in the local community could be easily organised.

Although teachers reported being able to design a range of assessment instruments for this SAS, some were uncertain about designing less traditional tasks and about making decisions on levels of achievement. The challenge of implementing assessment in special-education settings may be a factor in this uncertainty.

Although comments about resources were generally negative in phase 1, it appears that teachers were broadly satisfied by phase 2. Teacher comments, particularly in phase 1, indicated that they need a range of print and electronic texts and materials. In both phases, teachers indicated that they need more time for planning and implementing the SAS. Material resources and administrative arrangements vary widely from school to school, yet by phase 2, two-thirds of responding teachers agreed that they had enough resources. There are schools that already have a bank of useful resources. Other issues that are causing difficulties for some teachers are school timetabling and class size, but these were mostly resolved by phase 3.

Finally, the absence of vocational elements in this SAS, seen as a positive by teachers implementing it, may mean that the content is accessible to students who cannot reach AQF level I. This appears to contribute to the flexibility that is seen as

a strength of the subject, enabling teachers to develop highly individualised programs that cater specifically for individuals across the whole range of ability, and allow all students to focus on their particular interests. It is interesting that the quantitative data indicate that more than a third of the responding teachers were unsure or disagreed that this SAS is valuable for students seeking employment or wishing to complete further studies at TAFE at the end of Year 12; however, teachers and students thought that the SAS helped students develop knowledge and skills that would be valuable for the future.

The recommendations are:

R.1: That the SAS be revised to include more explanation of the key concepts of criteria-and-standards-based assessment, and principles and strategies for special consideration and special arrangements.

R.2: That the Office of the Board consider revising the Form R9 for this SAS as indicated by the evaluation.

R.3: That the Office of the Board review the strategies and processes in place for providing teachers with support for the development of study plans.

R.4: That employing authorities be advised of the resourcing issues for this SAS.

PURPOSES OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation of the Social & Community Studies SAS has been designed:
- to provide a sound and participative research basis for recommending whether the SAS ought to proceed to full implementation
- if implementation is recommended, to provide detailed information to the Board about the optimum development of the SAS in terms of:
  the detail of revision of the SAS needed to make it a more effective curriculum document
  resources and professional development for teachers
  any other matters relevant to the successful implementation of the SAS in senior schools in Queensland.

SASs were introduced to rationalise the system of Board-registered subjects. The final report of this evaluation, therefore, will also assess the extent to which the introduction of this SAS, as part of a broader policy direction, has been successful in this task.

HISTORY OF EVALUATIONS

Trialling of the first eight SASs began in 1997. These were:

- Hospitality Practices
- Business
- Land & Animal Systems[1]
- Industrial Skills
- Tourism
- Computer Studies
- English Communication
- Trade & Business Mathematics.

Evaluations of these SASs also began in 1997; the findings of these evaluations can be found in the 1999 report *Evaluations of Study Area Specifications*, which also includes interim findings from the evaluation of a ninth SAS, Literacy & Numeracy, the trialling of which began in 1998, and the final evaluation of which was published in 2000.

Trialling and evaluation of the Marine & Aquatic Practices SAS began in 1999, and the final evaluation was published in 2001.

In 2000 the Board's Policy and Evaluation Section also began evaluating three new SASs that were made available for open trial in that year: Social & Community Studies, Early Childhood Practices, and Physical Recreation. Early interim findings of these evaluations were published in 2000 and interim reports were produced in June 2001. The final evaluations of Social & Community Studies, and Early Childhood Practices, will be published at the same time as this report.

STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

This report includes a core report and two appendices. The core report provides overall discussion of background, research questions, method, overall findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Appendix A provides a detailed report of the findings and an extensive analysis of the data, as they relate to the recommendations.

Appendix B contains the research instruments used in each phase of the evaluation.

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[1] Since it was introduced, Land & Animal Systems has been renamed Agricultural & Horticultural Studies.

BACKGROUND

The development of social and community studies as a discipline

The curriculum territory of "social and community studies" is extensive and sometimes controversial. Its history is characterised by recurring shifts between a number of different positions, rather than a linear development. Part of the evaluation of the Social & Community Studies SAS is identifying where the SAS is positioned in this curriculum territory — both by the curriculum document itself and by how schools and teachers interpret and implement it.

A recurrent distinction in the literature of this area is between citizenship and scholarship; and as Johnston (1989, p. 83) points out, ways of using these terms have tended to change:

> the citizenship aim has varied from a very doctrinaire inculcation of civic loyalty and obedience in the lower orders complemented by training for leadership in the higher to, in more recent times, the incitement to question the basic values of the democratic society as these are involved in the contentious social issues of the day.

Johnston (1989, p. 2) has expressed a similar distinction in terms of social welfare and social understanding. Arthur and Davison (2000, p. 11) point to a further distinction within citizenship itself between social literacy (which is "active") and political literacy (which is "passive"): political literacy promotes "knowledge, understandings and behaviour — competence — in order to *enable* an individual to participate in [a] version of democracy", whereas social literacy

> also *empowers* individuals by developing in them levels of criticality in order that they might question, critique, debate and even take a leadership role in proposing alternative models of the structures and processes of democracy.

Arthur and Davison (2000, p. 10) also contrast an approach that provides a "social 'first aid' kit" and a more critical approach, which may be indicated by one of the SAS's general aims:

> to develop critical literacy skills to access, organise and analyse information and to communicate this information effectively to others through planning, cooperative team work and problem solving (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1999, p. 3).

Other areas of debate and discussion include whether this area should be studied in discrete subjects or in a more integrated way (Queensland School Curriculum Council 1998; Batten 1992), and the extent to which the approach to teaching should be didactic or discovery-based (Johnston 1989, pp. 67–70).

How these different views affect the teaching of social and community studies may be suggested by the range of approaches summarised by Gilbert (1996, pp. 9–14). He identifies approaches that emphasise information about the world, social and political inculcation, development of disciplined knowledge and problem solving, personal and social development, effective participation in society, and critical social understanding and action.

Inevitably a curriculum area so bound up with social issues will be influenced by its social context. A change in social context that has been identified as instrumental in a shift towards the citizenship end of the citizenship–scholarship spectrum is the increasingly large and diverse group of students participating in the higher levels of schooling (Johnston 1989, p. 11; Batten 1992, p. 1). The curriculum area can be viewed differently over place as well as over time. Starkey (2000, p. 41) contrasts the French approach to citizenship — "determinedly modern, based on a firm commitment to equality and universal values" — with the

approach in Britain, which is "more cautious in its statements and application of values, stressing diversity, tolerance and thus inviting relativism". Unterhalter (2000, pp. 70–71) traces recent changes in ways of approaching citizenship education in South Africa, from the apartheid curriculum — "infused with racism, sexism and approaches to knowledge and culture which failed all but a tiny minority" — through an approach in which "ways of negotiating and overcoming the difficulties of differences … are learned", to more radical theories in which difference is seen not as "a disruption to be overcome and incorporated" but as "a feature of social reality to be acknowledged and engaged with".

That values have an important place in social and community studies does not seem to be in question, even if whether the school should inculcate, analyse or clarify values is not a straightforward issue (Gilbert & Hoepper 1996, pp. 64–70). Although, as the example of apartheid curriculum makes clear, actual curriculum structures are not always democratic, the dominant values endorsed in the literature are undoubtedly democratic and participatory. The Queensland School Curriculum Council (QSCC) (1998, p. 2), in a document which is acknowledged in the Social and Community Studies SAS as the source of its concept of "lifeskills", states that lifeskills (a learning area) is based on respect for "life, reasoning, fairness, the welfare of others, diversity, peaceful resolution of conflict, justice, responsibility, freedom, honesty, integrity, and ecologically sustainable development". A more detailed list of "values and dispositions" — including, for example: "premeditation and calculation about the effects actions are likely to have on others" and "courage to defend a point of view" — is set out in Crick 1998 (the Crick Report; quoted in Scott 2000, p. 3).

QSCC (1998, p. 1) accepts that "lifeskills is not a de facto key learning area in its own right. As an integrative element in the core curriculum, lifeskills offers a point of commonality across key learning areas". However, while emphasising the cross-curriculum nature of lifeskills and indeed the extent to which lifeskills is "taught" through the "hidden curriculum" of the school, it explicitly acknowledges that schools "may elect to offer discrete courses of study or other programs designed to provide students with specific opportunities to practise, learn about and develop lifeskills" (p. 6).

On this issue, as on many others, the literature of social and community studies suggests that any manifestation of these studies in a particular curriculum will be a negotiated position, established with reference to a number of competing, or at least contrasting, positions.

Study area specifications

Study area specifications are a relatively new form of Board-registered subject, in which the Board is responsible for the curriculum documents and schools are responsible for the study plans they develop within these specifications, and for assessment. In most SASs, students may study one or more strands, and can receive a level of achievement in each strand as well as records of competencies they demonstrate, and any certificates for which they have met the competency requirements. The competencies embedded in SASs are based on nationally recognised industry-endorsed competency standards, and the certificates are defined under the Australian Qualifications Framework.

The development of SASs began in 1996 and has continued in a context of:
- changing patterns of participation in senior studies
- developments in VET in schools.

In the next two sections, brief accounts of these two contexts are followed by a summary of the immediate reasons for the introduction of SASs: the rationalisation of old-style Board-registered subjects.

Curriculum is, of course, delivered by teachers. What teachers know and do has a greater impact on students' achievements than any other single factor. The section on background concludes with a note on the diversity of backgrounds of teachers involved in SASs, including the Social & Community Studies SAS.

Changing patterns of participation in senior studies in Queensland

In Queensland the senior curriculum has continued to change in response to changing student needs. The proportion of OP-ineligible students has been increasing since 1989 at least, as indicated by table 1.

Table 1: Changes in the student population 1989–2001

Year	OP-eligible	OP-ineligible	Total	OP-eligible as a percentage of Year 12	OP-ineligible as a percentage of Year 12
1989	26 523	5 002	31 525	84.1	15.9
1990	26 828	5 206	32 034	83.7	16.3
1991	28 649	6 026	34 675	82.6	17.4
1992	28 577	6 924	35 501	80.5	19.5
1993	27 336	7 100	34 436	79.4	20.6
1994	25 985	7 406	33 391	77.8	22.2
1995	25 118	7 106	32 224	77.9	22.1
1996	24 893	7 870	32 763	76.0	24.0
1997	25 957	7 865	33 822	76.7	23.3
1998	26 214	8 594	34 808	75.3	24.5
1999	27 237	9 176	36 413	74.8	25.2
2000	27 836	10 374	38 210	72.9	27.1
2001	27 303	10 533	37 837	72.2	27.8

Completion rates[2] for senior studies rose steadily until 1992. Completion rates then dipped for three years, reaching a low point in 1995. They then appeared to be on the increase and were up for the fifth year in succession to 73 per cent of the age grouping 2000. There was a marked gap between the completion rates for females (77 per cent in 2000) and males (68 per cent in 2000). In 2001, the completion rate for females was down slightly to 76 per cent and for males was up slightly to 69 per cent.

Developments in VET in schools

The Queensland experience of developing SASs with embedded VET has occurred in a national context of an increasing emphasis on VET in schools and a range of approaches to its implementation.

Queensland, like other states, has seen sustained growth in the provision of

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[2] The completion rate is the number of students receiving a Senior Certificate expressed as a proportion of the relevant population. Figures given here are for age-weighted cohort rates rather than apparent retention rates.

VET in schools. The senior curriculum in Australia has changed with the development of new subjects integrating both theoretical and more general studies with practical and "hands-on" studies into senior courses. The new SASs may be seen as examples of these new curriculum offerings across Australia. The extent of recent growth in the provision of VET in Queensland schools is suggested by table 2. (This table shows VET reported on Senior Certificates which is now very close to all the VET that is being delivered (see *A report on the AVETMISS Project, Phase 3*.)

Table 2: Changes in VET in Queensland schools 1997–2001

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Senior Certificates issued	33 822	35 394	37 032	38 727	38 441
Students who received a result in one or more subjects with embedded VET	2 616	11 952	15 865	20 728	21 361
Modules/competencies printed on Senior Certificates as part of subjects with embedded VET	18 097	134 017	194 299	246 505	308 269
VET modules/competencies printed on Senior Certificates as part of non-SAS Board-registered subjects	0	5 305	6 887	5 040	4 921
Students with results in (TAFE) Recorded subjects	3 745	4 030	4 167	2 324	706

The practice of "embedding" VET is part of an Australia-wide trend to integrate VET into the senior secondary school curriculum. In Queensland there are currently five Board subjects and 14 SASs with 32 strands that provide students with opportunities to acquire industry-endorsed competencies as part of these subjects. (One strand within each SAS does not require schools to provide industry-endorsed competencies and a fifteenth SAS (Social & Community Studies) contains no industry-endorsed competencies). Results in all Board subjects are included in calculations of Overall Positions (OPs) and Field Positions (FPs). Results in SAS subjects are not included in OP and FP calculations.

The emphasis on workplace learning varies considerably across Australian states. Most Queensland senior students, whether they are studying SASs or any other subjects, take part in "work experience" rather than industry placement. Work experience for Queensland students is conducted under the provisions of work experience legislation; the few cases where industry placement is mandatory involve students in on-the-job training that is conducted under the provisions of the industry placement legislation. NSW has developed workplace guidelines, which are designed to ensure that students develop skills in the workplace, rather than simply doing routine tasks. The importance of this is supported by the student survey data obtained for all SASs as part of the 1999 report of evaluations of the first nine SASs.

Registration arrangements vary considerably across Australia. In Queensland, schools can register with the Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (QBSSSS) as providers of VET delivered at AQF levels I and above, including VET delivered as part of SAS subjects. In Queensland, students who complete VET as part of Board or SAS subjects (and/or who have completed a number of Recorded subjects) receive a Senior Certificate that provides considerable detail about this VET. This information may include certificates,

modules, industry-endorsed competencies, and industry standards, and is sufficiently large for some students to require their certificates to be printed on more than one sheet of A4 paper. (From 1997 to 1999, students with too many results to fit on one sheet of A4 paper received a Senior Certificate on A3 paper. In 2000 and 2001, an A3 sheet was not large enough to accommodate the achievements of every student receiving a Senior Certificate, so many students with VET had their Senior Certificate results printed on several sheets of A4 paper.)

Scrutiny of equivalent certificates in other states suggests there are substantial differences in the degree of detail about VET reported by Australian authorities certificating senior studies (Australasian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities (ACACA)). However, there are some agreed-upon principles and commonalities in practices for reporting VET and other results. The agreed-upon national guidelines for certification and an account of certification practices in the different Australian states are given in a 1999 report produced by QBSSSS, *Principles for the Integrity, Quality and Long-Term Credibility of Certificates of Achievement* (1999). This report lends support to the view that Queensland is reporting a great deal more VET on its Senior Certificates than many other states.

The rationalisation of old-style Board-registered subjects

SASs were developed following a government decision in 1995 that Board-registered subjects should be rationalised.

The old-style Board-registered subjects were defined by a work program and accredited by the Board; there was great diversity, and as many Board-registered subjects as there were work programs written by schools. They had only one level of quality control — accreditation by the Board of work programs as representing a coherent program of study suitable for senior students.

Schools used the system of Board-registered subjects to provide more practical and "hands-on" rather than theoretical subjects for their students, and also to provide numeracy and literacy courses for students who had not experienced much success in these areas in previous years of schooling.

Reasons for rationalising the old-style Board-registered subjects included the:
- large number of subjects
- cost of developing and accrediting work programs for each subject
- highly variable quality of these subjects
- lack of substance of some of these subjects
- fact that there were different names for essentially the same course
- perceived limited value or currency of results in these subjects
- general absence of effective quality controls.

In addition to fixing these problems, SASs were intended to contribute to the "convergence" of "vocational" and "general" education. They were intended also to continue to provide the flexibility delivered by the previous very wide range of Board-registered subjects. This original intention behind the design of SASs is an important benchmark for evaluating their effectiveness as curriculum documents today.

Teachers

In our previous evaluations, we found that teachers of SASs have a diverse background and include:

- those who are relatively new to criteria-based assessment, e.g. those who do not have a long history of teaching Board subjects and working with the Board through its moderation system; many of these teachers have a trade background and/or have been teaching the old-style Board-registered subjects or school subjects
- those who are relatively new to competency-based assessment, e.g. those who have primarily taught Board subjects
- those who are new to both criteria-based and competency-based assessment, e.g. recent graduates of teaching qualifications
- some who have experience with both competency-based and criteria-based assessment, including teachers who have gained experience of integrating both in other SASs.

The variety of the backgrounds of SAS teachers is crucial to understanding the challenges these teachers have experienced in implementing the SASs in their schools. As evaluations of other SASs progressed, it became clear that difficulties teachers were experiencing with the SASs could be, and sometimes in their view almost certainly were, primarily about the challenges of implementing either criteria-based or competency-based assessment, and combining both these kinds of assessment. Our data on assessment, collected over the course of the evaluation, is also designed to explore these in-practice assessment issues.

In addition, SAS classrooms include many students who have special needs. These special needs groups are diverse; they include students with different kinds of disabilities, students who have not experienced much success at school, students who are not well motivated, and students who are highly motivated and committed to the goal of being employed in the industry area after school. Clearly, teaching this diverse range of students is a job that makes high demands on teacher skills.

In summary, then, concerns about the SASs are not always about perceived limitations of the curriculum documents as such; they are often about the very substantial teacher delivery challenges, such as the discrepancy between what teachers had previously taught and what they are now, as SAS teachers, required to teach. Our evaluation of this SAS will aim to provide a deeper understanding of the nature of any difficulties with the SAS curriculum document experienced by teachers (as well as a sense of its strengths).

Our quantitative data from phase 2 (see appendix B for the research instrument) show that teachers of Social & Community Studies who responded to the survey came from a variety of backgrounds. Figure 1 shows that some of these responding teachers have taught the Board-registered subject that in some schools was replaced by this SAS. Some have taught another old-style Board-registered subject. Some have had experience teaching another SAS Board-registered subject. Some have taught Board subjects, and within that group, there are teachers who have taught these subjects for more than ten years. Overall, it is notable that most of the teachers of this SAS have no experience of teaching SASs or other Board-registered subjects.

This diversity of experience suggests that teachers of Social & Community Studies come to the subject with different experiences of assessment but mainly of Board subjects. This presents a particular challenge for curriculum designers. The greater experience of teachers with Board subjects than with Board-registered

subjects may suggest that they will be, in general, familiar with criteria-based assessment, but may welcome advice on adapting this to the SAS context.

Figure 1: Types of teaching experience of teachers of Social & Community Studies
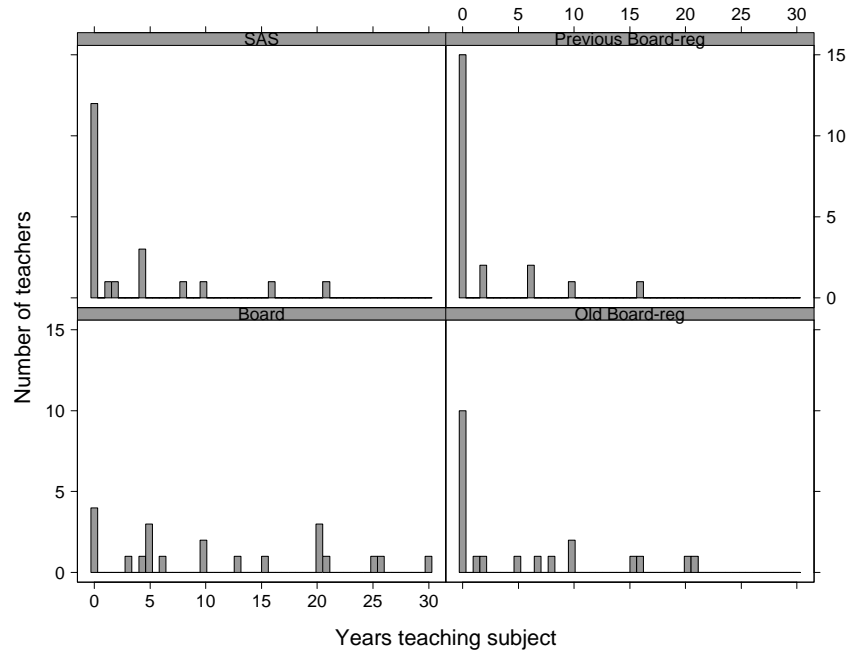
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The key research questions for this evaluation are necessarily many and varied, being in the first instance directed at establishing whether the SAS ought to proceed to full implementation and, in the second instance where implementation is recommended, offering detailed information about specific revisions required, resources or professional development required by teachers, as well as any other matters relevant to successful implementation.

The key research questions have been organised around three areas:
- the effectiveness of the SAS for teachers
- the effectiveness of the SAS for students
- the effectiveness of the SAS for the Queensland community (phase 3).

The effectiveness of the SASs for teachers

Research questions for evaluating the effectiveness of SASs for teachers (in this and other evaluations of SASs) have been organised under seven subtopics:

1. The language of the SAS
- How well does the SAS communicate intentions to teachers?

2. The internal integrity of the SAS
- How good is the internal consistency of the components of each of the strands?

3. The content of the SAS
- How suitable is the breadth and depth of each of the strands?
- What is the nature and appropriateness of general and embedded vocational education components?

4. Development of study plans using the SAS
- Can teachers translate the strands into effective study plans?

5. Development of learning experiences using the SAS
- How useful is the SAS for teachers providing worthwhile learning experiences for students in the context of the trial schools?

6. Assessment and the SAS
- How well developed, clarified and appropriate are the criteria and standards of assessment for the strands?
- How well do schools combine summative information to make decisions about achievement in each criterion in each strand?
- How useful is this SAS for teachers making valid and reliable assessments of student achievement?
- How easily are teachers implementing competency-based assessment? How well are teachers handling the requirements of both criteria-based assessment and competency-based assessment?

7. Resources
- What resources are needed to ensure effective teaching, learning and assessment in the strands?

The effectiveness of the SASs for students

The research questions for evaluating the effectiveness of the SAS for students have been organised under four subtopics.

1. *The match between student needs and the SAS*
   - What specific needs in the student populations studied does the SAS meet/not meet? How well does the SAS match the needs of the student populations studied?
   - How well do embedded vocational education components meet the needs of students?

2. *The balance between practice and theory in the SAS*
   - Does the SAS provide students with an appropriate balance between practical and "hands-on" learning and theoretical learning experiences?

3. *The appropriateness for students of demands made by the SAS*
   - Are the demands of the strands appropriate for the students who undertake these studies?

4. *Students who are not participating in the SAS*
   - What groups of students are not participating in the SAS and why are they not participating? Should the SAS meet the needs of any of these other groups of students?

The effectiveness of the SASs for the Queensland community

The discussion about the rationalisation of Board-registered subjects made clear that the SASs need to be evaluated in a particular policy context. They were intended to achieve some specific ends that could not be achieved so effectively with the old-style Board-registered subjects, particularly the convergence of "vocational" and "general" education.

For the evaluation of SASs, including Social & Community Studies, it is therefore not enough simply to ask "How well do the SASs work for teachers and students?" The related question of how well the SASs do what they were designed to do has to be asked. Accordingly, the research questions that follow were designed using the definitions of what rationalising SASs was supposed to achieve. They have been organised under six subtopics. In this report, the data for Social & Community Studies will be considered in the light of data from other SAS evaluations answering these broader questions.

1. *Reducing the number of Board-registered subjects*
   - What are the key issues in the reduction of the number of old-style Board-registered subjects?

2. *Better coordination and implementation of Board-registered subjects*
   - Does the new system provide better coordination of the development and implementation of Board-registered subjects?

3. Cost effectiveness
- Has rationalising Board-registered subjects effectively reduced costs (i.e. the costs of developing and accrediting work programs for each individual subject versus the costs of developing and implementing SASs)?

4. Improved value or currency of results
- Does the new system of Board-registered subjects mean improved value or currency of results (i.e. with some reference to the "old" system of Board-registered subjects)?
- Do SASs offer substantial improvement of the standardisation of results in Board-registered subjects?

5. A better balance between theory and practice and the convergence of "vocational" and "general" education
- Do SASs provide students with an appropriate balance between flexibility to suit local needs and standardisation of quality of subjects?
- Have the SASs achieved the aim of convergence of "vocational" and "general" education?

6. Improved outcomes for students
- Do the new SASs provide students with subjects offering more meaningful knowledge and skills leading to better results (whether employment, further education and/or personal development)?

METHOD

This section summarises the research methods used in phases 1, 2 & 3 of this evaluation, and explains the:

- nature of the methods
- rationale for the methods
- complementary way in which these different research methods help answer the research questions.

Summary of methods

For the evaluation of the Social & Community Studies SAS, substantial written comments were obtained. During phase 1, teachers filled out 17 data collection forms; during phase 2, teachers filled out 21 qualitative forms and 21 quantitative forms; during phase 3, teachers filled out 16 data collection forms.

It is important to consider these numbers in the context of participation of schools in this evaluation: in 2000, 15 schools participated in phase 1 of the evaluation (out of 47 schools that had expressed an interest in participating in the trial, of which only 17 reported in March 2000 that students were enrolled). In March 2001, 20 schools participated in phase 2 of the evaluation (out of 21 schools with students enrolled in the SAS). In October 2001, 16 schools participated in phase 3 of the evaluation (out of 21 schools with students enrolled).

Quantitative data from surveys of teachers have been used in this evaluation as a cross-check of the written comments, complementing and supplementing these data. Quantitative data tell us, for example, whether teachers agreed or disagreed with a statement, but they cannot tell us why. Quantitative data help identify priority areas for development of the SAS (or, possibly, indicate together with written comments that the SAS ought not to proceed to full implementation).

The comments obtained from teachers in phase 1 provide an early and not always conclusive dataset that can be analysed to signal what were issues for teachers in the very early stages of the trial; these issues have been compared to the issues that are still, or are no longer, seen as important in later stages of the trial (as revealed by phase 2 and phase 3 data). Appendix A offers this analysis.

In phase 3, the evaluation team carried out an analysis of a sample of the study plans developed from the SAS in order to gain some idea of the nature of the programs of study that schools typically develop.

Phase 1

What phase 1 achieved

In phase 1 the evaluation team aimed to provide all teachers of Social & Community Studies with an opportunity to express in writing their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the SAS document, as well as any other issues relevant to the implementation of the SAS. The evaluation team met personally with as many teachers of this SAS as possible to obtain accounts of their early experiences of the SAS and give them the message that the Board has made a commitment to a rigorous and substantial evaluation of their subjects that will convey their experiences to the Curriculum Committee.

Who did what in phase 1

In March 2000, 47 schools had expressed interest in seeking participating in the trial of Social & Community Studies, and the Board sent letters informing them of the evaluation and inviting them to attend the meetings.

The meetings aimed to provide:
- the evaluation team with information about the broad range of issues for schools trialling Social & Community Studies
- as many teachers as possible with the opportunity to meet face to face with members of the evaluation team at an early stage of the evaluation.

Ten meetings were conducted. Teachers recorded their experiences of implementing Social & Community Studies in schools on a qualitative data collection form; the number of data collection forms received for each strand is shown in table 3. Fifteen schools were involved.

Table 3: Data collection forms received in phase 1, by strand and by district

District	Forms
Brisbane South	6
Brisbane Ipswich	4
Brisbane North	1
Toowoomba	
Wide Bay	1
Rockhampton	1
Mackay	
Townsville	3
Cairns	
Gold Coast	
Sunshine Coast	1
Total:	17

The data collection form (see appendix B for the research instruments) contained seven broad questions on seven topics designed to canvass all issues relevant to teachers' experiences of implementing SASs in schools; it also gave teachers the opportunity to make additional comments relevant to the implementation of the SAS in their school.

Each of the data collection forms from phase 1 was numbered and personal details including name, school and SAS were recorded. The data collection forms were used in the detailed discussion of teachers' comments that appears in appendix A to this report.

Phase 2

What phase 2 achieved

In phase 2 the evaluation team aimed to provide teachers of this SAS with opportunities to provide more detail about the broad issues, concerns, and areas of satisfaction identified in phase 1. Phase 2 obtained both qualitative and quantitative data on similar issues, so that both datasets could work together as a cross-check of the findings for this phase.

Who did what in phase 2

In March 2001 seven meetings were held across Queensland, attended by eight teachers. Table 4 provides some figures showing schools' response to this phase of the evaluation.

Table 4: Schools' response in phase 2

Number of schools with students enrolled in Social & Community Studies in 2001 (Years 11 and 12)	21
Number of schools that provided completed evaluation forms	20
Percentage of schools completing evaluation forms	95%
Number of schools that did not complete an evaluation form	1

From the meetings and from later postings of the research instruments, 24 teachers filled in 21 qualitative forms and 21 quantitative forms. The number of qualitative and quantitative data collection forms is given in by district in tables 5 and 6.

Table 5: Qualitative data collection forms received in phase 2, by district

District	Forms
Brisbane South	6
Brisbane Ipswich	4
Brisbane North	2
Toowoomba	1
Wide Bay	2
Rockhampton	1
Mackay	
Townsville	2
Cairns	1
Gold Coast	2
Sunshine Coast	
Total:	21

Table 6: Quantitative data collection forms received in phase 2, by district

District	Forms
Brisbane South	6
Brisbane Ipswich	4
Brisbane North	2
Toowoomba	1
Wide Bay	2
Rockhampton	1
Mackay	
Townsville	2
Cairns	1
Gold Coast	2
Sunshine Coast	
Total:	21

The qualitative and quantitative data collection forms ask quite similar questions. The qualitative form offered teachers an opportunity to elaborate on the questions they had answered in phase 1, through the use of more detailed questions. These data collection forms are also analysed in the appended report.

Phase 3

What phase 3 achieved

In phase 3 the evaluation team obtained specific information about the content of the SAS, which could help pinpoint particular areas requiring revision. For instance, the qualitative phase 3 instrument asked teachers to list specific aspects of the SAS that are/are not meeting their students' needs. They were also asked questions about the aspirations of the students they were teaching. As was the case in phase 2, the quantitative instrument for this phase asked similar questions to help ensure that recommendations about content are supported by more than one kind of dataset. A survey instrument was used to gather data from students in all schools offering the SAS. The evaluation team also conducted an analysis of study plans for the SAS.

Who did what in phase 3

In 2001, 21 schools were offering Social & Community Studies. From the posting of forms to teachers we obtained 16 responses. From the posting of forms to students we obtained 281 responses.

Table 7 provides some figures showing schools' response to this phase of the evaluation.

Table 7: Schools' response in phase 3

Number of schools with students enrolled in Social & Community Studies in 2001 (Years 11 and 12)	21
Number of schools that provided completed evaluation forms	16
Percentage of schools completing evaluation forms	76%
Number of schools that did not complete an evaluation form	5

From postings of the research instruments, 19 teachers filled in 16 forms and students filled in 281 forms. The number of forms received from teachers is shown in table 8.

Table 8: Data collection forms received in phase 3, by district

District	Forms
Brisbane Central	2
Brisbane South	2
Brisbane North	2
Brisbane East	2
Brisbane Ipswich	1
Gold Coast	0
Sunshine Coast	0
Toowoomba	1
Wide Bay	2
Mackay	0
Townsville	1
Rockhampton	2
Cairns	1

Total: 16

These data collection instruments included both quantitative and qualitative forms. As in the earlier phases these forms asked quite similar questions. The questions allowed teachers the opportunity to elaborate on some of the responses they had given earlier and also explored in more detail some of the areas touched on in phases 1 & 2.

The evaluation team carried out an analysis of the study plans developed from the SAS in order to gain some idea of the nature of the programs of study that schools typically develop.

The approaches used to analyse data obtained for this evaluation

What is the approach to qualitative data obtained from teachers?

Most data obtained for this evaluation are language data in the form of written comments. The report aims to provide a narrative in appendix A that effectively synthesises all these comments.

The evaluation team did not try to classify and quantify each paragraph that teachers wrote. However, it should be emphasised that the point of the analyses of written comments in this appendix is to offer an account of the nature of teachers' experiences, to "flesh out" particular issues in ways that convey the detail of teachers' experiences of the SAS. This is why quotations are offered in these analyses, so that readers get the flavour of comments that contribute to the synthesis of the findings and recommendations.

In an evaluation exercise that claims that its recommendations are data-driven, and must be presented to committees who may want to question these recommendations, it is important that substantial amounts of space be devoted to describing the data that are the basis for the recommendations. This is the purpose of the report given in appendix A. Accordingly, the writing in the appended report is descriptive; under each research question we provide a synthesis of the available data, as well as substantiation of this synthesis by way of detailed descriptions of the data collected. The synthesis under each research question is in turn the basis for the summaries of the findings in this core report and the recommendations. Given the high-stakes nature of recommendations for change to curriculum documents, and the importance of having considered debates about whether evaluation findings are justified, illustrating the connections between the data and the recommendations is particularly important in reports like this. In short, we aim to ensure that our evaluation of curriculum is demonstrably driven by these data.

*O*VERALL FINDINGS

The following pages provide the findings for this evaluation and suggestions for action, with reference to each of the research questions.

They give only the big picture for the Social & Community Studies SAS. The detail of the findings and the evidence supporting the recommendations for this SAS are given in the report in appendix A.

The effectiveness of SASs for teachers

The language of the SAS	
How well do SASs communicate intentions to teachers?	Teachers have been generally positive in their comments about the clarity of the SAS document. However, in phase 1, some expressed uncertainties about the Board's requirements and this may be because, for some teachers, this may be the first experience of teaching curriculum with criteria-based assessment developed by the Board. It appears that the majority of teachers have found this SAS to be one that adequately defines the kinds of learning experiences that should be offered to students and one that can be used to generate a program of study that is relatively easy to teach.
	Negative comments arose from a perceived lack of clarity about the following:
	the extent of flexibility allowed by the SAS
	the specific requirements for assessment.
	Possible actions:
	revision of the SAS as indicated by Recommendation 1
	workshops that explore assessment in ways that focus on the needs of special educators including the extent of flexibility allowed by the SAS
	workshops that explore expectations about depth of treatment of content.

The internal integrity of the SAS	
How good is the internal consistency of the components of each of the strands?	Comments about the internal consistency of the curriculum document were generally positive, largely it seems because of the perceived flexibility of the SAS and its compatibility with previous special needs learning programs and approaches. The flexibility of the SAS allows teachers to develop learning programs that have a logical consistency for their own students and that can be adapted to meet the needs of individual students.
	Positive comments about how well the core and elective components fit together were consistent through phases 1 & 2. Teachers also felt that the document allowed them to integrate the core and elective elements of the SAS successfully.

The content of the SAS	
How suitable is the breadth and depth of each of the strands? What is the nature and appropriateness of the content of the SAS?	Comments about content were mostly positive, once again largely due to the perceived flexibility of the SAS. Teachers were positive about the extent to which the content can be adapted and individualised according to the needs of their students, including students with special needs. They were generally of the view that the subject has the capacity to engage students and allow them to follow up their own interests. Content that seems to have been not so successful in programs of study is theoretical and involves research activities or activities requiring self-motivation. Although some teachers cited the lack of vocational components in the SAS as a positive, it was interesting that the quantitative data indicated that more than a third of the responding teachers were unsure or disagreed that this SAS is valuable for students seeking employment or wishing to complete further studies at TAFE at the end of Year 12. Teachers offered little criticism of the aims and objectives of the SAS, although individual comments focused on the need to teach communication and to emphasise self-development and personal growth. Suggestions for changing the content of the SAS included the addition of more practical and work-related content such as work experience, planning for work placement and the acceptance of qualifications awarded to students by other bodies, such as certificates for self-defence, defensive driving, and Duke of Edinburgh awards. There were no suggestions for content that should be omitted, although the necessity for the quantity of theoretical content now included was questioned.

Development of study plans using the SAS	
Can teachers translate the strands into effective study plans?	Comments about writing the study plan were not generally as positive as comments about the SAS itself, although phase 2 comments suggested that some of the earlier difficulties had been dealt with. The difficulties appeared to relate, first, to the perception that the Form R9 was less flexible than the SAS; second, to some teachers' lack of familiarity with Board processes; and then, for special education teachers especially, the ever-changing situation for which they must cater. Some teachers reported that they had found the process of developing the study plan difficult. However, in phase 2, a majority of teachers indicated that the resulting study plan provided a reasonably useful basis for their teaching of the SAS. Workshops and support from the Board were appreciated. Despite this, the quantitative data indicated that about one-third of the responding teachers disagreed or were unsure that the Board provided useful feedback and support during the development and approval of their study plan. The kind of support that teachers said they might find helpful included listing in the document a greater number of useful resources and contacts, and providing, by means of more workshops and the internet, examples of successful units, assessment activities and resources. An analysis of the accredited study plans by the research team suggested that all of the electives offered provide useful content and that those dealing with practical life skills have been the most successful for programs of study. *Possible action* Review the strategies and processes in place for providing teachers with support for the development of study plans (see Recommendation 3).

Development of learning experiences using the SAS	
How useful is the SAS for teachers providing worthwhile learning experiences for students in the context of the trial schools?	Comments about the SAS as a basis for developing learning experiences were consistently positive throughout phases 1 & 2. Teachers commented favourably again on the flexibility of the SAS and the extent to which it promotes a variety of practical, community-based learning experiences. However, phase 1 comments include the suggestion that the success of the SAS depends on the expertise and experience of the teacher in exploiting the flexibility permitted by the document. Some teachers disagreed or were unsure that work experience in the local community can be easily organised.

Assessment and the SAS	
How well developed, clarified and appropriate are the criteria and standards of assessment for the strands? How well do schools combine summative information to make decisions about achievement in each criterion in each strand? How useful is this SAS for teachers making valid and reliable assessments of students' achievements?	The comments about assessment were mixed. Positive comments focused once again on the flexibility of the SAS and suggested that the exit criteria are clearly written, appropriate and useable. In phase 2, the majority of teachers were finding it possible to design assessment tasks to suit the particular needs of their students and reported that criteria sheets and marking schemes were easy to develop, apply and interpret. However, some teachers were uncertain about their success in making decisions about levels of achievement. A factor in this uncertainty may be the challenge of implementing assessment in special-education settings. In phase 3, teachers appeared to have become more positive in their views on assessment and, in particular, more confident about making assessment decisions. However, it appears that although teachers are happy to exploit the flexibility of the SAS and adapt the assessment to student needs, some have difficulty in designing the less formal and less traditional tasks that may be most suited to their students and to this SAS and would benefit from further assistance with these. *Possible action* Provide advice in the SAS about suitable assessment tasks.

Resource issues	
What resources are needed to ensure effective teaching, learning and assessment in the strands?	While comments about resources were generally negative in phase 1, it appears that teachers were broadly satisfied by phase 2. Teacher comments, particularly in phase 1, indicated that they needed a range of print and electronic texts and materials. In both phases, teachers indicated that they needed more time for planning and implementing the SAS. Material resources and administrative arrangements vary widely from school to school, yet by phase 2, two-thirds of responding teachers agreed that they had enough resources. There are schools that already have a bank of useful resources. By phase 3, teachers were indicating that they were making use of a range of media and internet resources, local community resources and material resources from a number of subject areas. Other issues that have caused difficulties for some teachers are school timetabling and class size, although these issues seem mostly to have been resolved in phase 3. *Possible action* Advise employing authorities of the resourcing issues for this SAS (see Recommendation 4).

Other issues	
What other issues should be considered in this SAS?	The fact that this SAS has no vocational component is seen as a positive by teachers who are implementing it. The absence of vocational elements may mean the content is accessible to special-needs students who cannot reach AQF level I. This contributes to the flexibility that is seen as a strength of the subject, enabling teachers to develop highly individualised programs that cater specifically for individuals across the whole range of ability and allow all students to focus on their particular interests.
	Requests from some teachers for more information about Board procedures and for feedback on the success of their implementation of the SAS indicate that, because the SAS is offered in such a range of situations, some teachers may not be well acquainted with the Board's procedures and requirements and may be unsure about how flexible they should be in interpreting these.
	This SAS appears to be one that can be adapted to meet the specific needs of a wide range of students. Most teachers commented positively about its relevance to the needs of their students and about their interest in the activities it can provide. They are positive also about the balance of practice and theory and the flexibility that allows them to individualise assessment.
	Some teachers commented that the SAS should encourage variety in school programs of study and should include more practical activities to suit the varied needs and interests of the students who take the subject.
	They also suggested that there should be more in-service training provided, none of them agreeing that the opportunities available to them during the trial of the SAS to attend workshops had been appropriate.

The effectiveness of SASs for students

The match between student needs and the SAS	
What specific needs in the student populations studied does the SAS meet/not meet? How well does the SAS match the needs of the student population studied? How well does the content of the SAS meet the needs of students?	Most teachers saw this SAS as having interest and relevance for a wide range of students, from very capable students among the general senior group to those who have language and literacy problems. Many maintained that the SAS is suitable for the students who have learning difficulties. All responses indicated that the flexibility available to teachers within this SAS allowed them to design a program of study to suit their students. Some teachers cited as a strength the opportunity that the SAS offers for students to follow their interests within the framework of the subject. Where the SAS replaced a previous subject it was seen to be at least as enriching as the subject it replaced.
	Industry placements or work experience were seen as being very worthwhile for students although, in some cases, the level of support needed by some of the students made them difficult to organise.
	Both teachers and students were of the opinion that the SAS helps to develop knowledge, skills and key competencies that would be beneficial in the future and specifically, in employment.

The balance between practice and theory in the SAS	
Does the SAS provide students with an appropriate balance between practical and "hands-on" learning and theoretical learning experiences?	Teachers have indicated that the flexibility of this SAS has allowed them to cater specifically for their students and to manage the balance between practice and theory well, although more guidance on what was possible in the practical elements was requested.
	Class discussions and practical activities were the classroom activities that students preferred.

The appropriateness for students of demands made by the SAS	
Are the demands of the strands appropriate for the students who undertake these studies?	Here again, the flexibility of this SAS seems to be a positive. Teachers perceive that it caters for the range of student ability, including students with special needs, in both the learning experiences and assessment tasks that can be generated from it. Students were fairly positive about their experiences of assessment and thought that the tasks were helping them to learn.

Students who are not participating in the SAS	
What groups of students are not participating in the SAS and why are they not participating? Should the SAS meet the needs of any of these other groups of students?	In phase 1, a group of teachers of students with ascertained needs reflected that students who communicate only "non-verbally" may not be able to meet the exit criteria. They described these students as being unable to attend to their own toilet needs and requiring very high levels of support in self-care.
	In written comments provided in phase 2, responding teachers made no comment on this specifically. However, some indicated that although some higher-ability students choose to take this SAS because they find it interesting or because they are looking for an easy "filler" subject, most students are guided into the subject because they are taking vocational subjects or because they are looking for an easier subject in which they can be given a good deal of support. Thus, it may be that students who are not participating in the SAS do not fall into those categories.
	The quantitative data from phase 2 indicate that many teachers are unsure or disagree that there are significant numbers of students in their school who should be participating in the SAS but are not. These data also suggest that many disagree or are unsure that subject-selection processes encourage OP-eligible students to take the SAS if it would benefit them.
	The phase 3 data indicate that the gender balance for the SAS is a little more than half girls and a little less than half boys. Almost all students taking the SAS also take at least one Board subject and more than half take at least one other SAS. Some classes include students with special needs. Teachers were asked whether changes to the content of the SAS might make it more attractive to students currently not participating in it. In response, teachers suggested the inclusion of some vocational elements and more practical activities.

The effectiveness of SASs for the Queensland community

Reducing the number of Board-registered subjects	
What are the key issues in the reduction of the number of old-style Board-registered subjects?	Board data (documented in this report) suggest that there has been an increase in the number of students taking old-style Board-registered subjects in some areas where SASs do not exist. The demand is strong for SAS subjects, including Social & Community Studies, that suit local needs.

Better coordination/implementation of Board-registered subjects	
Does the new system provide better coordination of the development and implementation of Board-registered subjects?	It appears that the Social & Community Studies SAS and other SASs have brought greater coordination to the development of Board-registered subjects through offering greater rigour, development of "subject communities" of teachers, and for many of the SASs, greater use of nationally endorsed industry competency standards and registration of schools to deliver VET. The Board has also taken an increased role in coordinating the development of these subjects through its curriculum development, registration, accreditation and other functions. Our review of relevant papers describing the situation under the old-style Board-registered subjects suggests these developed largely ad hoc. Speaking generally about our data for all evaluations, including this one, special education teachers have indicated that, prior to SASs being available, their students did not always have the opportunity to have achievements reported on a Senior Certificate. It would appear that this SAS has a role in developing special education practices.

Cost-effectiveness

Has rationalising Board-registered subjects effectively reduced costs (i.e. the costs of developing and accrediting work programs for each individual subject versus the costs of developing and implementing SASs?	For schools, the costs of developing SASs may not be so high and especially for one such as Social & Community Studies which contains no VET component. For the Board, the costs of SASs are higher in terms of curriculum development and support for implementation.

Improved value or currency of results

Does the new system of Board-registered subjects mean improved value or currency of results (i.e. with some reference to the "old" system of Board-registered subjects)? Do SASs offer substantial improvement of the standardisation of results in Board-registered subjects?	The standardisation of curriculum documents and the reporting of the detail of VET achievement in Senior Certificates should translate into better recognition by employers and the community of results in these subjects. However, evidence from employer meetings in evaluations of earlier SASs does not support their view that all employers understand or place great weight on VET results. It appears likely that this is true also for Social & Community Studies even though it has no VET components.

A better balance between theory and practice and the convergence of "vocational" and "general" education

Do SASs provide students with an appropriate balance between flexibility to suit local needs and standardisation of quality of subjects? Have the SASs achieved the aim of convergence of "vocational " and "general" education?	The data from Social & Community Studies showed that teachers were generally positive about the flexibility of the SAS. At the same time, our data from this evaluation indicate the importance of using Board workshops to tell teachers about the full extent of flexibility available to them. While teachers were positive also about the balance of practical and theoretical content in this SAS, they indicated that they have some difficulty integrating the two and some question whether the SAS is effective in preparing students for employment.

Improved outcomes for students

Do the new SASs provide students with subjects offering more meaningful knowledge and skills leading to more meaningful outcomes (whether employment, further education and/or personal development)?	This SAS appears to be making a contribution to the task of giving students more meaningful knowledge and skills leading to more meaningful outcomes. There is no evidence, however, that these outcomes lie in the area of employment.

PARTICIPATION AND OUTCOMES IN BOARD-REGISTERED SUBJECTS — OLD AND NEW

In our previous SAS evaluation reports, analyses of participation and outcomes data have been very helpful in answering questions like "What are some of the characteristics of the group of students taking this SAS (e.g. gender, curriculum choices)? Are these characteristics different from the characteristics of students taking other SASs? And what is the distribution of levels of achievement received by students completing this SAS?" The analyses that can be produced using Board data on participation and outcomes can really be considered part of the findings, and so are given in this section.

The discussion that follows is based on data gathered up to the end of 2001. These analyses allow us to understand the patterns of participation in old-style and SAS Board-registered subjects up to the end of last year, and that is important to understanding the big picture for Social & Community Studies.

Participation in Board-registered subjects — old and new

In 1994, before proposals for the rationalisation of old-style Board-registered subjects were developed, over half of senior students took at least one Board-registered subject. Predictably, students who were OP-ineligible were more likely to take more Board-registered subjects; students who did not complete Senior were much more likely to take more Board-registered subjects.

Figures 2 and 3 provide detailed information about enrolment trends in old-style Board-registered subjects from 1987 to 2001 (showing the data in terms of absolute numbers and proportions). Figure 2 shows the number of students enrolled in the various categories of old-style Board-registered subjects. Figure 3 shows these enrolments as proportions of the numbers of students enrolled in old-style Board-registered subjects (for OP-eligible, OP-ineligible and all students). It can be seen, not surprisingly, that the big declines have been in the areas where SASs have been developed. (Old-style Board-registered subjects replaced by the Social & Community Studies SAS have been categorised under "Home Economics".)

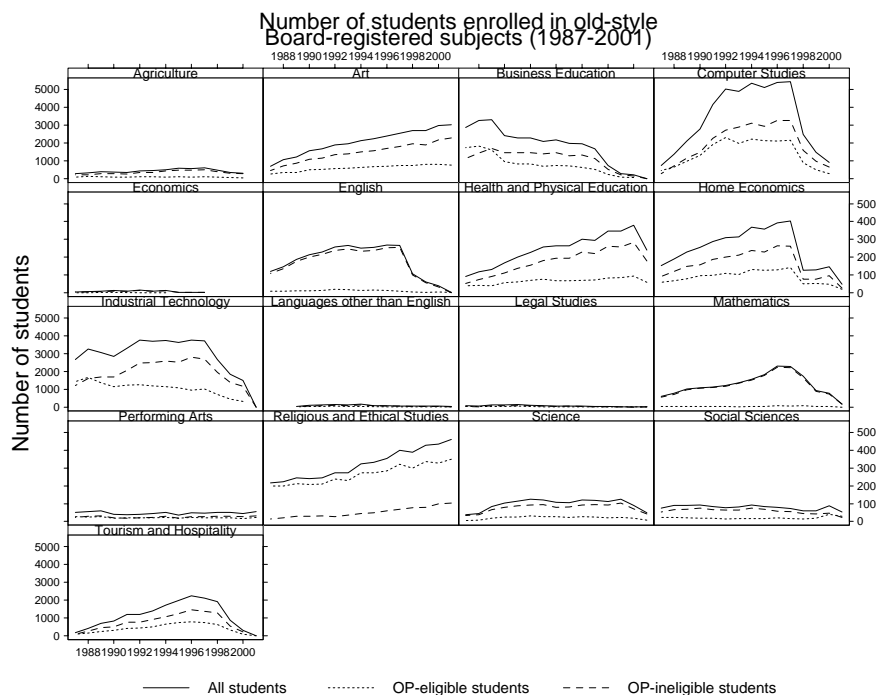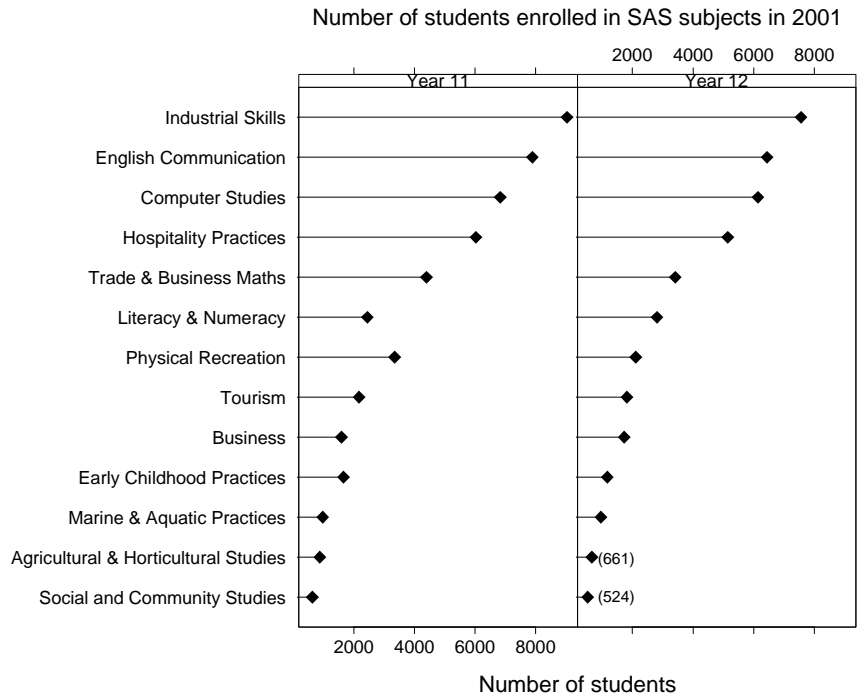**Figure 2: Number of students enrolled in old-style Board-registered subjects (1987–2001)**

Figure 3: Proportion of all students who take old-style Board-registered subjects (1987–2001)

Number of students enrolled in SAS subjects in 2001

Figures 4 and 5 provide detailed information about enrolments and participation in SASs in 2001.

Figure 4: Number of Year 11 and Year 12 students enrolled in SAS subjects in 2001
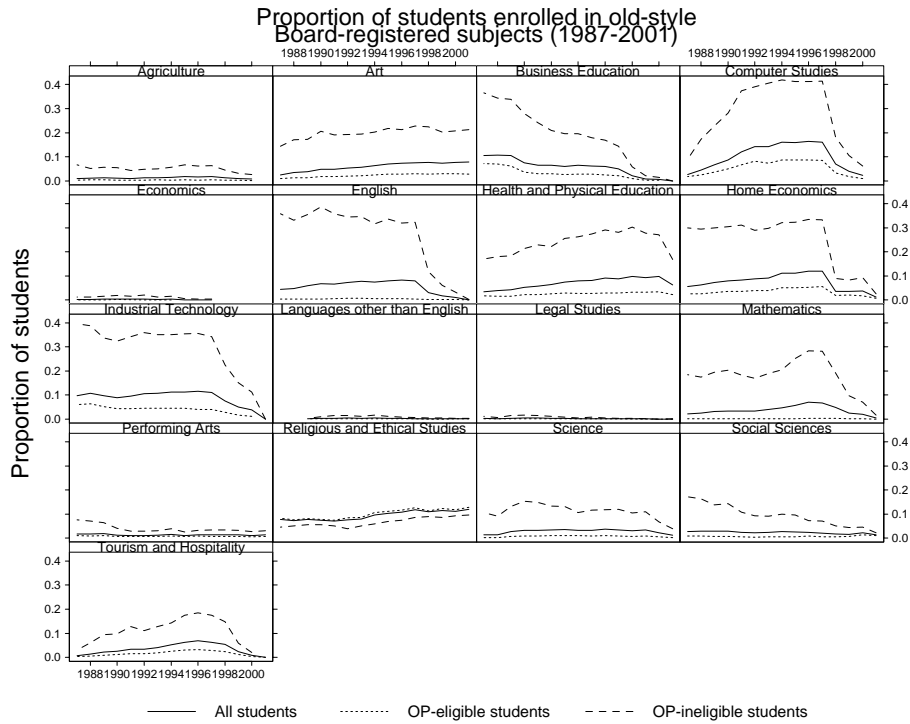

Proportion of students enrolled in old-style Board-registered subjects (1987-2001)

Figure 5: Proportion of SAS students enrolled in particular SAS subjects in 2001

Proportion of SAS students enrolled in SAS subjects in 2001
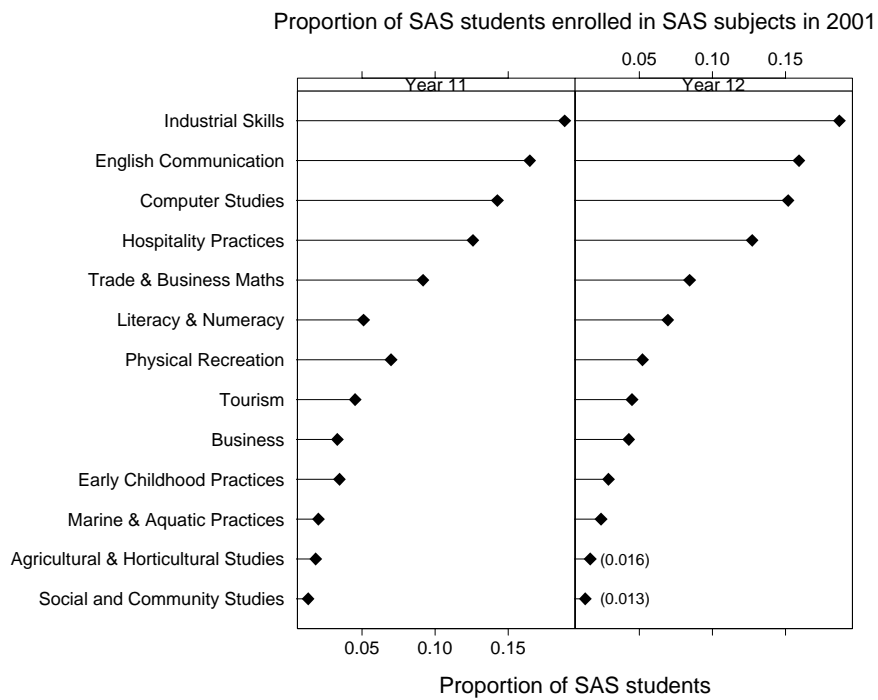
Table 9 gives a count of female and male students enrolled in SAS subjects in 2001. It can be seen that the only SAS with nearly equal numbers of boys and girls is Social & Community Studies. This may be influenced by the two schools requiring all students in Years 11 and 12 to take the subject. In all but four of the remaining SASs enrolment is dominated, to at least some extent, by boys.

Table 9: Count of female and male students in Year 11 and Year 12 enrolled in SAS subjects in 2001

SAS	Year 11			Year 12		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Hospitality Practices	4035	1991	6026	3604	1540	5144
Business	1100	492	1592	1135	595	1730
Agricultural & Horticultural Studies	180	700	880	168	493	661
Industrial Skills	315	8717	9032	261	7301	7562
Tourism	1503	668	2171	1249	568	1817
Computer Studies	2856	3971	6827	2751	3389	6140
English Communication	2696	5191	7887	2259	4181	6440
Trade & Business Mathematics	1600	2794	4394	1360	2052	3412
Literacy & Numeracy	1118	1328	2446	1190	1618	2808
Marine & Aquatic Practices	241	729	970	240	720	960
Physical Recreation	883	2463	3346	516	1592	2108
Early Childhood Practices	1604	53	1657	1144	25	1169
Social & Community Studies	319	313	632	294	230	524

Figures 6 and 7 explore some issues about the characteristics, in terms of curriculum choices, of the group of students taking SASs versus those not taking SASs, as well as differences between those taking the different SASs.

Figure 6 shows that the population of students taking some SASs (Literacy & Numeracy, Trade & Business Mathematics, and English Communication) are a little alike. These three groups do appear different from some other groups of students taking SASs in terms of their curriculum choices; that is, they tend not to enrol in at least one Board subject to a greater extent, and they tend to enrol in the old-style Board-registered subjects to a relatively greater extent than students taking some other SASs. Taken as a whole, students in Social & Community Studies tend to enrol in at least one Board subject to a greater extent than students in most other SASs. This feature of the data may be influenced by the fact mentioned previously that a large proportion of all students taking this SAS in 2001 attend just two schools. (In 2001, this proportion was 64 per cent.)

Figure 6: Proportion of Year 12 students in SASs taking Board/old-style Board- registered subjects in 2001

SAS participation by students in different subject categories (2001)
(base is students in the given category)
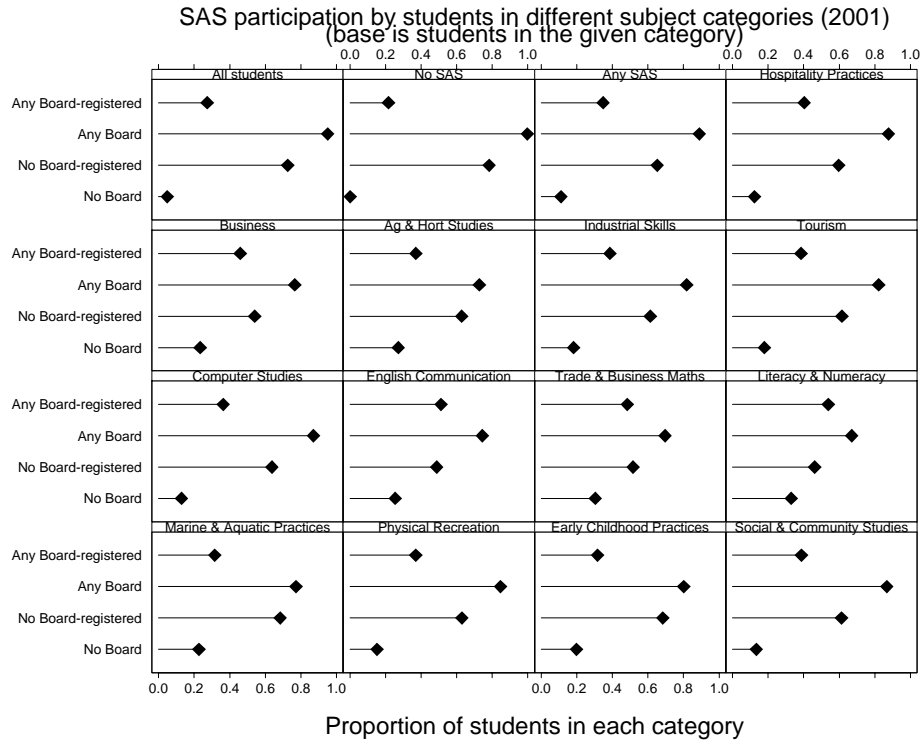
Proportion of students in each category

Figure 7 shows the proportion of students in each SAS category who are taking Board mathematics subjects. We can see again that some SASs really do seem to have different groups of students, in terms of their curriculum choices. For example, in some SASs, higher proportions of students take Mathematics A. However, students taking SASs tend not to take Mathematics C. There are four SASs in which students take Mathematics B to a lesser extent than Social & Community Studies students do — but again, this finding needs to be considered with reference to the fact that so many of the students come from just two schools.

Figure 7: Proportion of Year 12 students in various SASs enrolled in Mathematics A, B, C in 2001

Proportion of Year 12 SAS students taking Mathematics A, B or C in 2001
(base is students in each category)

Proportion of students from each SAS category
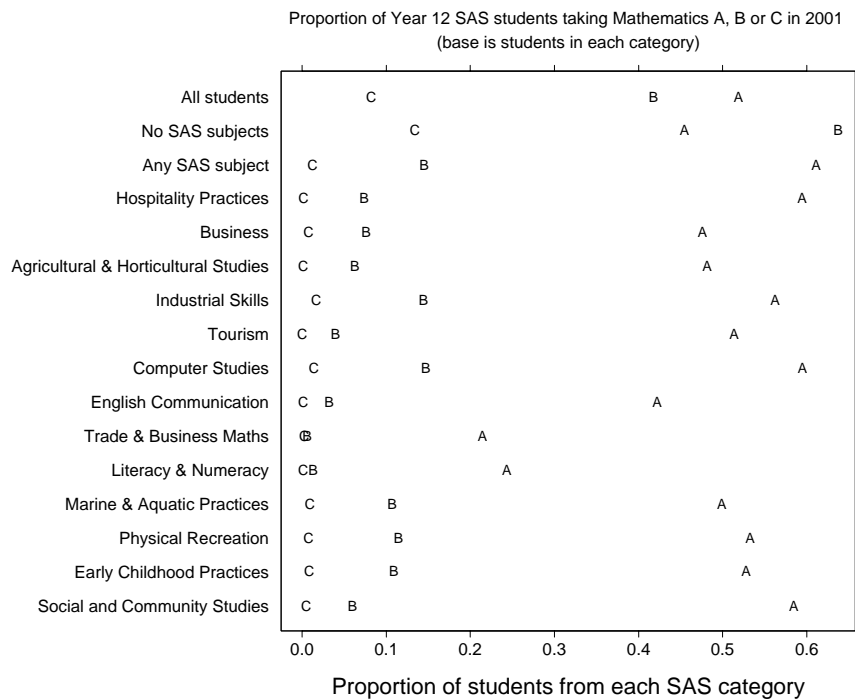
Student outcomes

Figures 8, 9 and 10 show some aspects of data for outcomes in Social & Community Studies, together with data for other SASs. The information shown here may be influenced by the fact that two schools require all students in Years 11 and 12 to take the subject. This may result in Social & Community Studies students as a whole seeming more like the overall population than students in other SASs.

Figure 8 shows the distribution of average levels of achievement in Board subjects for students who are also taking SASs and receiving a level of achievement in these; the figure also summarises the data for this for the old-style Board-registered subjects. The black diamond shows the median point, and the black line shows where most of the data points are. It can be seen, for example, that the group of students receiving a Very High Achievement in Social & Community Studies tend to receive, on average, a Sound Achievement in their Board subjects. Generally speaking, when we look across the SASs, it appears that students who take Board subjects tend not to do as well in their Board subjects as they do in their SAS subjects.

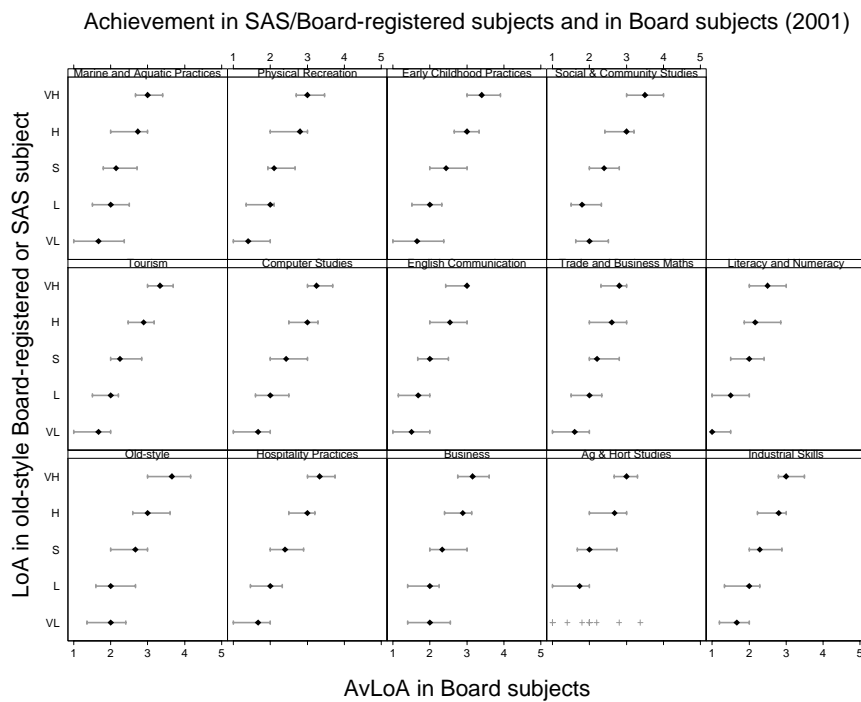**Figure 8: Achievement in SAS/Board-registered subjects and in Board subjects**

Figure 9 shows the extent to which the award of levels of achievement in each SAS was different from the overall distribution of levels of achievement for SAS and non-SAS Board-registered subjects. For example, we can see that, compared with the overall distribution of levels of achievement in all SAS and non-SAS subjects, the group of students taking Social & Community Studies received slightly more Very High Achievements, and about the same High, Sound, Limited and Very Limited Achievements. This seems to be in keeping with data from teachers of Social & Community Studies that this SAS is not too hard or too easy for their students. Social & Community Studies is the SAS in which the distribution of

levels of achievement most closely matches that for all SAS and non-SAS Board-registered subjects.

Figure 9: Amount that the distribution of levels of achievement within each SAS differs from the overall distribution of levels of achievement in all SAS and non-SAS Board-registered subjects in 2001
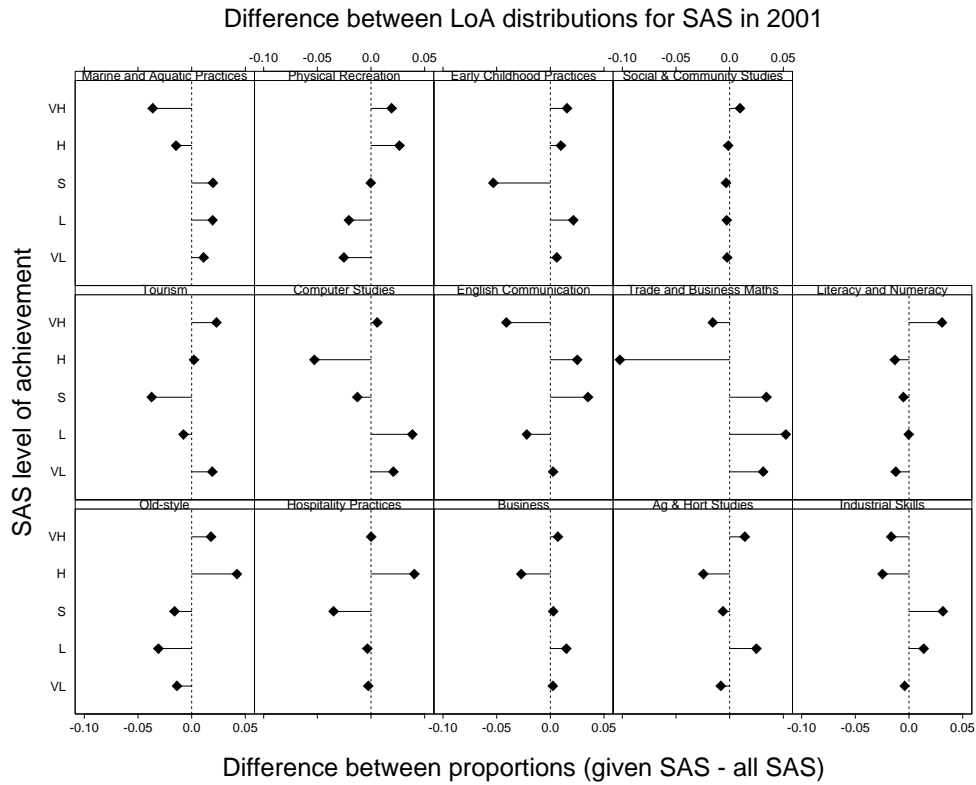

Difference between LoA distributions for SAS in 2001

Difference between proportions (given SAS - all SAS)

Figure 10 provides information for another kind of question about outcomes: "Are OP-eligible students more successful in SAS subjects than OP-ineligible students?" The answer is quite clearly that OP-eligible students taking SASs do receive more of the higher levels of achievement in these practically oriented subjects.

Figure 10: Proportions of SAS levels of achievement for students taking SAS subjects in 2001

Proportions of SAS LoAs for students taking SAS subjects in 2001
(difference between OP-eligible and all students)
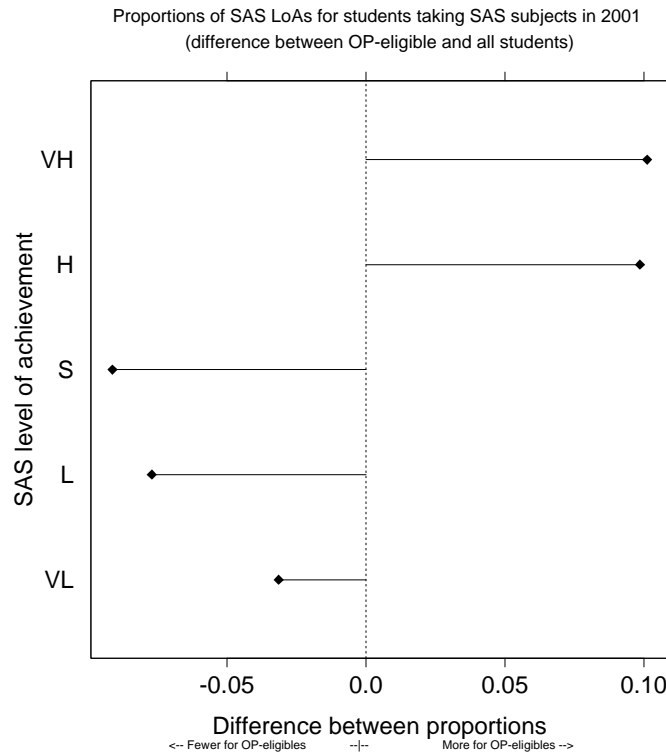
Participation in Social & Community Studies of students with special needs

Figure 11, obtained from the quantitative data provided by the phase 2 instrument, indicates the numbers of students who may have special needs in the classes of responding teachers in Social & Community Studies. It suggests, for example, that there are classes with students who have some form of learning difficulty and classes with students who have special literacy or numeracy learning needs. Some of these students may be in both groups.

A suggestion based on the data shown in figure 11 might be to advise employing authorities that schools should keep classes small so that adequate support can be given by the teacher and perhaps by extra support personnel, and that physical resources provided, such as print materials, need to be suitable for these students.

Figure 11: Number of Social & Community Studies classes with students with special needs
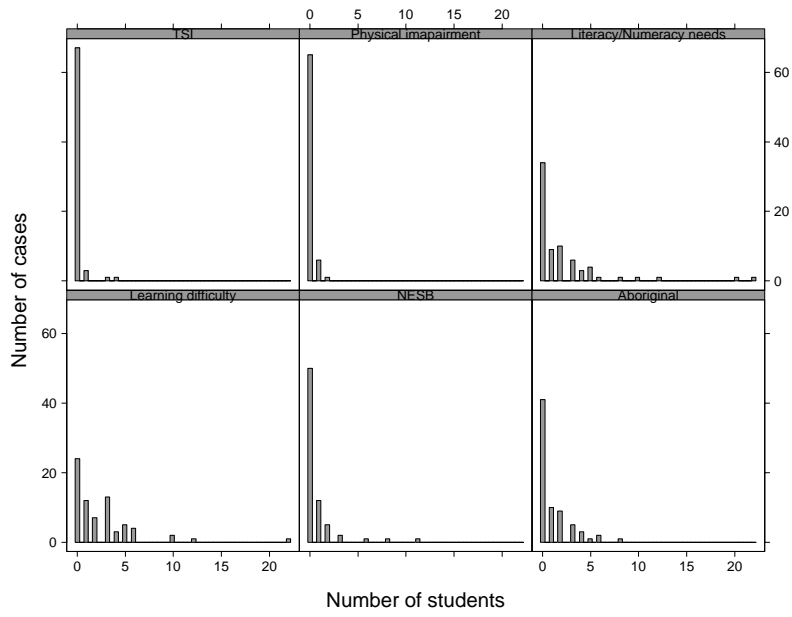
CONCLUSIONS

Teachers have been generally positive about the flexibility of the SAS, about its compatibility with previous special needs learning programs and approaches, and about the extent to which the content can be adapted to the needs of students, including those with special needs. They report that they can develop highly individualised programs catering specifically for individuals and allowing all students to focus on their particular interests. In the area of assessment, however, while teachers indicated that they can design a range of assessment instruments, some would like more advice on how to design and implement the less traditional forms of assessment and some feel uncertain about making decisions about levels of achievement. The challenge of implementing assessment in special-education settings may be a factor in this.

The absence of vocational elements, seen as a positive by teachers implementing this SAS, may mean that the content is accessible to special-needs students who cannot reach AQF level I. This appears to contribute to the flexibility that is seen as a strength of the subject. Both teachers and students thought that the SAS helped students develop knowledge and skills that will be valuable for the future. However, our quantitative data indicated that some teachers were unsure or disagreed that this SAS is valuable for students seeking employment or wishing to complete further studies at TAFE at the end of Year 12.

Data about designing the study plan for this SAS (as for other SASs in open trial in 2000–2001) suggest the value of reviewing both the design of the Form R9 and the support for teachers in this area.

While comments about resources were generally negative in phase 1, it appears that teachers were broadly satisfied by phase 2. Teacher comments, particularly in phase 1, indicated that they need a range of print and electronic texts and materials. In both phases, teachers indicated that they need more time for planning and implementing the SAS. Other issues that caused early difficulties for some teachers are school timetabling and class size but, in most cases, these seemed to have been resolved by phase 3.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations that follow are those that our data support.

The recommendations are:

R.1 That the SAS be revised to include more explanation of the key concepts of criteria-and-standards-based assessment, and principles and strategies for special consideration and special arrangements.

R.2 That the Office of the Board consider revising the Form R9 for this SAS as indicated by the evaluation.

R.3. That the Office of the Board review the strategies and processes in place for providing teachers with support for the development of study plans.

R.4 That employing authorities be advised of the resourcing issues for this SAS.

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DATA ANALYSIS

The effectiveness of the SAS for teachers

The language of the SAS

How well does the SAS communicate its intentions to teachers?

Overall

Teachers have been generally positive in their comments about the clarity of the Social & Community Studies SAS document. However, in phase 1 some expressed uncertainties about the Board's requirements and this may be because for some of them this may have been their first experience of teaching curriculum with criteria-based assessment developed by the Board.

Other negative comments arose from a perceived lack of clarity about the following:

- the extent of flexibility allowed by the SAS
- the specificity and depth of treatment of content that is expected
- the specific requirements for assessment.

Phase 1

Teacher responses were mostly positive in relation to the SAS curriculum document. The positive comments took the following form:

- positive comments that referred approvingly to the compatibility of the content of the SAS and previous learning programs, including special education programs (some teachers); one teacher reported: "our school has had a subject like this for many years; this SAS 'formalises' our school subject"; Another teacher noted: "it is a flexible program that allows special education unit students to achieve"; three teachers from three schools said that the absence of VET in the SAS gave them real "elbow room", commenting positively about the support they have had from the Board, and adding that the SAS and the reporting of results on the Senior Certificate really "legitimate what our students can achieve"
- approving comments about the clarity of the messages about how to teach the SAS, as they relate to variety of assessment techniques, and ideas for topics and electives (some teachers)
- approving comments about the simplicity of the writing and clarity of the structure in the SAS curriculum document (some teachers)
- positive comments about the flexibility of assessment requirements (a few teachers); one teacher said that "… all students have passed. There is a lot of oral assessment (students can't read). If students complete a project, teachers see this as observational evidence of meeting criteria"
- positive comments about the clarity in relation to the scope for flexibility the document gives teachers (two teachers); one teacher said: "I think it is very clear and its strength is its flexibility. Most of my difficulties thus far have been in adjusting my own preconceived ideas and methods"; another teacher noted that "material/electives is to be selected to meet students' needs".

There were comments that indicated uncertainty about:

- the Board's assessment and other requirements, most often apparently a function of teachers not having had much contact with the Board in their previous teaching career (some teachers); one teacher said that the SAS "document appeared to be clear concerning assessment, but advice from the Board was not"; another teacher noted: "We are mostly not clear on the Board processes, particularly curriculum documentation, assessment procedures. There may be others when we get our heads around these basic things but our initial need is to get up to speed on these processes"; one teacher was uncertain about the exit criteria in particular; another teacher stated that "as we have only been teaching this subject for several weeks, it is too early to determine if our understanding of the document translates well into the Board's understandings"
- what the term "resource management" means, its definition and requirements (two teachers)
- the extent of flexibility of the SAS document (one teacher); this teacher said she "did not clearly understand that the key ideas were suggestions only" and that teachers had scope to "pick and choose those most appropriate to the clientele", having supposed that "all key ideas needed to be chosen".
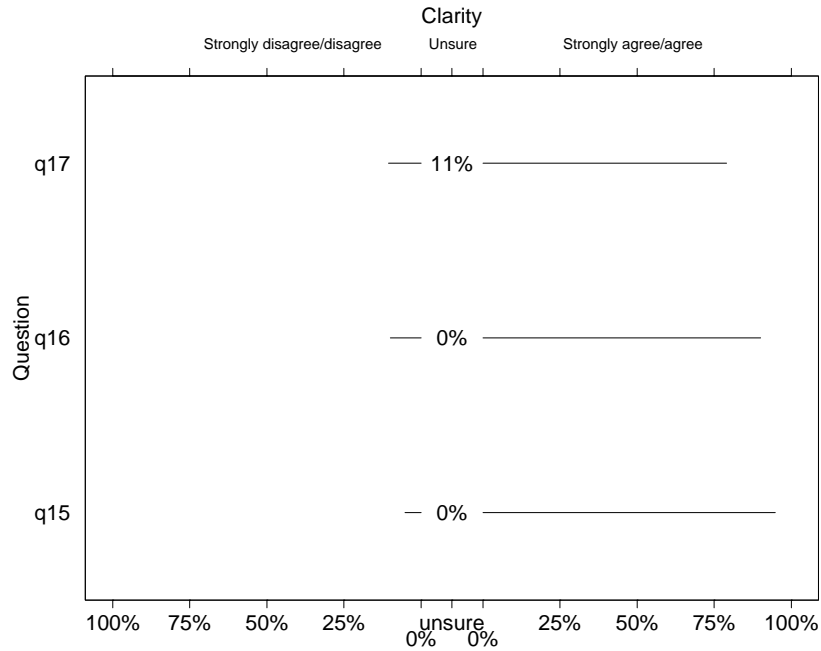
Phase 2

In phase 2, comments again indicated general satisfaction with the document. More than half of the teachers who responded felt that the document was clear. However, one teacher found that the language of the SAS was poor, unclear and wordy. Other negative comments were few and related to:

- a lack of clarity about the balance between theory and practical work such as community projects (one teacher)
- a need for more advice about the specificity and depth of treatment of content that is required (one teacher)
- a need for more specific information about aspects of assessment
- a lack of clear information about giving students repeated attempts to demonstrate competency (one teacher)
- a request that the SAS document could be more helpful (two teachers).

Our quantitative data from phase 2 (see appendix B for the research instrument) provide some confirmation of these views. Figure 12 suggests that the responding teachers felt that learning outcomes are clearly stated in the SAS but a small number were not so certain that information about assessment is clear and concise (Q15, Q16). Some were unsure or disagreed that the human and physical resources for implementing this SAS are clearly explained (Q17).

**Figure 12: Degree of clarity of the SAS document**

Phase 3

Teachers have, in the main, responded positively to the SAS document. Almost all the responding teachers agreed that the document is easy to use (Q2) and about two-thirds of them agreed that it adequately defined for them the kinds of learning experiences that should be included in the program of study (Q3). More than two-thirds of the teachers agreed that the SAS is easy to teach (Q4). It appears that the majority of teachers have found this SAS to be one that adequately defines the kinds of learning experiences that should be offered to students and one that can be used to generate a program of study that is relatively easy to teach.

Figure 13 from the phase 3 quantitative data (see appendix B for the research instrument) shows that many of the teachers who responded to the survey were of the opinion that the document provides a sound basis for teaching the subject, although about one-quarter disagreed with this (Q1).

Figure 13: Effectiveness of the SAS for teachers
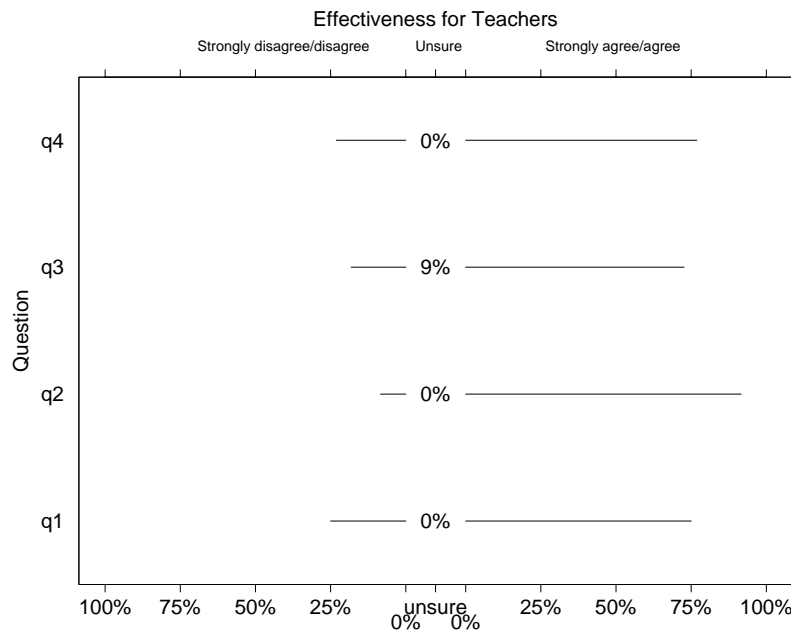
The internal integrity of the SAS

How good is the internal consistency of components of the SAS?

Overall

Comments about how the parts of the curriculum document fits together were generally positive, largely, it seems, because of the perceived flexibility of the SAS. This flexibility allows teachers to make learning programs that have a logical consistency for their own students and that can be adapted to meet the needs of individual students.

Positive comments about how well the core and elective components fit together were consistent through phases 1 & 2. Teachers also felt that the document allowed them to integrate the core and elective elements of the SAS successfully.

Phase 1

Comments about the internal consistency of components of the SAS, including how well the core fits with electives were (with only two exceptions) entirely positive. Teachers' positive comments about this aspect of the SAS related to:

- the nature of the content, and its close relationship to previous special education learning programs (some teachers); one teacher commented: "the core of life roles, personal management, relationships, self-esteem and self-care along with fitting the community … has always been the core of special school curriculum and student needs. We have been 'into this' for years … It is *functional* learning"
- the complementary nature of the core and elective subject content (some teachers); one teacher told us: "The core is easily integrated with all electives. We have organised the core elements of the subject [as] a series of learning routines within the elective units"

- the flexibility of the SAS which allows programs to be tailor made to meet the needs of particular students while offering a useful framework within which these individual needs can be met, and individualised teaching can occur (some teachers)
- the scope that the SAS gives teachers to revise and repeat specific content (one teacher).

The comments of the two teachers who were less than entirely positive related to uncertainty about how to integrate the core with the electives. One teacher said: "[I] like the idea of integrating core with electives. Not sure whether core needs to be assessed separately to electives". The second teacher said that "[I am] starting to see how they fit together now, but need a fairly solid understanding of core before integration occurs easily — just a time issue".

Phase 2

A few teachers commented on the close relationship between the core and the electives as being a strength of the SAS. Two teachers indicated some uncertainty about this.

Our phase 2 quantitative data (see appendix B for the research instrument) show that teachers agreed they have found that the core provides a useful basis for the sequence of work (Q18).

The content of the SAS

How suitable is the breadth and depth of each of the strands?

What is the nature and appropriateness of the content of the SAS?

Overall

Comments about content were mostly positive, once again largely due to the perceived flexibility of the SAS. Teachers were positive about the extent to which the content can be adapted and individualised according to the needs of their students, including students with special needs. They were generally of the view that the subject has the capacity to engage students and allow them to follow up their own interests. Content that seems to have been not so successful in programs of study is content that is theoretical and content that involves research activities or that requires self-motivation.

Although some teachers cited the lack of vocational components in the SAS as a positive it was interesting that the quantitative data in phase 2 indicated that more than one-third of the responding teachers were unsure or disagreed that this SAS is valuable for students seeking employment or wishing to complete further studies at TAFE at the end of Year 12.

Teachers offered little criticism of the aims and objectives of the SAS, although individual comments focused on the need to teach communication and to emphasise self-development and personal growth. Suggestions for changing the content of the SAS included the addition of more practical and work-related content such as work experience, planning for work placement and the acceptance of qualifications certificates awarded to students by other bodies, such as certificates for self-defence, defensive driving, and Duke of Edinburgh awards. There were no suggestions for content that should be omitted, although the necessity for the quantity of theoretical content now included was questioned.

Phase 1

The comments on the content of the SAS (in response to an item on the research instrument asking teachers to write about "How well the content meets the needs of your students") were positive, with only two exceptions (which did not appear to be strongly negative).

Teachers' positive comments focused strongly on the functional lifeskills nature of the content and were of the following nature.

- Positive comments about the content that relate to its relevance, flexibility and the extent to which the content can be moulded to meet the needs and interests of students, particularly students in special-education settings, who have different and highly individual learning needs (most teachers). For example, one teacher commented: "It is flexible enough for us to design a responsive learning program for addressing our students' interests and life aims"; another teacher said: "This meets the needs of our present curriculum being based on social and lifeskills so well and gives a framework to broaden goals or develop learning within particular goals to be evaluated. Again, the content fits the functional learning and meets the students where they are at because the teacher [can] implement the content to fit". Another teacher noted that "the electives allow for a wide choice by both students and teachers — content is interesting and relevant … core areas are very specific and can be incorporated into the electives and an outcomes-based model". In teacher comments of this kind there are also a few references to how the content is not only compatible with the previous content of special education learning programs, but also that the content of the SAS fits well with other structures and strategies of special education programs such as individualised education programs (IEPs).
- Positive comments about the variety of the content and the extent to which it can engage students in learning (some teachers).

The two possibly negative comments related to quite different things. One teacher observed: "The content can be adapted to meet the needs of all students. However, this may require you to submit multiple R9s". Presently we do not have enough information to say whether other teachers feel this is the case; it appears not, as our other comments indicated quite strong support for the idea that the one Form R9 submitted for this SAS allows a program of learning that can meet different individual student needs. Future research should provide more information on this.

The second negative comment was possibly neutral. This teacher observed that the content is "okay", adding that "it must be remembered that some units suggested overlap with other subject areas". Again, future phases of the evaluation should reveal whether teachers feel there is too much overlap between components of this SAS (although the teacher could have been referring to overlap with the content of other subjects).

Phase 2

In phase 2 most teachers indicated that they saw this SAS as interesting and relevant to a wide range of students from the very capable students to those "who have language and literacy problems". Many said that the SAS is suitable for lower-ability students who have learning difficulties.

The absence of vocational components was seen as a positive.

Many responses indicated that teachers and students were happy with the level

of flexibility possible, commenting that this was the greatest strength of the SAS and that this flexibility allowed them to design a program of study that suits their students. Some teachers cited as a strength the opportunity that the SAS offers for students to "follow their interests within a framework". One teacher, however, was unsure about the appropriate balance between practice and theory. One suggested that there seemed to be too much theory in the SAS and that more guidance was needed on the practical elements, such as what could be done in community services and in personal development. Another asked for more practical activities or projects.

One teacher suggested that there be some emphasis on critical literacy and social critique in the SAS. Some suggestions for additional elective material were:

- an additional art-based elective to allow students to take up one of these in each year of the course
- a focus on Australian mythology to "give students a more focused evaluation of where we 'fit' in the world through discovering our past"
- a focus on drug use in society so that students are more informed (suggested by students)
- activities focusing on self-defence to increase confidence and improve concentration (suggested by students).

It was clear that teachers felt that nothing should be removed from the SAS.

Figure 14 from our phase 2 quantitative data indicates that in half of the aspects surveyed responding teachers have positive perceptions about the suitability of the content of the SAS for their students. Almost half were uncertain that the SAS is more relevant to their students than the subject it replaced (Q24).

Figure 14: Teacher perceptions about the content of the SAS in phase 2
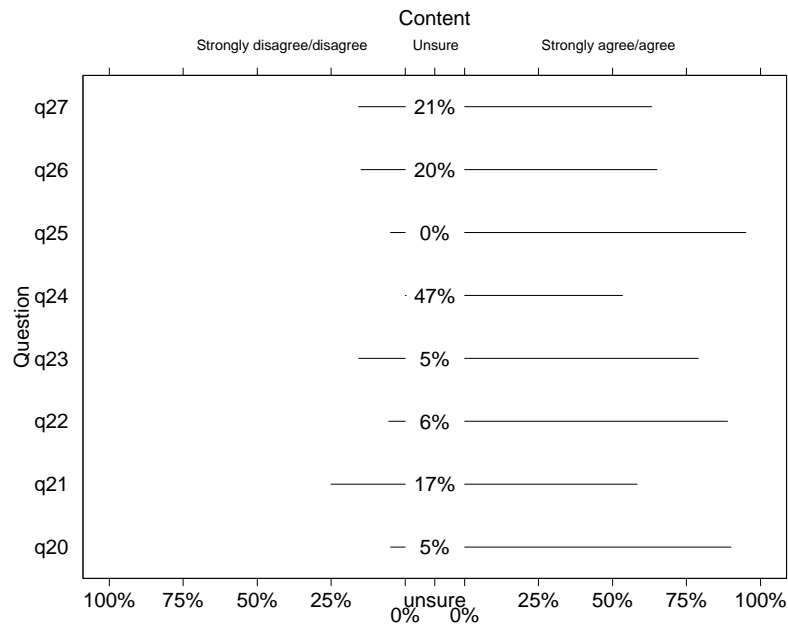
Of interest are the views of a significant number of responding teachers who were unsure or disagreed that the content of this subject is valuable for students seeking employment at the end of Year 12 (Q26). A similar number were unsure or disagreed that the content of this subject is valuable for students wishing to

complete further studies at TAFE at the end of Year 12 (Q27).

Phase 3

At this stage of the trial, teachers seemed to have developed a clear view of what would work for their students in this SAS. They were definite in their comments about the need for the units and activities to be highly practical and "hands-on". The electives they referred to as being most successful were those related to the students' personal needs, for example, 5.3 How to be a discerning consumer, 5.4 Legally it could be you, 5.5 Health, recreation and leisure — get a life!, 5.6 Personal economics – money management, 5.9 The world of work, and 5.14 Food, nutrition and the community. Other successful activities included driver education, lessons in self-defence, community service, work experience, action research, visits to community organisations, and invited guest speakers.

As in the previous phases, favourable comments about the SAS focused on its "ample flexibility" to cater for the range of students. One teacher expressed appreciation for the way in which the program of study could be modified for the Special Education Unit students, allowing them to achieve some success, and another commented favourably on the life skills content that is appropriate to the clientele of the subject. For one school, the program allowed students time to participate in traineeships, and in another school there was some integration of the work for Certificates I and II in Workplace Learning. Another teacher successfully incorporated current affairs into the school program of study.

Teachers also identified content that has not been so successful. This included theory or "academic work", units containing a large research component, units requiring self-motivation, and units dealing with social issues. Individual teachers mentioned as being unpopular or having concepts that are too difficult for their students: 5.4 Legally it could be you, 5.8 Gender studies — the way we are, and 5.10 Industrial relations. One teacher said that sections that include citizenship skills were not as effective as they should be because "most of our clients can't see the point of community participation; they have little concept of the wider world around them and how it affects them". Another said that assessment tasks that required report writing or oral presentation were difficult for many of their students.

Despite these criticisms, there were favourable comments about the "broad range of topics covered" and about the "flexible and reasonable" nature of the SAS. One teacher said that it is "up to the teacher to relate materials to students".

Responses to the request for suggestions for additional content that should be included in the SAS were not extensive and a few teachers said there were diverse choices already available in the SAS. However, additional content suggested included work experience and planning for work placement, more on Aboriginal studies, and more practical lifeskills-based content, e.g. certificates awarded for self-defence courses, driving courses, and Duke of Edinburgh awards.

There were no suggestions for content to be omitted from the SAS. In fact, four teachers commented that the nature of the SAS makes it possible to tailor a course from the SAS that suits the students of the school. Nevertheless, one pointed out that although some theoretical basis is needed for the subject, the amount of theory and the nature of the content overwhelms many students.

Teachers who responded to the survey offered little criticism of the aims and objectives of the SAS, although one pointed out that some affective objectives are not really implemented and another said that the aims and objectives of the SAS

cannot be achieved without teaching communication. One commented that the emphasis in the SAS on self-development and personal growth needs to be continually promoted to students by means of regular self-evaluation and peer evaluation. One said: "Our program caters for the aims and objectives of the syllabus document but many students fail to embrace them, e.g. cultural diversity, self-management".

Figure 15 from the quantitative data for phase 3 (see appendix B for the research instrument) goes some way to confirming these views about the relationship between the content and the aims and objectives of the SAS. Three-quarters of the teachers who responded agreed that the content of the subject meets the stated aims and objectives of the SAS (Q6, Q7). Similarly, three-quarters of the teachers agreed that the content of the SAS is equally suited to both male and female students (Q8).

Figure 15: Teacher perceptions about the content of the SAS in phase 3
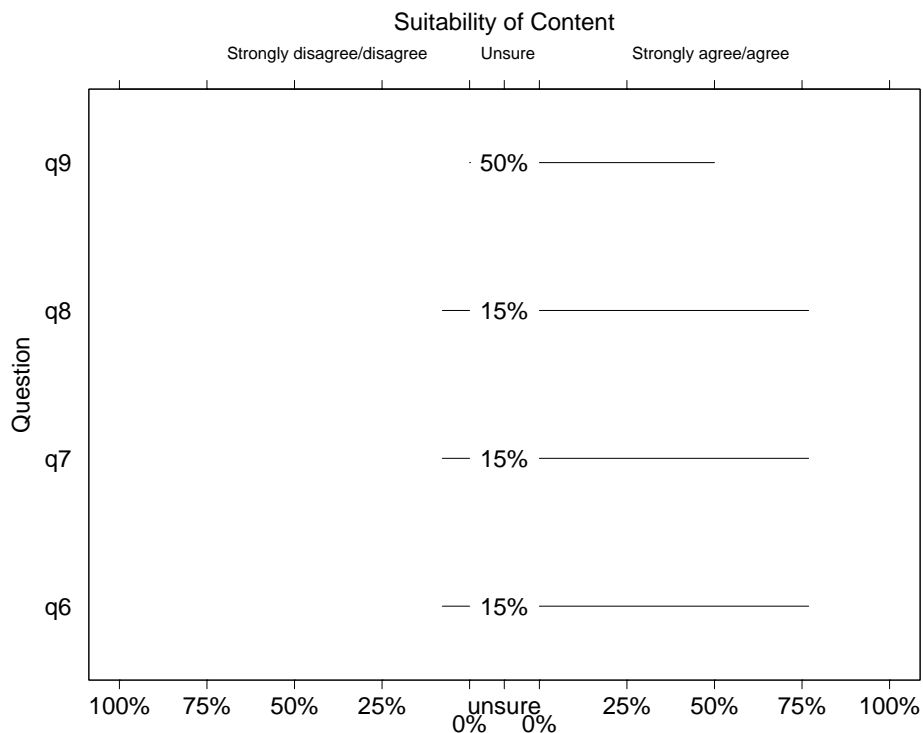
Development of study plans using the SAS

Can teachers translate the SAS into effective study plans?

Overall

Comments about writing the study plan were not generally as positive as comments about the SAS itself, although phase 2 comments suggest that some of the earlier difficulties had been dealt with. The difficulties appeared to relate firstly to the perception that the Form R9 was less flexible than the SAS, and secondly to some teachers' lack of familiarity with Board processes; and then, for special education teachers especially, the ever-changing situation for which they must cater.

Some teachers reported that they had found the process of developing the study

plan difficult. However, in phase 2, a majority of teachers indicated that the study plan provided a reasonably useful basis for their teaching of the SAS. Workshops and support from the Board were appreciated. Despite this, the quantitative data indicated that about one-third of the responding teachers disagreed or were unsure that the Board provided useful feedback and support during the development and approval of their study plan.

The kind of support that teachers said they might find helpful included listing in the document a greater number of useful resources and contacts, and provision (by means of more workshops and the internet) of examples of previously successful units, assessment activities and resources. An analysis by the research team of the accredited study plans suggested that all the electives offered provide useful content, and that those dealing with practical skills have been the most successful for programs of study.

Phase 1

Teacher comments tended to be more negative about the study plan (as opposed to the SAS itself). These comments may indicate a need for the Board to rethink whether the present design of the Form R9 actually meets the needs of teachers in this SAS.

Negative comments about study plans had the following nature.

- Comments that the Form R9 itself (not the SAS document) did not work well for teachers (some teachers). For example, one teacher commented that "the study plan (R9) is designed for vocational programs and needs to be adapted for this subject and modified on a regular basis". Another teacher commented that: "there are some difficulties in allowing for … flexibility in writing … on the R9, and it will probably be upgraded and modified to meet teacher and student needs". Another teacher commented that developing the study plan had been "impossible — the SAS is extremely flexible but the study plan documents aren't". A further comment put the problem with the Form R9 in this way: "[It is] difficult to map the flexibility of the course as a structured study plan … have to include lots of attachments".

- Comments that writing the Form R9 was difficult (again, these comments did not appear to be related to perceived deficiencies in the SAS document itself) (one teacher). This teacher reported that: "non–high-school-trained teachers have difficulty writing the R9. Planning ahead for two years is difficult. Found writing R9 was time consuming (difficulties with assessment tools)".

Three other teachers said they were not able to offer much information about the Form R9 as they were in the process of writing it and still felt "in the dark".

Another teacher observed that the Form R9 "was okay to produce. However, as it was written without a knowledge of the clientele it will probably have to be rewritten at the end of 2000 with the new copy sent to you". This captures the flavour of negative comments about the Form R9; learning in special-education settings is constantly changing and, while it seems from our early data that the SAS document allows this kind of flexibility, for some teachers (about a third in our data) the process of filling in the Form R9 does not.

However, juxtaposed against these comments are the comments of about a third of our responding teachers in phase 1 who made only positive comments about the process of filling in the Form R9. A few of these teachers made reference to the usefulness of the SAS curriculum document as a basis for developing the study

plan. For example, one teacher observed that the study plan had "made planning a wide variety of learning activities that incorporate a myriad of social knowledges and skills relatively straightforward". Another teacher in this group of positive respondents noted that the school was "still working on a study plan; however, the SAS document is clear and helpful. It is a good basis to work from". One teacher offered this comment: "Needed in-service to understand this process — in-service was spot on and at the right time (before study plan was due!)".

Phase 2

More than half of those who responded to the relevant question on the survey form indicated their satisfaction with the process of developing the study plan although this may reflect the fact that the difficulties of the process were behind them. Support from the Board was appreciated.

Almost all responses indicated that the study plan provided a reasonably useful basis for their teaching of the SAS. Two made the point that the plan could be changed at any time in response to student needs. The only negative comments were from a teacher who was not happy with the options that teachers were taking since the development of the study plan because these did not reflect the original intentions. Another felt that it was still too early to be sure of the success of the study plan.

Figure 16 from the quantitative data of phase 2 supplements these written comments and indicates teachers' general satisfaction with the study plans and their production. However, about one-third of the responding teachers were unsure or disagreed that the Board provided useful feedback and support during the process of development and approval of their study plans (Q30).

Figure 16: Teacher satisfaction with study plans and their development in phase 2
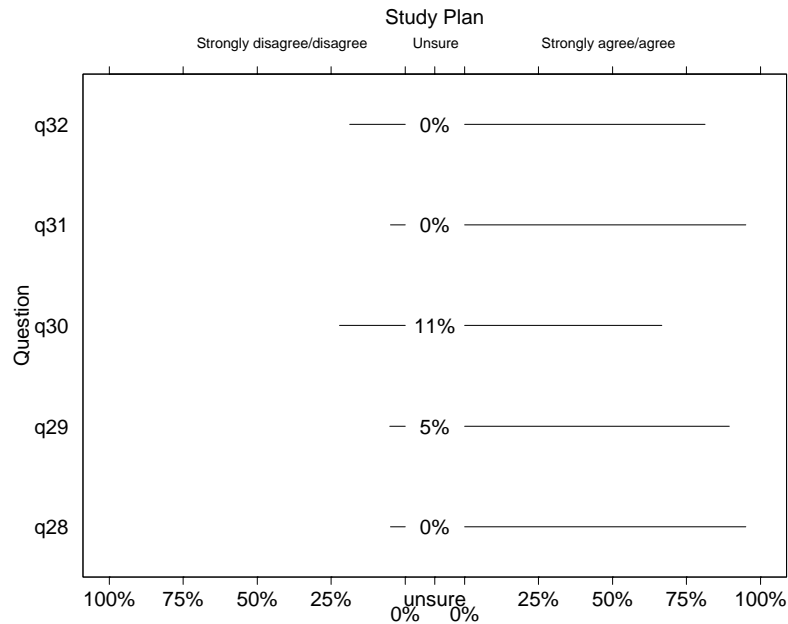
Phase 3

In phase 3, the evaluation team made an analysis of the study plans developed from the SAS in order to gain some idea of the nature of the school programs of study that were developed and to identify the electives that were most and least successful.

The SAS allows schools to choose between four and ten electives, and to allocate between 20 and 50 hours to each of these. A review of accredited study plans indicated that each elective ranged from 14 to 50 hours. Most commonly however, schools spent about 20 hours on an elective. About half of the schools had developed and included a school-based elective. These were also most commonly of about 20 hours duration, the longest being 30 hours.

All electives included in the SAS had been selected by at least some schools. Those chosen most frequently were 5.4 Legally it could be you, 5.6 Personal economics — money management, and 5.9 The world of work, indicating that schools find these practical life skills electives useful for their students. The least popular electives appeared to be 5.12 The arts and the community, 5.15 Science and technology, and 5.10 Industrial relations.

Some schools gave details of their school-based elective. They included units on how to select, enrol in and attend a TAFE course (two schools), driver education (two schools), maintenance and driving a car, the Short Course in the Australian Constitution, a school-to-work transition program, a personal journal and preparation for the St John Ambulance Certificate in Senior First Aid.

When teachers were asked what advice in the SAS or what further support from the Board could be provided, one teacher suggested that the SAS should encourage schools to be flexible in the development of the school program of study so that it can be student-centred and meet the needs of the school clientele. Other suggestions were that a greater number of useful resources and contacts should be

listed, that examples of units, assessment activities and resources that have worked in other programs of study should be provided in Board workshops and on the internet. Teachers also indicated a need for more in-service training and greater contact with the review officers.

Figure 17 from the quantitative data of phase 3 (see appendix B for research instrument) provides some confirmation for these comments. The responses showed that three-quarters of the teachers agreed that the study plan provided a useful basis for the teaching of the subject, and that the information in the SAS document is clear and simple and is adequate for the development and accreditation of a study plan (Q10, Q11, Q12). The teachers who responded were less positive about the support and advice provided by the Board. More than two-thirds disagreed or were unsure that Board workshops dealt adequately with the development of study plans, that they had had enough face-to-face contact with officers from the Board when they were developing the study plan or that Board support for the process was adequate (Q13, Q14, Q16). Their concerns were reflected even more clearly in their responses to the statement that they had been able to attend enough workshops in the development of the study plan (Q15). More than three-quarters disagreed with or were unsure about this statement.

Figure 17: Teacher satisfaction with study plans and their development in phase 3
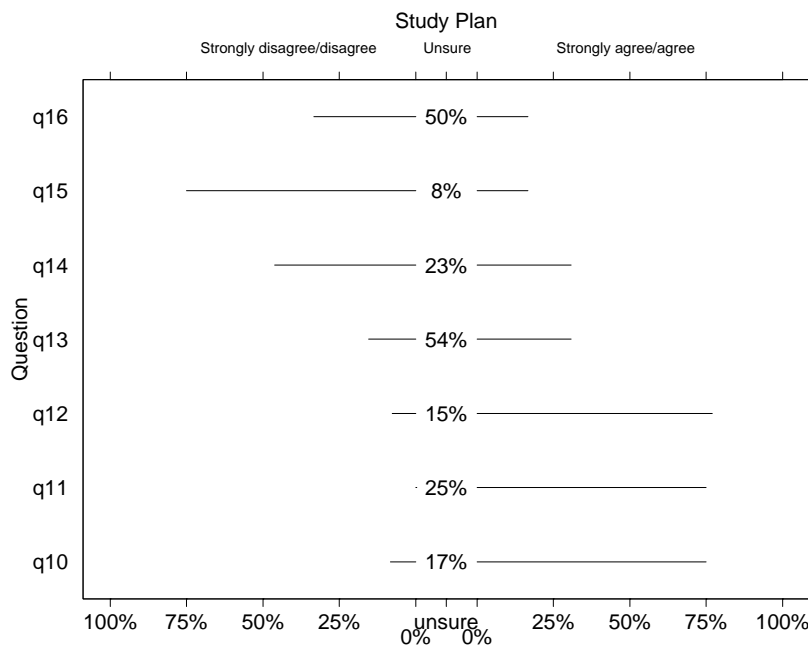
Development of learning experiences using the SAS

How useful is the SAS for teachers providing worthwhile learning experiences for students in the context of the trial schools?

Overall

Comments about the SAS as a basis for developing learning experiences were consistently positive throughout phases 1 & 2. Teachers commented favourably

again on the flexibility of the SAS and the extent to which it promoted a variety of practical, community-based learning experiences. However, phase 1 comments include the suggestion that the success of the SAS depends on the expertise and experience of the teacher to exploit the flexibility permitted by the document. Some teachers disagreed or were unsure that work experience in the local community could be easily organised.

Phase 1

The comments obtained in phase 1 were mostly positive in response to item 7 on the research instrument asking teachers to comment on "the strengths and weaknesses of the SAS as a basis for developing worthwhile learning experiences for students" (see appendix B).

Positive comments about the SAS as a basis for learning experiences were as follows:

- Learning experiences developed from the SAS are functional, practical, community-based, compatible with special-education aims, relevant to individual student needs, and prepare students for roles in the community and the workforce (some teachers); one teacher commented that the SAS allows for "a local community influence which of course adds relevance and interest … the experiences offered/included allow the teacher(s) implementing the program to work with a good deal of creativity [to meet] individual strengths and weaknesses". Another teacher told us that "life-related electives are making it easy to develop life-related learning experiences".

- The flexibility of the SAS and the scope it offers teachers to use their professional skills to develop learning experiences (some teachers); for example, one teacher said that the SAS allows "flexibility of presentation and assessment. This is obviously of great assistance to students". Another teacher pointed out: "I found I could pick and choose from those [electives] presented in the SAS and develop suitable strategies for our students (every area of the program was simplified to a level suitable for special school students)". Another teacher noted that the SAS is "not overly restrictive in requirements, yet does have an accountability".

As for other SAS evaluations, there are teachers who see as a weakness what other teachers find a strength of a curriculum document. Two teachers commented that the success of the SAS was really conditional on the experience of the teacher; it is possible that these teachers would argue that the document does not help less experienced teachers enough, or does not give these teachers enough "structure". One of these teachers commented that learning experiences are "really left up to the teacher. This then means that an inexperienced teacher would find this difficult". The second teacher making this kind of comment added that the SAS "will be beneficial if the teacher has the expertise". However, apart from these qualifications, there were no negative indications in teacher comments in this area in phase 1.

Phase 2

In phase 2 responses indicated that teachers and students were happy with the level of flexibility possible, one commenting that this was the greatest strength of the SAS. One teacher felt it was well suited to students with special needs and that it was easy to administer because it had no vocational components.

One teacher reported that learning experiences were difficult to develop but the remainder were of the view that "varied practical experiences could be developed" and that "there is great scope for students to be challenged and stimulated".

Responses were mixed about the ease of arranging work experience for students but all who commented indicated that industry experience was worthwhile for students. One teacher pointed out that, in some cases, the level of support needed by some of the students made these placements difficult to organise.

The quantitative data for phase 2 support these comments, as shown in figure 18. This figure also suggests that although about two-thirds of the responding teachers agreed that their students could gain meaningful learning experiences from work experience (Q35), well over one-third of them disagreed or were unsure that work experience in the local community could easily be organised (Q36).

Figure 18: Teachers' opinions about the development of worthwhile learning experiences
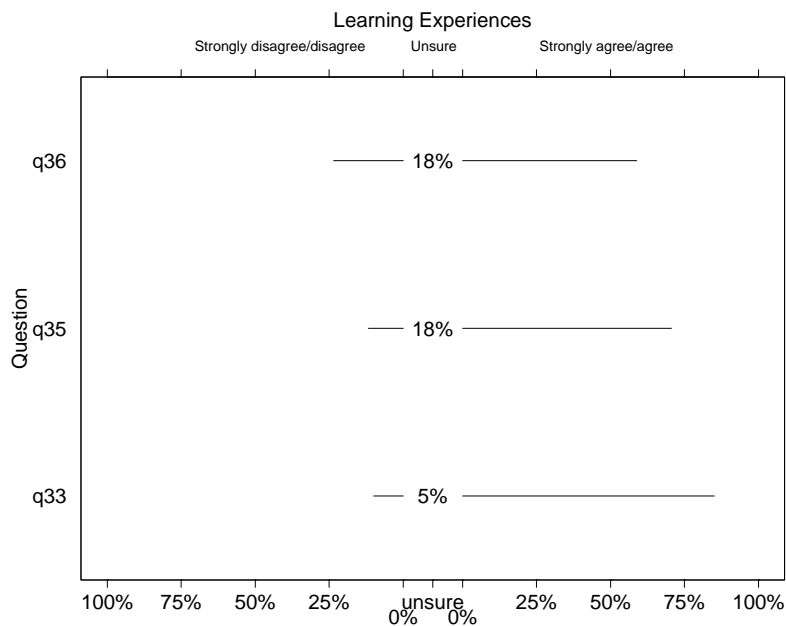
Assessment and the SAS

How well developed, clarified and appropriate are the criteria and standards of assessment for the SAS? How well do schools combine summative information to make decisions about achievement in each criterion in the SAS? How useful is this SAS for teachers making valid and reliable assessments of students' achievements?

Overall

The comments about assessment were mixed. Positive comments focused once again on the flexibility of the SAS and suggested that the exit criteria are clearly written, appropriate and useable. In phase 2, a majority of teachers were finding it possible to design assessment tasks to suit the particular needs of their students and reported that criteria sheets and marking schemes were easy to develop, apply and interpret. However, some teachers were uncertain about their success in making decisions about levels of achievement. A factor in this uncertainty may be the challenge of implementing assessment in special-education settings.

In phase 3, teachers appeared to have become more positive in their views on assessment and in particular, more confident about making assessment decisions. However, it appears that although teachers are happy to exploit the flexibility of the SAS and adapt the assessment to student needs, some have difficulty in designing the less formal and less traditional tasks that may be most suited to their students and to this SAS, and would benefit from further assistance with these.

Phase 1

Previous evaluations of SASs suggest that assessment is a key challenge for teachers of these subjects, and that this is often about implementing competency-based assessment in schools. It is clear that assessment in this SAS will involve quite different challenges, but that, as in the evaluations of other SASs, the nature and extent of these challenges will not be apparent until later phases of the evaluation.

The comments about assessment in phase 1 appeared to be mixed (under one-half negative or uncertain and over one-half positive), with some indications from teachers that it is simply too early to tell (exit criteria have clearly not yet been "road tested").

Negative or uncertain comments took the following form.

- Along the lines that assessment as it is conceptualised and presented in the SAS may not be compatible with meeting students' special needs and special-education settings (a few teachers). One teacher seemed to be saying that assessment may be intrusive in special-education settings, creating the need for teachers to find ways of assessing students whose ability to demonstrate their achievement is limited by their disabilities: "Our biggest dilemma is the extent to which the assessment process inhibits the instructional process. We are still trying to see our way through this. We need lots of help in identifying ways of assessing to make best use of the skills they have and to allow them to demonstrate high skills but with limited communication ability". Another teacher seemed to be saying that standardised multidimensional criteria for assessment allowing for degrees of achievement, including more abstract thinking skills (which characterises the approaches of Queensland school-based assessment) may not be as suitable for some students as more individualised, "yes/no" criteria about specific aspects of "hands-on" demonstrations: "Have difficulty here — in reality all our students who are ascertained as intellectual impairment level 6 need to be assessed simply on the basis of 'can', or 'cannot', carry out the practical task based on individual criteria (i.e. with or without prompts, independently etc.)". Another teacher simply said that some of the requirements of the exit criteria that relate to abstract skills of decision making, "research" and understanding may not be achievable by students but added that there was a need to define what the "research" assessment requirements are for students who cannot read.
- The SAS was not useful as a basis for assessment decisions (one teacher who did not elaborate).
- The teacher was uncertain about translating assessment requirements into a special-school setting, but was optimistic that further networking with teachers would resolve this (one teacher), or simply that it was too early to tell (two teachers).

Positive comments were given as follows.

- The SAS allows considerable flexibility of assessment (seven teachers, or just under half the teachers who responded). One teacher said that the "techniques suggested are varied and ensure all students' learning styles are catered for"; Another teacher stated that the SAS catered not only to the different "levels" of her students' learning but also the ways in which they work in different "communication mediums", offering scope for formal and informal assessment, as well as "creative" and "realistic" assessment for her students; Another teacher told us that the assessment criteria "are broad enough" for students in special-education units to achieve through both signed and written work.
- The exit criteria are clearly written, appropriate and useable (a few teachers); one of these teachers commented that the criteria are "also easy for students to understand". Another teacher said: "Never worked under an assessment framework before. Struggled initially to combine three areas of knowledge and understanding, decision-making etc. (didn't realise I should combine these!). Feel the framework is very workable".

Phase 2

Although teachers had expressed doubts about this area previously, the comments made in phase 2 about assessment were generally positive. Most teachers who responded were finding it easy to develop assessment instruments for this SAS. A few teachers reported some difficulties in record keeping.

Almost all teachers were finding assessment criteria sheets and marking schemes easy to develop and "easy to apply and interpret". One teacher commented that with a small class it was easy to individualise assessment to provide the variety that would allow students to achieve competency.

Almost all teachers felt that they were successful in developing profiles and deciding levels of achievement in this SAS. Negative comments about assessment related to the following:

- designing assessment that suits the particular student interests and which "allows for discrimination between a range of abilities" presented a challenge
- it is easy to determine SA but difficult to award HA/VHA (one teacher)
- some teachers had difficulties in making the decisions in a subject with "so much flexibility, such a large number of low-ability students and such a significant component of community projects"
- a model of a profile would assist (one teacher).

Figure 19 from the quantitative data for phase 2 gives information on assessment matters. It seems to support the written comments from the responding teachers, indicating that many were able to develop a variety of sound assessment instruments (Q37), that the SAS gives enough help in deciding exit levels of achievement (Q41) and that efficient and effective methods of recording students' achievement can be developed from the SAS (Q42). The response to this last question is more positive than for other SASs and is interesting in the light of the fact that this SAS has no vocational elements.

Although most of the teachers indicated that criteria sheets were easy to develop from the SAS, some disagreed (Q39).

Figure 19: Teachers' views of assessment in phase 2
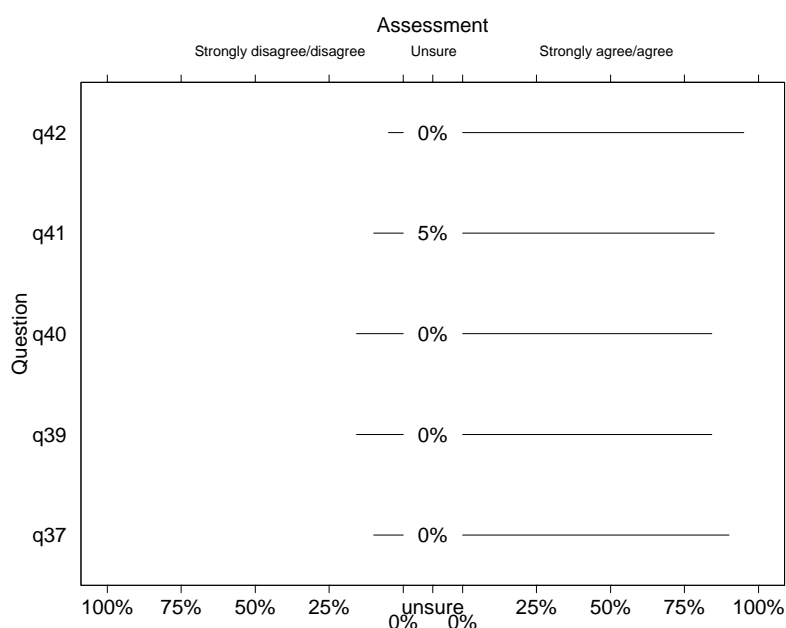
Phase 3

Assessment of student learning in this SAS has proved to be a challenge for some teachers. The difficulties they reported included getting students to complete tasks, framing assessment in ways that allow students to address key concepts in a tangible form, using some types of assessment items that students already struggle with in other subjects, finding ways to assess ideas and keep them interesting, assessing group tasks, assessing practical achievement, and assessing action research.

Some teachers pointed out that some of the formal assessment requirements may disadvantage some students and that some find the workload too demanding. They said that many who take this subject are students with learning difficulties and need a great deal of support in dealing with assessment. However, two teachers said they had found no problems, one claiming to have modified the assessment for the students with learning difficulties so that all can achieve.

One said that it is possible to set assessment tasks at times when the students will benefit most from them. One pointed out that assessment comes a poor second in importance to "experiential learning and interaction in the class". One said that the SAS could allow for more flexibility in assessment and could put some emphasis on group effort since the clientele for this SAS tend to be lower-ability learners. Another observed that some students see little value in the subject since it contains no vocational component.

When asked about the appropriateness of the exit criteria and standards, eight of the responding teachers agreed that the exit criteria relate to the most important aspects of the subject and that the standards were set at the right level of difficulty for the SAS. One said that the exit standards could be a little easier and another suggested that they should be made a little less vague and could be refined to reflect topic-specific requirements. One teacher who said that at times the exit standards seem too high, also commented that this perception would be influenced by the ability of the class. One teacher wanted advice on ways to simplify decision

making. Another teacher suggested that there should be a 30 per cent oral component and that assessment should be tailored more to suit special-needs students and low achievers.

The quantitative data for phase 3 (see appendix B for research instrument) seem to support the generally positive comments made about assessment for this SAS. Figure 20 shows that almost all the responding teachers agreed that the descriptions of assessment techniques in the SAS are helpful, and over three-quarters agreed that there is sufficient variety in the assessment techniques suggested in the document (Q17, Q18). A similar number were of the view that the exit criteria allow them to make sound assessment decisions and that the SAS gives clear advice about how to arrive at exit levels of achievement (Q21, Q22). No teachers disagreed with the statement offered for the two latter issues, although, in each case, there were some who were unsure.

Figure 20: Teachers' views of assessment in phase 3
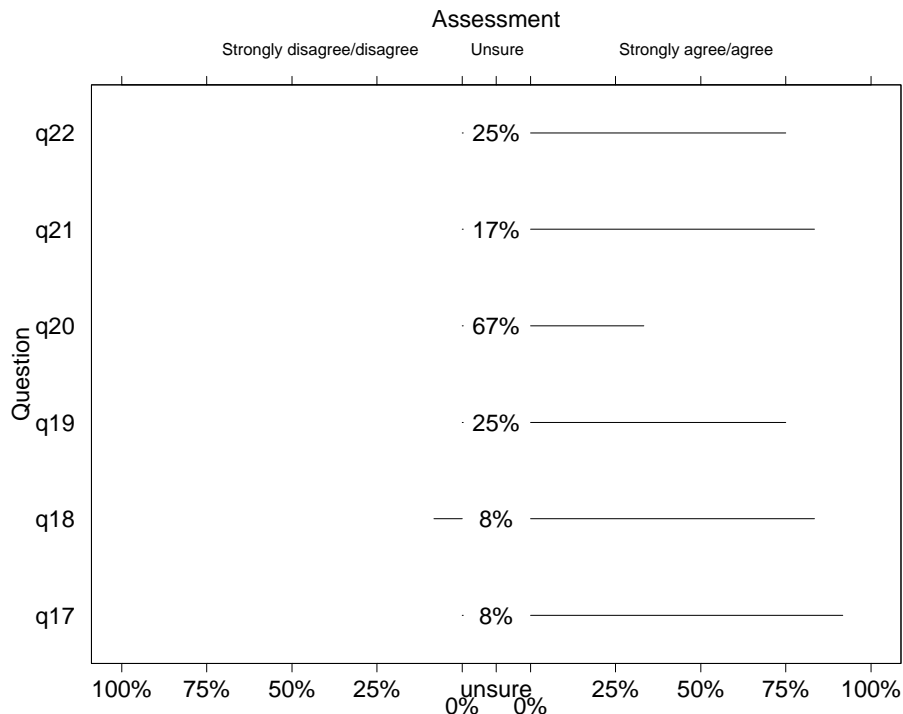
Resources

What resources are needed to ensure effective teaching, learning and assessment in the SAS?

Overall

While comments about resources were generally negative in phase 1, it appears that the majority of teachers were broadly satisfied by phase 2. Teacher comments, particularly in phase 1, indicated that they need a range of print and electronic texts

and materials. In both phases teachers indicated that they need more time for planning and implementing the SAS. Material resources and administrative arrangements vary widely from school to school, yet by phase 2, two-thirds of responding teachers agreed they had enough resources. There are schools that already have a bank of useful resources. By phase 3, teachers were indicating that they were making use of a range of media and internet resources, local community resources and material resources from a number of subject areas.

Other difficulties for some teachers are school timetabling and class size although these issues seemed mostly to have been resolved by phase 3.

Phase 1

Unlike in some other areas of this SAS that we asked teachers about, the general flavour of comments about resources was negative. It seemed that, on our phase 1 data, there was cause for concern about the resources that are available to implement this SAS.

Negative comments fell into the following categories.

- Lack of print and electronic resources for teaching and learning, difficulty accessing these resources, difficulty affording resources, or comments that the resources listed in the SAS are out-of-date (almost all the negative comments were about one or other of these things). For example, teachers commented on the lack of resources in their own school; one teacher said: "[I] gave the core resource list [for the core components of the SAS] to the librarian at our school — *not one* resource in the school. Had better success with the elective …". Another teacher said: "problems are getting resource materials through the school that are of a level appropriate to special-education unit students". Two teachers said that they found the most up-to-date resources on the World Wide Web; a further teacher commented: "we go out into the community as much as possible to access resources … hands-on experience wherever possible … there isn't much available in our school in terms of resources for this study area". Yet another teacher observed: "due to the newness of the subject there are limited resources available". Another teacher pointed out that: "Obtaining the computer … at short notice is a difficulty. The course is functioning on a very limited budget. Currently resources are borrowed from other subject areas".

- Need for more teacher time to be made available for planning and developing the SAS, as well as networking with other teachers (two teachers); one teacher indicated: "program development should be allocated time-off from classroom". The other teacher making this kind of comment said: "I feel I am struggling with writing the program — mainly due to lack of time to do so".

- Options for learning were limited by lack of flexibility to travel from the school (two teachers); one teacher commented that money for travel to access community-based learning was limited in the school and that "communication within the school is poor"; this teacher stated that the SAS should include a "list of funding agencies and grants available".

Positive comments in phase 1 about resources were as follows.

- The school already had a bank of resources from which the teacher could draw for teaching or that by pooling teacher resources within the school, the resource demands of the SAS were adequately met (four teachers). One teacher commented: "We have divided this SAS between five teachers with

each teacher specialising in different aspects of it. This has been good for both students and teachers. As teachers have specialised in various areas they each have particular resources which are then pooled together". Another teacher told us: "Our school has plenty of resources, especially the issues of the 80s and 90s books. Students are using the internet regularly to access information. Students often suggest guest speakers and help in the decision making".

• One teacher said that the SAS was not restrictive in terms of which resources schools could use and this gave schools scope to use the diverse range of available, often community-based, resources.

Phase 2

The comments about resourcing were more mixed in phase 2 than they had been in phase 1. However, most appeared to be broadly satisfied with the level of resourcing in their schools. A few teachers felt that their programs of study and teaching suffered because of restrictions imposed by timetabling requirements but others were quite satisfied with timetabling arrangements.

One teacher commented that the subject has been timetabled to allow students to enter at various times over the two years if they find other subjects become too difficult.

Some teachers said that more time for planning was needed and some expressed a need for more support of some kind, such as networking with other teachers to share units of work, resources, assessment and expected standards of work for students.

It was suggested that class size has a significant influence on the learning experiences and outcomes that are possible.

In the quantitative data from phase 2, Figure 21 provides information about resourcing. Responding teachers indicated that, while many perceive the resources listed in the SAS as being helpful (Q48), they are experiencing a range of other resource problems. A significant area of concern appears to be the amount of time they need to spend on this subject (Q47). Around two-thirds of teachers agreed that they had enough resources in the school to effectively teach the SAS (Q49). Over three-quarters felt that school administrative arrangements, like timetabling and class sizes, are working well (Q50).

Figure 21: Teacher perceptions about resources in phase 2
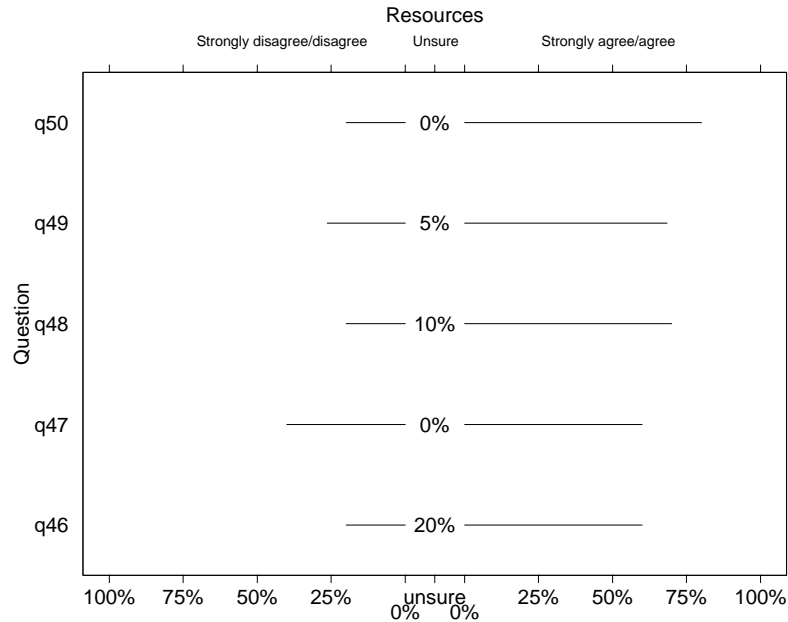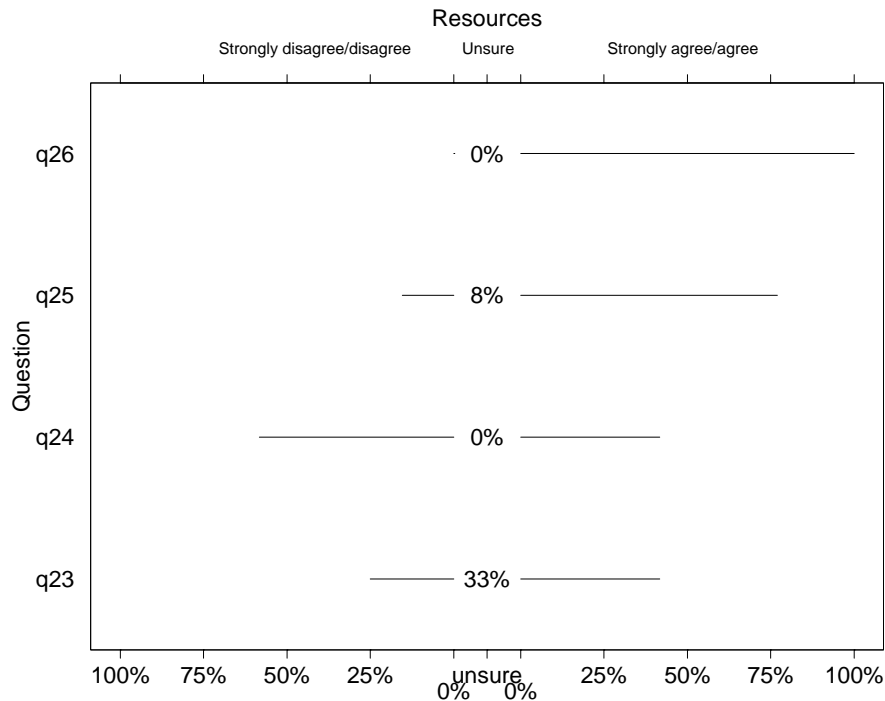

Phase 3

In phase 3, teachers commented on the material resources that had been most effective for their teaching of the SAS. They had variously used newspapers, videos and websites, the school library, local community resources, contacts and organisations. One had found Tourism Queensland to be particularly helpful. Another had found that useful resources were often those from subject areas like junior commerce, junior home economics, SOSE or citizenship education.

The quantitative data for phase 3 in figure 22 (see appendix B for research instrument) indicate that almost half of the responding teachers agreed that the SAS gave enough specific advice about useful resources, although about one-quarter disagreed and about one-third were unsure (Q 23).

About half the teachers agreed that there were enough material resources of the right kind in their schools to deliver the SAS but here the degree of disagreement with this statement was stronger (Q24). Over three-quarters appeared to be satisfied with the timetabling in their schools and all agreed that class sizes are workable (Q25, Q26).

Figure 22: Teacher perceptions about resources in phase 3

Resources

| Strongly disagree/disagree | Unsure | Strongly agree/agree |

q26 — 0%

q25 — 8%

q24 — 0%

q23 — 33%

Question

100% 75% 50% 25% unsure 25% 50% 75% 100%
                        0%   0%

Other issues

Overall

The fact that this SAS has no vocational component is seen as a positive by teachers who are implementing it. The absence of vocational elements may mean that the content is accessible to special-needs students who cannot reach AQF level I. This contributes to the flexibility that is seen as a strength of the subject, enabling teachers to develop highly individualised programs that cater specifically for individuals across the whole range of ability, and allow all students to focus on their particular interests.

Requests from some teachers for more information about Board procedures and for feedback on the success of their implementation of the SAS indicate that, because the SAS is offered in such a range of situations, some teachers may not be well acquainted with the Board's procedures and requirements and may be unsure about how flexible they should be in interpreting these.

In phase 3, some teachers said that the SAS should encourage variety in programs of study to ensure that they suit the school, and that the document should include descriptions of more of the practical activities that would suit the varied needs and interests of the students who take the subject. They also suggested that there should be more in-service training provided, none of them agreeing that the opportunities available to them during the trial of the SAS to attend workshops had been appropriate.

Phase 1

The research instrument used in phase 1 invited teachers to volunteer further comments. Most of these were positive, some took the form of suggestions, and a few took the form of questions.

Positive comments appeared as follows.

- The "all round" flexibility of the SAS (a few teachers); "the flexibility of this SAS well suits the ethos and milieu of [our school]. As such, its implementation is unhindered, clear and painless". Another teacher noted that there is "no moderation and no need to compare our school with [name] special school, for example … [teachers are] able to adapt the course to the range of students at each school".

- Expressions of overall satisfaction with the SAS, its content, the approach to teaching it supports (most of the positive comments); one teacher commented: "the 'no pressure' implementation and method allows the professionalism of teachers to be valued and the importance of different schools, classes, and students". Another teacher stated: "this course is very useful to students who can contribute their decision-making to the way the course is run. The students feel the course is theirs with room for issues important to them". Another teacher noted: "I've been teaching special education for sixteen years and it's the first time I've ever been handed a framework to work from. After the initial teething problems and a steep learning curve to offer a SAS, I've really enjoyed the experience".

Suggestions made by some teachers were as follows.

- that the Board develop a folder to include examples of programs and assessment given out at workshops (one teacher)
- more in-service training, particularly on criteria-and-standards-based assessment (a few teachers)
- SAS or workshops could include "more concrete ideas about parental involvement" given the community-based approach to learning the SAS represents (one teacher)
- advice to other teachers to "forget the academic subject they may have been trained in when they teach this subject" (one teacher).

There were two questions in this body of comments. One was from a teacher who wanted to know whether the course could be studied by a student over three years (the answer is yes), and a question from another teacher about recognition of prior learning for a student who had transferred from another school. Such questions suggest an important feature of our data; teachers of this SAS may not be so well acquainted with the Board's procedures, and may require more information about the flexibility and requirements of these procedures to do the best by their students, and feel confident with their approaches. This is generally true of the population of teachers taking SASs, but may be particularly true of some teachers of Social & Community Studies.
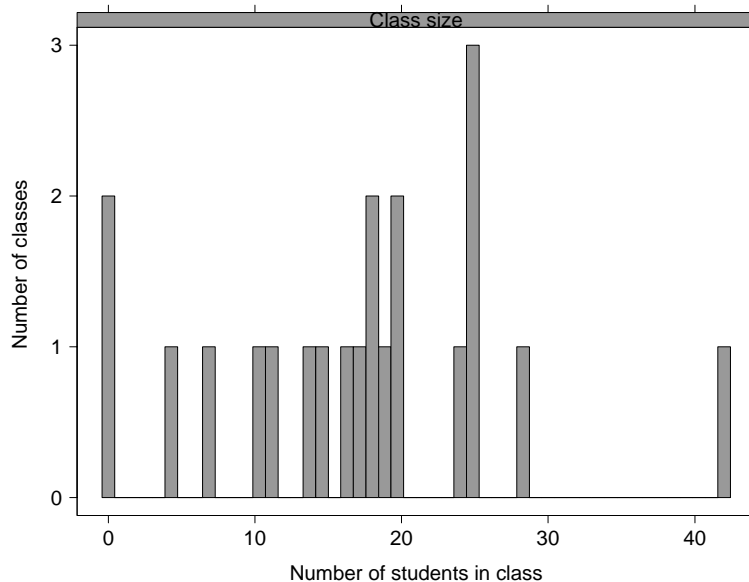
Phase 2

In phase 2, positive comments focused especially on the flexibility of this SAS, which is seen as a strength by most teachers, although one pointed out that this may, however, make it difficult to plan a course and identify the resources that best suit the range of students who select the SAS. Teachers also commented positively on the flexibility possible because the SAS included no vocational components. One teacher commented that "the SAS fulfilled a need to supply a subject in between the academic and the vocational spectrum".

Negative comments were as follows and in each case were made by one teacher only:

- new teachers with no background in the area need more help from the SAS document
- some teachers would like feedback on whether they have been "doing the right thing"
- more communication and coordination between subject departments is necessary.

Figure 23 from the quantitative data for phase 2 indicates that, although most classes in Social & Community Studies have fewer than 20 students, some are larger than the 15 to 20 that SAS teachers often suggest. The question that arises is how the SAS could support teachers better in this matter particularly given the presence of groups of students with special needs (see figure 8 in the core report).

Figure 23: Number of students in classes

Phase 3

In phase 3, teachers were asked what further advice they would give the Board. In their responses the opportunity offered by this SAS for flexibility was mentioned as a positive once again with one teacher saying that this was "the key to its success". The question of the relationship of the SAS to work, industrial relations and vocational education was raised by a teacher who also suggested that "at the moment it is a 'watered down' version of an academic subject" and has "little appeal to the clientele".

Some teachers remarked that the SAS should encourage variation in the programs of study to ensure that they suit the school, to include more practical activities in the SAS, as most students who take the subject "prefer to learn by actually *doing* hands-on work" and to provide more in-service training for teachers. One warned of the need to avoid an overlap with English Communication and Year 10 SOSE.

Figure 24 from the quantitative data for phase 3 (see appendix B for research instrument) shows that teachers who responded to the survey were positive about the future of the SAS. More than half the teachers were of the opinion that the SAS was progressing well in their schools and that students would want to take the subject in the future (Q38, Q39). More than two-thirds were optimistic that the school would be keen to offer the SAS in future (Q40).

When asked about their participation in professional development for this SAS, none of the teachers agreed that the opportunities available to them had been appropriate (Q 41).

Figure 24: Teachers' views of the future of the SAS, phase 3
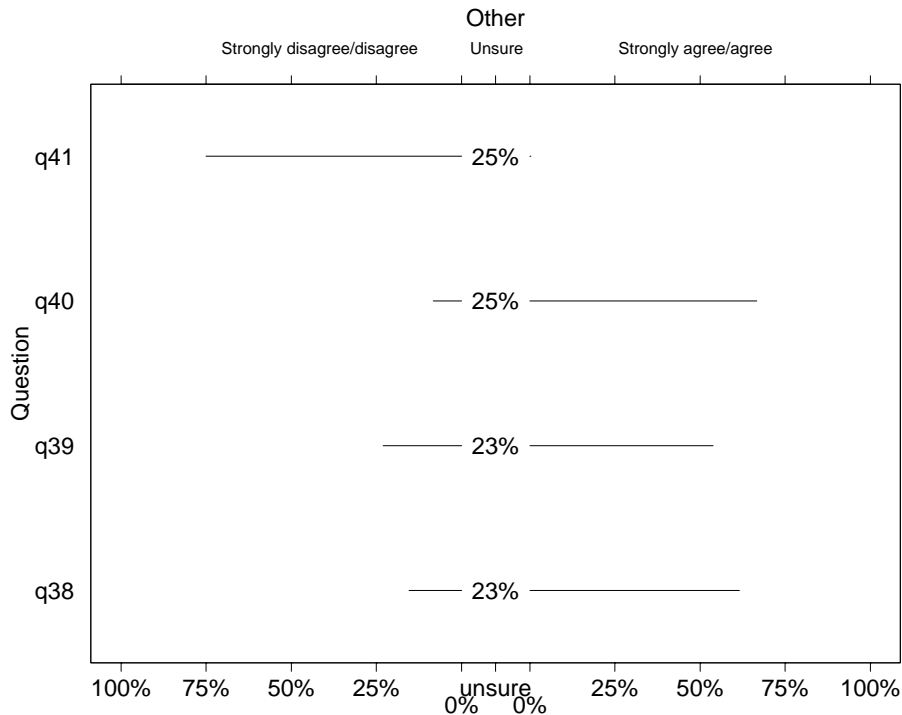
The effectiveness of the SAS for students

Overall

This SAS appears to be one that can be adapted to meet the specific needs of a wide range of students. Most teachers commented positively about its relevance to the needs of their students and about their interest in the activities it can provide. They were positive also about the balance of practice and theory and the flexibility that it allowed them to individualise assessment.

The match between student needs and the SAS

What specific needs in the student population does the SAS meet/not meet? How well does the SAS match the needs of the student populations studied? How well does the content of this SAS meet the needs of students?

Overall

Most teachers saw this SAS as having interest and relevance for a wide range of students from very capable students among the general senior group to those "who

have language and literacy problems". Many maintained that the SAS is suitable for the students with a lower ability and for those who have learning difficulties. All responses indicated that the flexibility available within this SAS allowed them to design a program of study to suit their students. Some teachers cited as a strength the opportunity that the SAS offers for students to "follow their interests within a framework". When the SAS replaced a previous subject it was seen to be at least as enriching as the subject it replaced.

Industry placements or work experience were seen as being very worthwhile for students although, in some cases, the support needed by some of the students made these difficult to organise.

Teachers and students indicated that the SAS helped to develop key knowledge, skills and key competencies that are useful as preparation for the future and specifically, in work situations.

Phase 2

The quantitative data from phase 2 indicate in figure 25 that more than half the responding teachers believe that many of the students taking this SAS are interested in and motivated by the subject (Q1) and that many gain mostly positive learning experiences from the SAS (Q8).

The teachers who responded to the survey seem to be of the view that a small number of their students find the work too difficult or too easy in this SAS (Q6, Q7). It seems clear that teachers believe that many students find the content of the subject relevant to their needs, that many students believe they develop practical knowledge and skills in the subject (Q11, Q12) and that the SAS helps some to develop theoretical knowledge and skills (Q13).

Figure 25: Teachers' views of the effectiveness of the SAS for students in phase 2
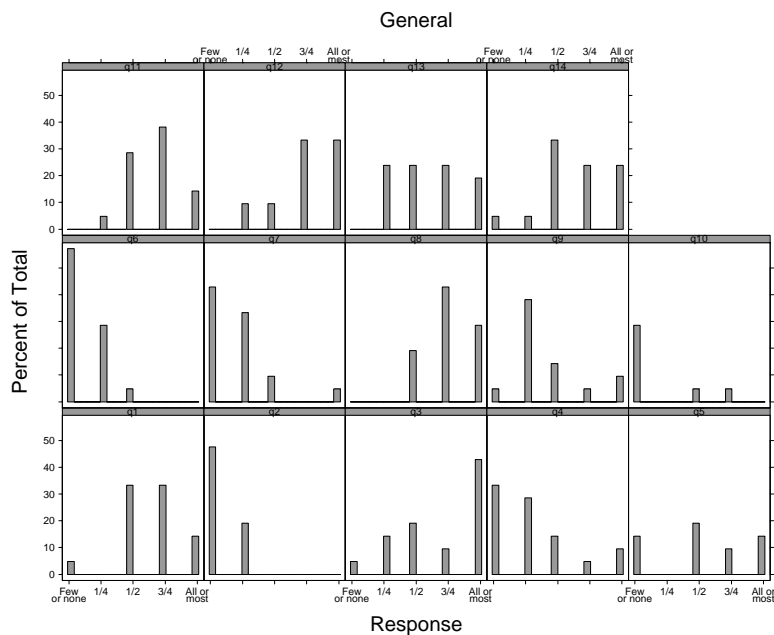
Phase 3

In phase 3, some teachers commented that the areas of content to which students responded best dealt with relationships, management, conflict resolution, work experience and information related to the world of work, personal finance and grooming. One said that content dealing with teenage interests and comparisons with other countries had interested students. Another said that activities that involved group discussions were of interest to students rather than the more formal assignment work.

According to some teachers, students who took up the subject during the year did so because they saw it as being easier than others available to them. One teacher said that the subject was attractive to those who "do not like learning a large amount of content". In another school, some students had taken the SAS on the recommendation of friends and because other subjects on the line had been too difficult. One teacher commented that the SAS had attracted some new students because it relates well to Early Childhood Practices and other applied subjects. Another said that a student had dropped Legal Studies in favour of this subject. The only other comment offered about the reasons for dropping the subject was from a teacher who said that some students who would not work had dropped the subject to take up another SAS that was seen as an easier option.

When asked how students have reacted to the SAS, teachers' responses ranged from observations that they enjoyed the subject and were enthusiastic, to comments about them being passive, apathetic and unmotivated in the subject. Individual teachers commented that the SAS was worthwhile for some students, that it had resulted in them gaining greater confidence or that they had responded well to life or work interests and to practical elements. However, another comment was that some students saw it as a "fill in" and the only thing they could do. Other comments were that it was difficult to motivate students without vocational elements in the subject, that some students were not keen on the written components of the subject or that some did not like assessment by means of formal assignments.

In the qualitative comments for phase 3, students said they enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere of their lessons, the freedom, and fun and variety of the subject. Some said it was an easy and interesting subject. Many students referred to the class discussions and debates as the most enjoyable activities in the subject. They also liked the practical work and the teamwork involved. Some appreciated the chance to develop communication and interpersonal skills.

Many said that there was nothing they did not enjoy about the subject. However, others said some of the assignments involved were too difficult, especially those that involved much writing. Some said they were bored by too much repetition, by information that they already know, and said that some of the topics were not relevant or not interesting. Students who indicated that the subject was compulsory in their school did not appear to enjoy the subject as much as those who had been able to choose it.

Teachers who knew something of the post-school destinations of their students said that they would range from going straight into the workforce, with some taking up apprenticeships for trades or traineeships, to studying further in TAFE courses or for degrees in education or hospitality. One commented that the subject would be especially useful for those heading for work in community organisations.

Although many did not know what they would do when they left school, students indicated a wide range of intended destinations after they completed Year

12. At least a third said that they planned to enter some form of tertiary study, either at university or TAFE. Many of the remainder indicated that they hoped to go straight into employment or take up an apprenticeship or traineeship. The employment areas they commonly identified included the armed forces and police service, clerical and computer studies, creative arts, the entertainment industry, health services and sports, hospitality and tourism, retailing, service industries, the sciences, teaching and childcare.

When asked to identify the key knowledge and skills that students learn from this subject, several teachers focused on the development of skills of interaction with others including employers and the public. They referred variously to learning to work in a group, communicating with others, formulating arguments, constructing spoken and written responses, and having the confidence to argue and express opinions. One teacher said that it helps develop attitudes to life, people, work and community that are valuable in the work environment. Teachers listed the areas of key knowledge developed by the subject as being a knowledge of health, law, legal rights and responsibilities, industrial relations, banking, basic financial management, current affairs, and an understanding of society and of their own and indigenous cultures. Skills that teachers felt were significantly developed were comprehension, information processing, problem solving and goal setting.

Many students thought the SAS would help them achieve their post-school aims, often saying that it helped them gain information about study and career options and how to make applications. Some said the subject was teaching them life skills such as planning, decision making and time management, helping to develop their ability to communicate and interact with people and making them aware of social issues, the law and community matters. Some commented that they were learning how to deal with situations they would face when they left school such as settling into a job or study, budgeting, leaving home, and finding and renting accommodation.

Figure 26 from the quantitative data for phase 3 (see appendix B for research instrument) shows that, of the teachers who responded to the survey, nearly half were of the opinion that the perceived status of the SAS in the school affected whether students take the subject, and one-third thought that parent perceptions of the SAS affected student decisions to take it (Q27, Q28). More than three-quarters of them were of the view that the subject develops the personal interests of students (Q29). More than two-thirds of the teachers said that most of their students have undertaken relevant industry placement or work experience but more than half either disagreed or were unsure that there are sufficient opportunities in the community for work experience (Q30, Q31).

More than three-quarters of the responding teachers agreed that most of their students were making good progress and more than two-thirds were of the opinion that most of their students would be satisfied with what they gained from this subject (Q36, Q37).

**Figure 26: Teachers' views of the effectiveness of the SAS for students in phase 3**

Effectiveness for Students

Strongly disagree/disagree	Unsure	Strongly agree/agree

q37 — 17% —
q36 — 0% —
q35 — 31% —
q34 — 0% —
q33 — 0% —
q32 — 15% —
q31 — 23% —
q30 — 17% —
q29 — 9% —
q28 — 45% —
q27 — 31% —

Question

100% 75% 50% 25% 0% unsure 0% 25% 50% 75% 100%
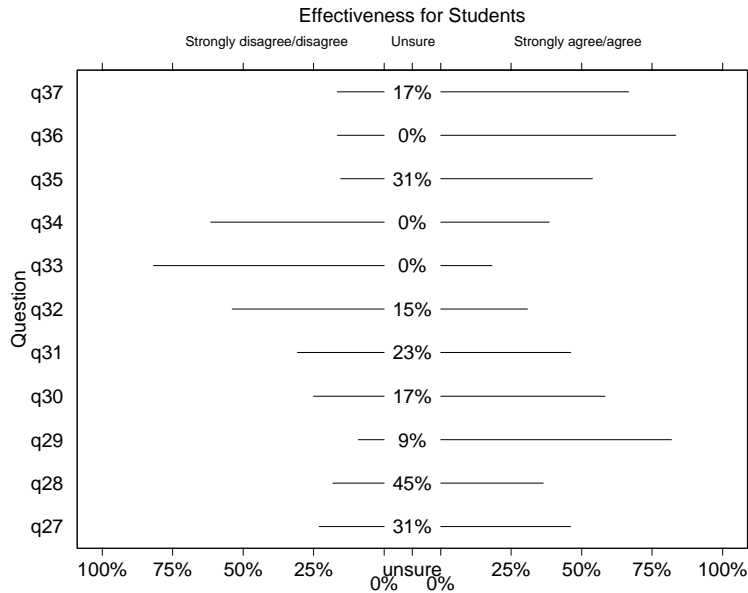
In the qualitative comments for phase 3, many students said they would advise other students to choose the subject. The kinds of students who would find it most useful, they thought, would be students who have trouble doing schoolwork, who want an easy subject, who have low self-esteem or poor decision-making skills, who want to learn useful things, who like practical work, who want a non-Board subject that is a challenge, or who don't know what they want to do with their lives. They also said that students interested in the community who want to do social work or who want to learn about social issues would find it helpful.

Figure 27 from the quantitative data for phase 3 (see appendix B for research instrument) indicates that teachers were positive in their views about the preparation for the future provided by the SAS. More than two-thirds agreed that the SAS helps in the preparation of students for further study at TAFE (Q42). Almost all teachers who responded to the survey agreed that the SAS helps in preparation for employment in the specific industry area, for employment generally, in the development of responsible attitudes to work, and in the development of self-knowledge and self-esteem (Q43, Q44, Q45, Q46). Almost one-third of the teachers who responded agreed that the SAS is of some help in the development of useful generic knowledge and skills, and almost two-thirds agreed that it is a lot of help in this (Q47). All agreed that it is of some help or a lot of help in the development of interpersonal communication skills (Q48).

This SAS was seen as being helpful in developing some of the key competencies. Teachers thought the SAS developed the skills of collecting, analysing and organising information, communicating ideas and information, and planning and organising activities (Q49, Q50, Q51). Agreement was not so high for the development by the SAS of the key competency of working with others and in teams. About one-third of the teachers either disagreed or were not sure that the SAS was helpful in this (Q52). Few teachers thought the SAS developed the key competency of using mathematical ideas and techniques (Q53). More than two-thirds agreed that the SAS helped in developing the skills of solving problems and

using technology (Q54, Q55).

Figure 27: Preparation for employment by the SAS
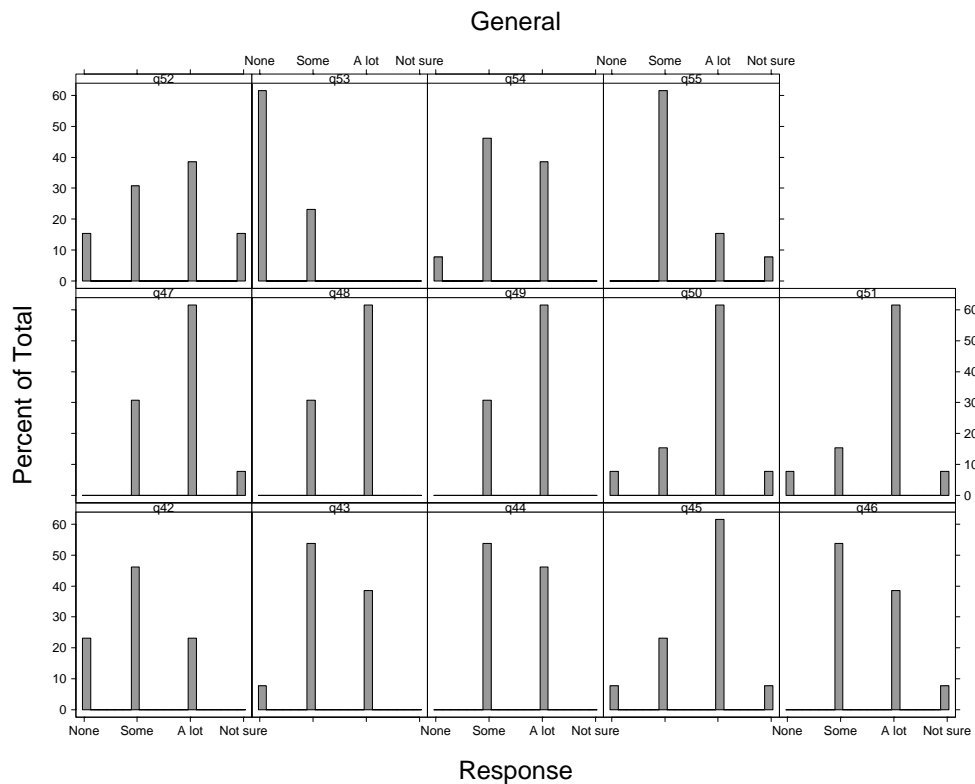
When asked what useful knowledge and skills they were learning in the subject, students said it provided an introduction to the real world and referred to its value in preparation for leaving school and becoming independent. These were things like learning to be responsible, to be organised, leaving home, budgeting, the rights and responsibilities of renting, health and nutrition, sex education and parenting. They said that knowledge of how to find and get employment, employment awards and laws and how to write résumés and conduct interviews was useful. They were learning assertiveness, tolerance, respect for others, how to get along with people, and how to work in groups. They were developing useful skills in analysing information, problem-solving researching, writing, mapreading and working with computers.

Some students identified areas not already covered that they would like to be learning about in the subject. These included how to apply for TAFE and university, how to get into apprenticeships and traineeships, how to find a job, how to drive, and how to achieve one's goals in life. Some wanted more on law and government, basic political knowledge, or information about famous people. Some wanted to be able to do work experience.
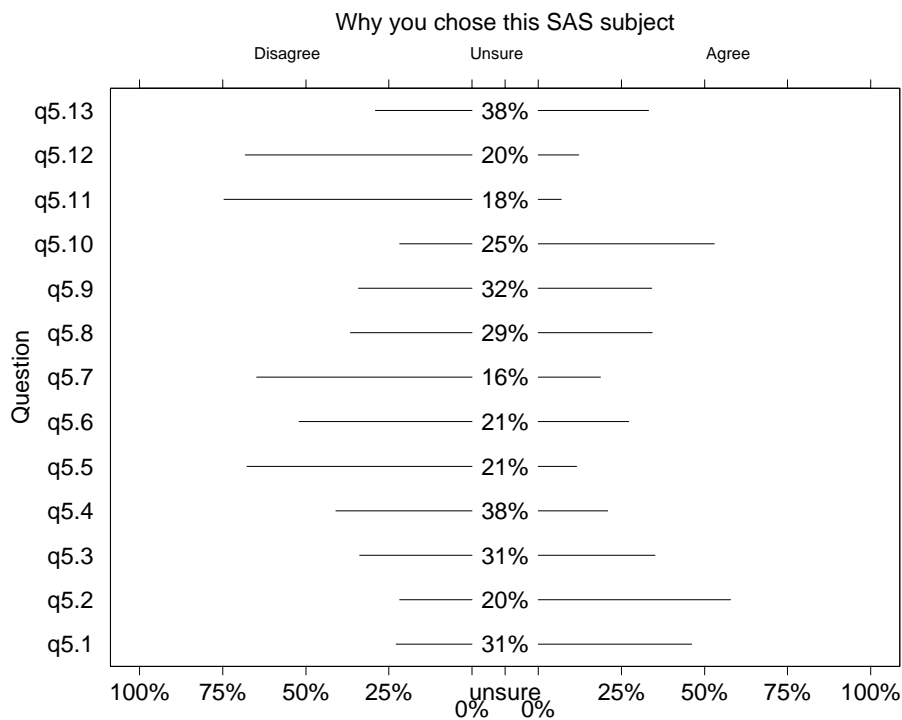
Figure 28 from the quantitative data for phase 3 (see appendix B for research instrument) provides data about the views of students taking the SAS. When students were asked why they had chosen this SAS nearly half responded that they had expected to enjoy it and more than half had chosen it because they wanted to learn practical skills (Q5.1, Q5.2). The possibility of its helping them to find work or go to TAFE after Year 12 was a factor in the choice of subject for only a small

number of students (Q5.3, Q5.4).

Few students said they were strongly influenced to take the subject by the views of their family (Q5.5), by the choice made by a friend (Q5.7) or by the views of the school guidance officer (Q5.11). However, liking the teacher was a factor in the choice for one-third of the students (Q5.9). It appears that adequate subject choices were available, since fewer than one-third of the students agreed that they had few choices available to them when they chose the subject (Q5.6, Q5.12).

More than one-third of the students agreed that they had chosen the subject because they thought it would fit in well with other subjects (Q5.8), more than half agreed that they had thought it would be useful and relevant to them (Q5.10) and one-third agreed that they wanted to get a useful qualification by doing the subject (Q5.13).

**Figure 28: Why students chose the SAS**

Figure 29 from the quantitative data for phase 3 (see appendix B for research instrument) presents data about students' views of the SAS. In general, students thought they had benefited from taking the subject. Half of them agreed that they enjoyed it (Q6.1) and fewer than one-third indicated that they were bored by it (Q6.2). Fewer again wanted to drop it (Q6.3). Although three-quarters did not agree that the subject is more interesting than most of their other subjects (Q6.4), nearly two-thirds of them agreed that they were learning useful knowledge and skills and that these were skills that they could use when they leave school, and half of them thought that they were learning lots of new things in the subject (Q6.5, Q6.6, Q6.7,).

More than three-quarters of the students disagreed or were unsure that the subject was making them feel good about themselves (Q6.8). However, one-third agreed that one of the skills they were learning from the subject was how to get along with other people (Q6.9).
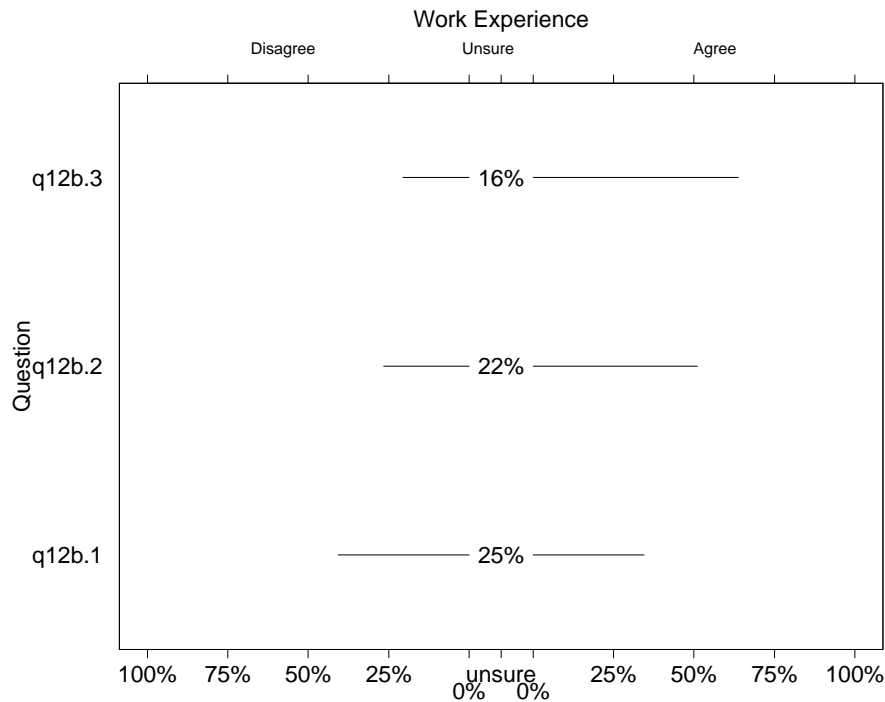
The level of agreement with the teachers about how helpful this SAS was in developing some of the key competencies was quite high. Like their teachers, a substantial number of students agreed that the SAS was developing the competencies of collecting, analysing and organising information, communicating ideas and information, and planning and organising activities (Q6.10, Q6.11, Q6.12). Nearly two-thirds of the students thought the subject was helping them to learn to work with others and in teams (Q6.13) but few students thought that the SAS developed the key competency of using mathematical ideas and techniques (Q6.14). Nearly one-third agreed that the SAS helped in developing the key competencies of solving problems and using technology (Q6.15, Q6.16).

Figure 29: Students' opinions about the SAS
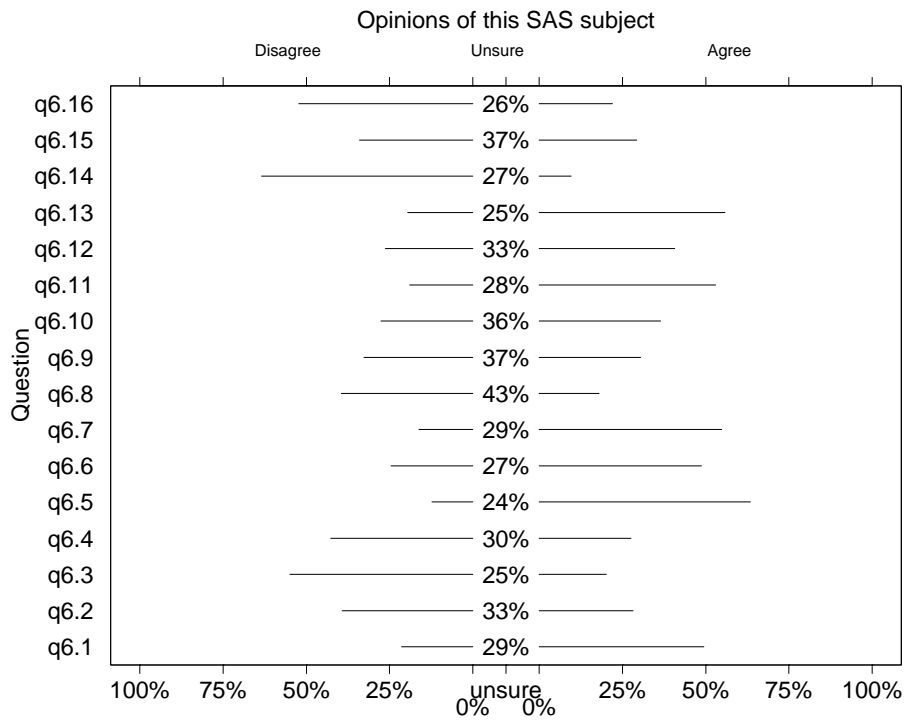
About half the students in this SAS did work experience during the program of study (Q12). Figure 30 from the quantitative data for phase 3 (see appendix B for research instrument) shows that, for those students it was a fairly positive experience. Fewer than a third claimed that they mainly did routine things, not new things (Q12b.1), half of them learned things they wanted to learn (Q12b.2) and more than two-thirds learned things they thought would be useful to them (Q12b.3). When asked whether they would leave school if they were offered a job or apprenticeship, two-thirds said they would not (Q13).

Figure 30: Student views on work experience and work

Work Experience

| Disagree | Unsure | Agree |

Question

q12b.3 ——— 16% ———

q12b.2 ——— 22% ———

q12b.1 ——— 25% ———

100% 75% 50% 25% unsure 25% 50% 75% 100%
0% 0%

The balance between practice and theory in the SAS

Does the SAS provide students with an appropriate balance between practical and "hands on" learning, and theoretical learning experiences?

Teachers have indicated that the flexibility of this SAS has allowed them to cater specifically for their students and to manage the balance between practice and theory well, although more guidance on what was possible in the practical elements was requested. Class discussions and practical activities were the classroom activities that students preferred.

Teachers made comments such as: "areas related to everyday life or practical matters generate more interest than theoretically based topics" and reported that students were most interested when they were involved in "hands-on activities where they can see their own action affecting the wider community" and in "aspects that involve more of the community". One teacher had developed a gardening and community project which proved to be the elective of most interest to students and the contact with the public involved in this had led to employment opportunities for two students. This teacher was convinced that "students enjoy the practical elements of this SAS the most".

Teachers identified knowledge that would be of direct use to students as being the practical knowledge they gained about such things as budgeting, cooking, buying goods, renting, driving, workplace health and safety, financial management. They thought that useful skills they had gained would be skills in teamwork, communication, problem solving, decision making, and planning activities. One commented that, in their preparation for the future, the experience in community service was enormously beneficial for some students. Another summed up the

benefits of the subject by saying that it had enabled students to be successful, given them ideas about life choices, directed them towards study, helped them develop a variety of practical skills, and assisted them in knowing what to aim for in their first year out of school.

The quantitative data from phase 3 shown in figure 31 (see appendix B for research instrument) supported these comments. The data indicated that nearly two-thirds of the teachers disagreed that the SAS has too much theory for some of their students and half thought that the balance of practical "hands-on" work and theory is appropriate (Q34, Q35).

Figure 31: Teacher views on the balance between practice and theory of the SAS

Balance between Practice and Theory
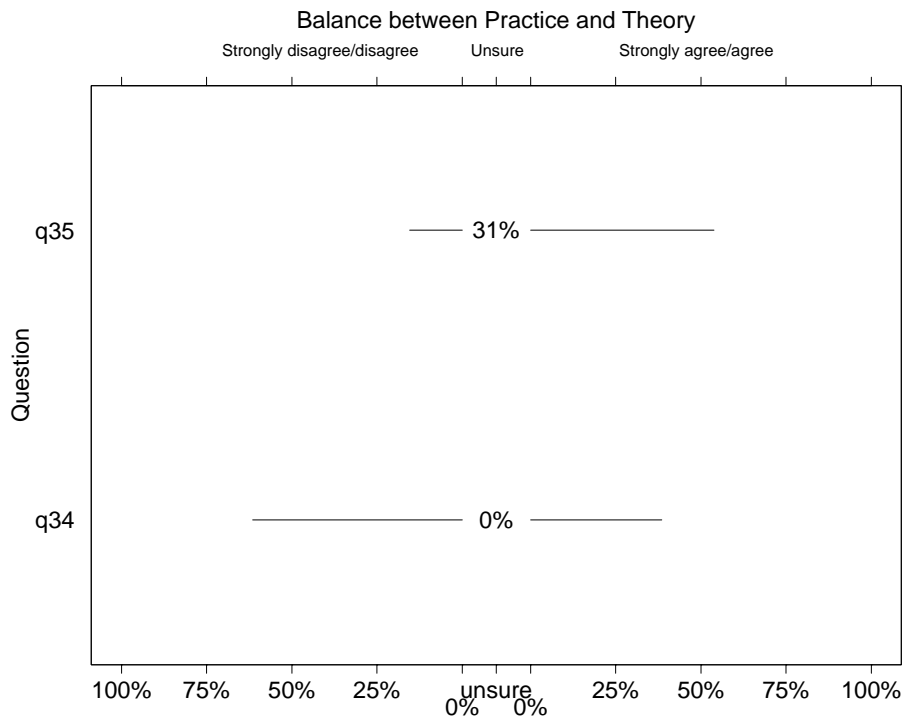
Figure 32 from the quantitative data for phase 3 (see appendix B for research instrument) shows how students perceived the nature of classroom activities they experienced (Q7). About one-fifth of the students reported that they spent hardly any class time on practical activities, about one-third reported that they spent some class time, and about half said that they spent half or most of their class time on practical activities.

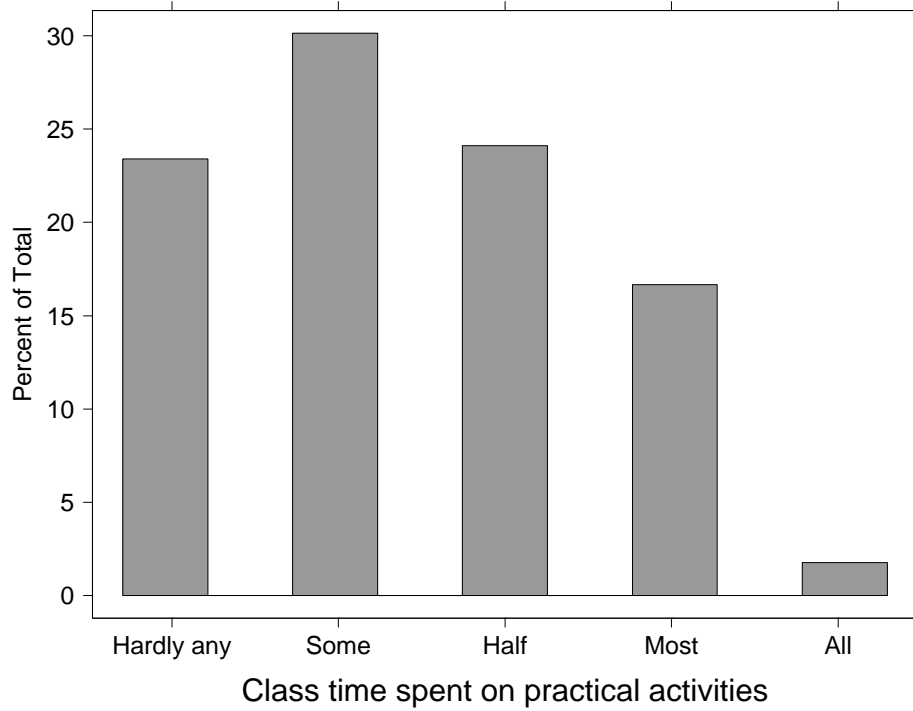**Figure 32: Students' perceptions of classroom activities**

Figure 33 from the quantitative data for phase 3 (see appendix B for research instrument) shows what students perceived as the main activity in class (Q10). About one-third said they mostly worked on their own, using booklets or other materials. About one-fifth said the main activity was listening to the teacher and taking notes, more than one-third said it was taking part in group discussions and fewer than one-fifth said the main activity was participating in practical activities.

Figure 33: Students' perceptions of main activities in class
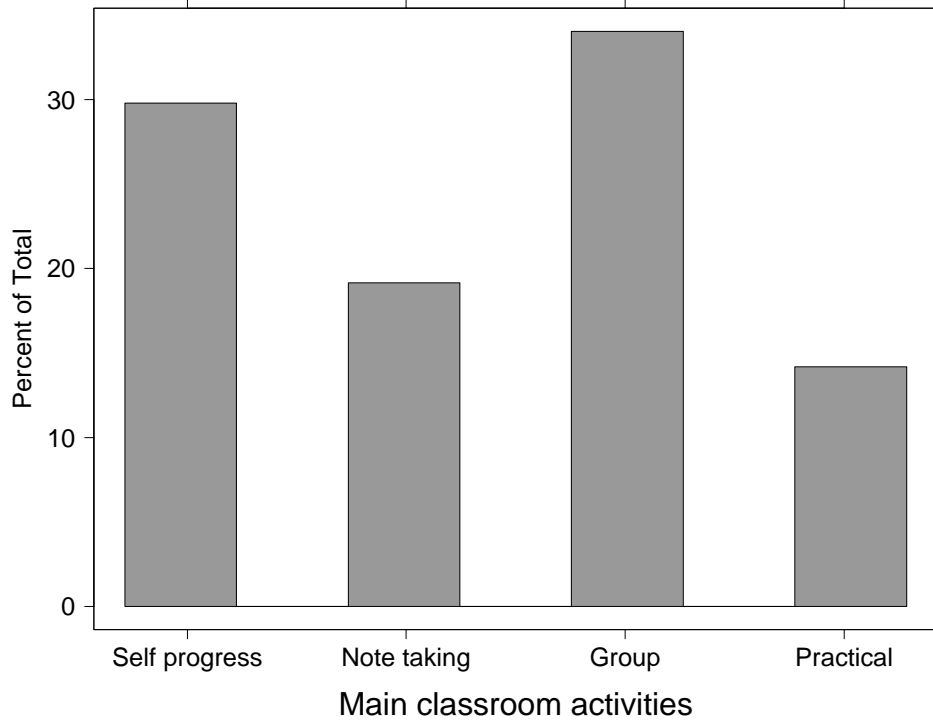

Figure 34 from the quantitative data for phase 3 (see appendix B for research instrument) shows that fewer than one-fifth of the students surveyed preferred to learn by listening to the teacher and taking notes and, again, fewer than one-fifth preferred to learn by taking part in group work. About one-third of the students in each case cited their preference as taking part in class discussions or doing practical activities, with the latter being the more popular of the two (Q8).

Figure 34: Students' preferred classroom activities
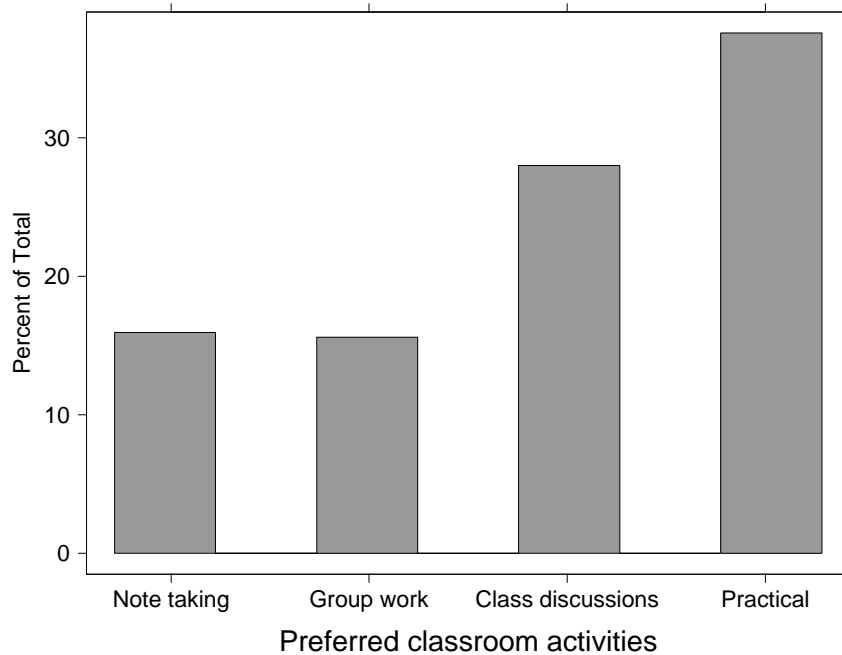
The appropriateness for students of demands made by the SAS

Are the demands of the strand appropriate for the students who undertake these studies?

Here again, the flexibility of this SAS seems to be a positive. Teachers perceive that it caters for the range of student ability in both the learning experiences and assessment tasks that can be generated from it. One teacher commented that the SAS was well suited to students with special needs and that it was easy to individualise assessment to provide the variety that allows students to achieve success in the task. Students were fairly positive about their experiences of assessment and thought the tasks were helping them to learn.

Most of the teachers who responded saw the SAS as being of a fair and equitable standard for students and one claimed that it is possible to develop areas "so that they can work on a topic to suit their ability or interest". One said the content was too difficult for special-needs students. A few noted that the more formal and academic kinds of assessment such as the essay or the debate were too difficult for many of their students. One suggested that assessment should allow for the use of anecdotal records and observation notes, and should allow more for self-development areas, such as participation and cooperation to cater for the range of students who take the subject.

Figure 35 from the quantitative data for phase 3 (see appendix B for research instrument) shows that, although nearly one-third of the teachers agreed that the SAS is too hard for a substantial proportion of their students, more than half disagreed that this is the case (Q32). Fewer than one-third of the teachers thought it

was too easy for most of their students (Q33).

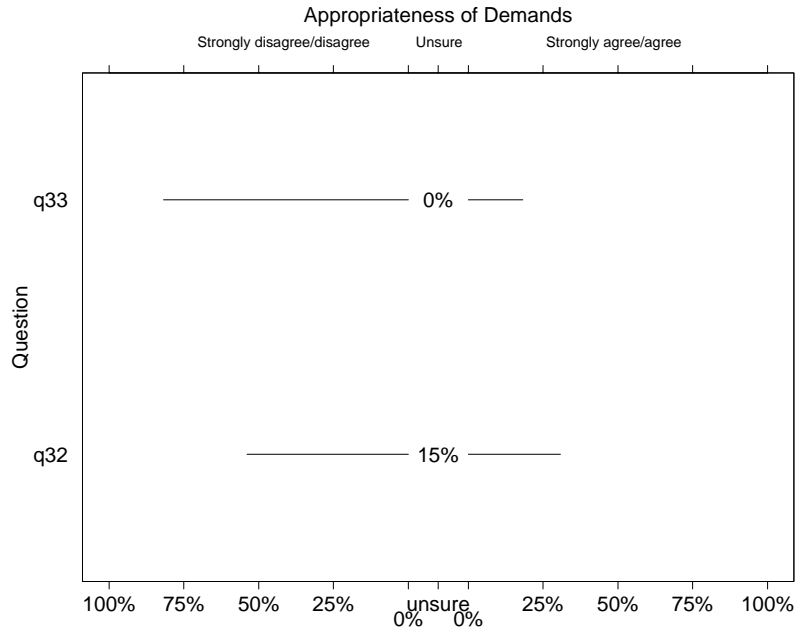**Figure 35: Teacher views of the demands of the SAS**

Appropriateness of Demands

| Strongly disagree/disagree | Unsure | Strongly agree/agree |

q33 ——————— 0% ———

q32 ——————— 15% ———————

Question

100%   75%   50%   25%   unsure   25%   50%   75%   100%
   0%   0%

Figure 36 from the quantitative data for phase 3 (see appendix B for research instrument) shows students' perceptions about assessment. When they were asked about their preferences in assessment (Q9), more than half reported that they preferred multiple-choice tests and fewer than one-fifth in each case preferred any other kind of testing suggested.

Figure 36: Students' preferences in assessment
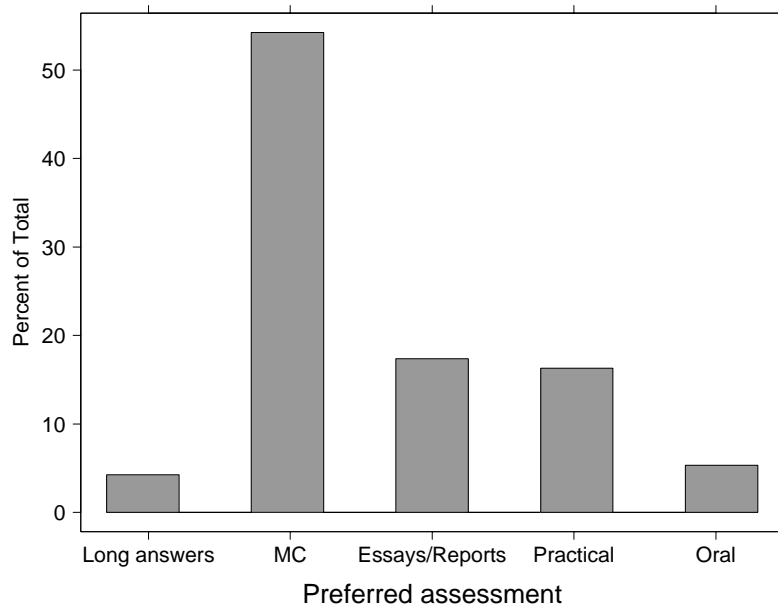
Students were fairly positive in their opinions about the assessment they had actually experienced. Figure 37 from the quantitative data for phase 3 (see appendix B for research instrument) shows that more than half of them agree that there was variety in the assessment tasks (Q11.a). Although about one-quarter thought there was too much assessment (Q11.b), very few thought it was too hard or that it was too easy (Q11.c, Q11.d). Two-thirds of the students agreed that they understood what they needed to do to do well in the assessment tasks and more than one-third thought the assessment tasks were helping them to learn (Q11.e, Q11.f).

Figure 37: Students' perceptions of assessment experienced
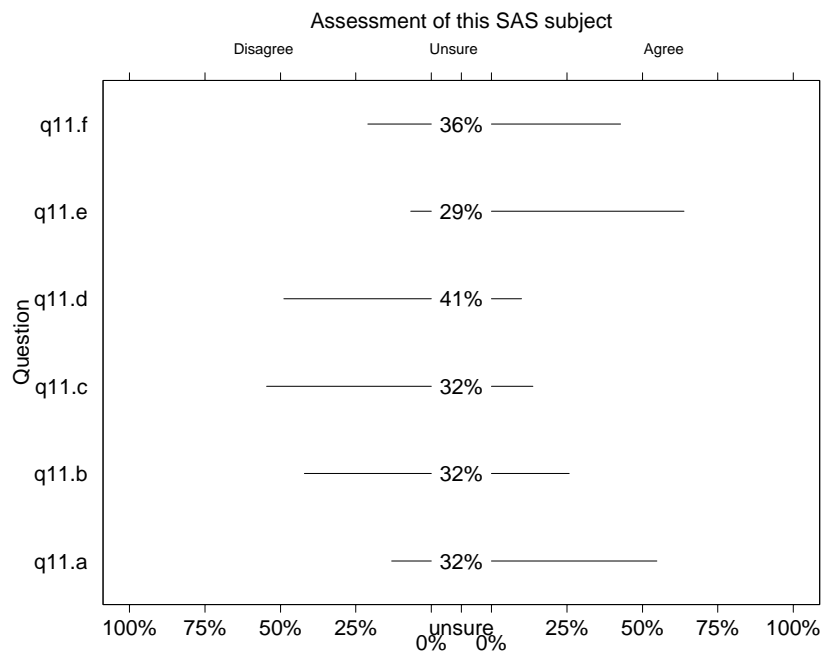
Students who are not participating in the SAS

What groups of students are not participating in the SAS and why are they not participating? Should the SAS meet the needs of any of these other groups of students?

In phase 1, a group of teachers of students with ascertained needs provided, at an evaluation meeting, some information directly relevant to answering these research questions. They commented that they would like to explore ways in which the SAS could be provided to students with multiple impairments; however, they added that presently not all their students with multiple impairments were taking the SAS. These teachers reflected that students who communicate only nonverbally may not be able to meet the criteria. They described these students as being unable to attend to their own toilet needs and requiring very strong support in self-care. They identified some of these students as being unable to meet the Social & Community Studies exit criteria.

In written comments provided in phase 2, responding teachers made no comment on this specifically. However, some indicated that although some higher-ability students choose to take this SAS because they find it interesting or because

they are looking for an easy "filler" subject, most students are guided into the subject because they are taking other vocational subjects or because they are looking for an easier subject in which they can be given a good deal of support. Thus, it may be that students who are not participating in the SAS simply do not fall into those categories.

The quantitative data from phase 2 indicate in figure 38 that many teachers are unsure or disagree that there are significant numbers of students in their school who should be participating in the SAS but are not (Q51). This also suggests that many disagree or are unsure that subject-selection processes encourage OP-eligible students to take the SAS if it would benefit them (Q52).

Figure 38: Students not participating in the SAS
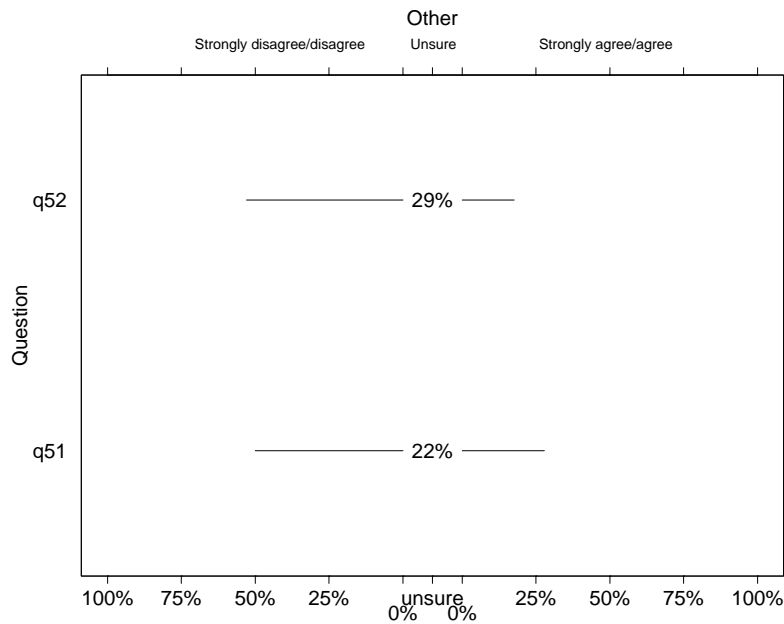
The phase 3 data indicate that the gender balance for the SAS is a little more than half girls and a little less than half boys. Almost all students taking the SAS also take at least one Board subject and more than half take at least one other SAS. Some classes include students with special needs. Teachers were asked whether changes to the content of the SAS might make it more attractive to students currently not participating in it. In response, teachers suggested the inclusion of some vocational elements and more practical activities.

A few teachers called for the inclusion of VET competencies in the subject, saying that some students currently do not take up the subject because it does not offer certification. Two teachers suggested that the content should include more "hands-on" activities for students with special needs, but another teacher commented that these students are well catered for. The possibility of a greater emphasis on practical skills was echoed by the teacher who suggested that perhaps traineeship work could be included in assessment in order to appeal to boys who might then be more likely to take up the subject.

Two teachers suggested that the subject could give students the opportunity to decide what content to study, and one suggested that some focus on youth cultures and survival through adolescence would be helpful in the subject. However, another said that it is already easy to adapt the SAS to suit the needs of most students.

APPENDIX B: RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS