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Class of 2024 achieves 33 excellence awards

Among the class of 2024, 33 students have been awarded Governor of South Australia Commendations across the categories of SACE Excellence, Aboriginal Student SACE Excellence and Excellence in Modified SACE.

This year's young recipients have challenged disability stereotypes, championed environmental sustainability, fundraised for mental health and volunteered for the homeless while completing their SACE – some while simultaneously taking on additional carer responsibilities.

The Awards, now in their 13th year, recognise students who have excelled in their SACE subjects and demonstrated SACE capabilities across three categories of excellence, while also making significant contributions to their schools and communities.

Raphillia Agale, from Kangaroo Island, is the Aboriginal Student SACE Excellence Award recipient for 2024. Raphillia has been acknowledged for her academic diligence, commitment to excellence and continuous improvement, and her environmental stewardship and cultural awareness of people and places.

Ruby Sambell, from the Limestone Coast, has been awarded the Excellence in Modified SACE Award* for her achievements in SACE and modified SACE subjects, and for being an outstanding role model for young people living with disabilities within her school and across the wider community.

Commendations are selected by an expert panel, including the Governor, Her Excellency the Honourable Frances Adamson AC, from Year 12 SACE students nominated by their schools based on selection criteria.

Students will receive their Commendations at an official ceremony at Government House on February 13, 2025.

A full list of Governor of South Australia Commendation recipients for 2024 is available [online](#) and included below.

Attributable to SACE Board Chief Executive Michaela Bensley

The Governor of South Australia Commendations celebrate students who have excelled in their SACE subjects and demonstrated SACE capabilities whilst contributing to their schools and communities.

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The SACE Board's vision is for all students to graduate with a world-class qualification that showcases the diversity of their skills and talents.

This year's Commendation recipients exemplify this vision and serve as inspiring examples. We wish them continued success in their future endeavours.

Governor of South Australia Commendation recipients for 2024

Aboriginal Student SACE Excellence Award

Raphillia Agale (Kangaroo Island)

Raphillia came to her school with a keen curiosity to learn more about, and connect with, her Torres Strait Islander heritage. She participated in the South Australian Aboriginal Secondary Training Academy (SAASTA) program where she expanded her intercultural understanding and applied this to the Kangaroo Island local context to advocate for better healthcare for Aboriginal residents. By embracing cultural activities such as cultural dance, workshops and smoking ceremonies, Raphillia has strengthened her cultural connection. She also worked with AusOceans to contribute to the development of an ocean monitoring rig deployed off Kingscote and has regularly sought support and feedback from teachers to achieve her best.

Excellence in Modified SACE Award

Ruby Sambell (Limestone Coast)

Ruby transitioned from special education classes to mainstream classes in Year 10 and flourished studying a combination of SACE and Modified SACE subjects. She has completed a VET Certificate II in Construction and undertaken work experience in engineering and construction. She has overcome extreme anxiety to act as a spokesperson for people living with disabilities. Ruby consistently demonstrates resilience, kindness and inclusivity inside and outside her school. Ruby is also a valued team member of her local, football and basketball teams. She is currently working as a Tyre Fitter with Naracoorte Tyre Power.

Excellence in SACE Award

Kloe Appleton (Yorke Peninsula)

Kloe has balanced her academic commitments and leadership duties with remarkable efficiency, performing at a high standard academically whilst also overseeing and organising a range of initiatives bringing together students, staff and the local community. From working with other school student leaders to fundraising

for childhood cancer, and winning the Copper Coast Council Leadership Award, Kloe has repeatedly demonstrated her commitment to bettering the world around her. Her dedication to self-improvement has been evident in her consistent application of study techniques and feedback in her SACE subjects.

Melody Baldock (Riverland)

As a Senior School Leader, Melody has played a key role in bringing together her school community through a range of initiatives and activities such as fundraising BBQs and Relay for Life. She has also been a strong advocate for lowering the voting age, showing her commitment to civics and citizenship. Melody has also managed her school's local news broadcast, ensuring that all students remain updated and informed.

Pareena Brar

Pareena is a diligent young person who has used her initiative, proactiveness and dedication to achieve outstanding academic results. In her spare time, she has formed tutorial groups to provide extra assistance to her classmates. A valued member of the school community, Pareena has been approachable and considerate in all interactions with members of the school community. Her community spirit has been evidenced through her many volunteering efforts with the local Indian and wider communities.

Alexander Clark

A Purton Oratory winner, Alex is an accomplished public speaker who has been engaged in debating activities from Year 7 through to Year 12. A Head Prefect, Alex organised and implemented a visit from disability support provider Novita, which involved his peers touring their school by wheelchair to identify accessibility gaps on campus. Alex has demonstrated a deep commitment to the community through various fundraising activities and social justice events, including the Winter Sleepout and White Ribbon Campaign. Alex's deep ethical understanding and strong sense of community makes him an exemplary role model for his peers and younger students at his school.

Gabriel Cregan

An accomplished mathematician and swimmer, College Captain Gabriel has balanced multiple commitments to achieve personal and learning goals. His considerable development in mathematics, which has far exceeded the level expected of a senior secondary student, has led Gabriel to choose to Mathematics as a career pathway. Gabriel has represented Australia in the Virtus Global Games, is two-time state champion and currently holds 56 state swimming records.

Rithisa Dahal

Rithisa aspires to pursue a career in radiation therapy and has a strong and focused vision for her future in healthcare. During her SACE journey, she has excelled in STEM subjects, including participating in the MASA Mathematics Competition and the NASSSA Math Olympics. Rithisa has won numerous academic achievements and is known for her compassion and supportive nature towards her peers and has passionately celebrated her culture and shared it with her school community.

Nathan Driver (Mid North)

Head Prefect Nathan has mentored younger students, led a Mission Trip to Bali, and coached school sports – all while completing a Certificate III and working at his local supermarket. He is a prolific contributor to his community and plays football and basketball locally. Academically, Nathan has a particular aptitude for Maths and Physics and hopes to pursue to a STEM-related degree at university.

Rachel Files (Riverland)

Head Prefect Rachel's passion for the humanities has seen her participate in Teen Parliament, excel as a debater and speak publicly at various forums. Her parliamentary speech won her a prestigious scholarship, and for Anzac Day, Rachel presented a well-researched speech highlighting the role of the Women's Land Army to her local community. She was the CEO of her company during Australian Business Week.

Lewis Gilbert

Lewis was born and lived in Hong Kong until Year 10, when he came to St Peter's College as a boarder, where he has been studying since. Lewis enjoys basketball, and fitness, including going to the gym. He also plays the piano. In Year 12, Lewis' biggest challenge was time management - balancing his sport commitments, health and wellbeing, and social life. He plans to study a double degree in Mathematics and Engineering next year. He is interested in a career in science, possibly in aerospace.

Zashka Gunson

Zashka's academic success spans across creative, scientific and mathematical domains. She was selected to attend the National Youth Science Forum (NYSF) and has subsequently assisted next year's participants with their funding applications. As Prefect in Years 11 and 12, she has been a role model for her peers and organised various activities to build stronger school connections. As part of her school's Environment Club, Zashka ran recycling programs and initiatives to reduce energy poverty. In sporting, Zashka holds a SASI scholarship for para-badminton and is a member of the national Para-Falcon badminton squad.

Putsoriyavong (Victoria) Hem

Victoria is a self-disciplined, determined young person who wants to pursue a career in STEM. Studying Math Methods, Physics, Chemistry and Biology in Year 12, she has exemplified her ability to approach complex concepts with a critical and analytical mind. Whilst meeting the high demands of these subjects, Victoria has also been a carer for her brother, who is on the autism spectrum, and worked at her parents' bakery.

Kevin Hua

An accomplished all-rounder, Kevin consistently embodies the SACE capabilities in all aspects of his academic journey. He has demonstrated a notable commitment to promoting literacy skills among his peers by initiating a wide range of literacy programs at school. Kevin has also been a strong advocate for National Reconciliation Week which has seen him organise events, create educational resources, and work collaboratively with his peers to raise awareness. Kevin contributes to the wider community with a focus on advocating for youth and inspiring younger students. Kevin is a strong leader who has rallied his school community on civic education, digital literacy, and environmental impact. Outside of school, Kevin is involved in Youth Parliament and the UN Youth Council.

Sargunpreet Kaur

Sargunpreet is dedicated to her ambition of becoming a doctor, sitting her Stage 2 Biology exam the day after her family home was burned. Her pursuit of knowledge and excellence has seen her achieve outstanding results in her SACE subjects, as well as the university subjects and Certificate III that she has completed alongside her SACE. Sargunpreet is also an accomplished communicator, and shared her key learning from Activating Identities and Futures (AIF), interwoven with stories of migration, culture, religion and identity to a warm reception at her school's AIF TED Talk Evening. As part of her AIF journey, Sargunpreet has sought to build shared understandings about Sikhism in Australia to enhance cross-cultural relationships.

James Le

James, who wants to study Medicine at the University of Adelaide, is also a passionate musician. He plays both the flute and the saxophone, and participates in multiple ensembles. James credits his teachers for the integral role they have played in his success during SACE. He is also a keen dancer.

Ebony Lewis

As an Aboriginal student leader, Ebony has shown an innate ability to bridge cultural perspectives and foster inclusive environments within her school community. She

organised NAIDOC Week celebrations and has mentored younger Aboriginal students at her school in their transition to secondary education. She has demonstrated exceptional critical thinking through data collection and analysis, which she has used to evaluate communication and process effectiveness across various community service projects such as Project Compassion. Ebony is a skilled communicator who has a particular aptitude for tailoring communication specifically for different audiences.

Xinyi (Cindy) Luo

Xinyi has immersed herself in debating, public speaking and philosophy, participating in the Rostrum Voice of the Youth, Australasian Philosothon and Ethics Olympiad competitions. She was Strings Leader in 2024 and engaged in over seven choirs, bands, orchestras and chamber ensembles. Xinyi has received excellent recognition for her work as an accompanist, including the AMEB Student Accompanist Award, the Collaborative Pianist Award and the Winston Music Finalist Prize in the Geoffrey Parsons Awards – a national biennial competition. Xinyi is committed to supporting others in their musical and creative endeavours and volunteers for the Salvation Army and Uniting Church.

Crystal Manning

Crystal has demonstrated exceptional public speaking skills at numerous events, including ANZAC and Remembrance Day services, Open Days, and College assemblies. Her confidence, humour, and humility captivate audiences, while her honesty and respect ensure her presentations are impactful. Crystal has excelled in guiding peers and writing for the College newsletter and magazine. Her dedication to storytelling is evident in her filmmaking, where she has created moving films that connect deeply with her community. Crystal has consistently achieved high results, showcasing her growth mindset and leadership abilities. Her commitment to inclusivity and community service is reflected in her numerous awards and her role in establishing a new inline hockey club for women in South Australia.

Kahlan Mashford

Kahlan was the recipient of the Vox Populi award at her school, highlighting her commitment to amplifying the student voice through her roles as Vice-Captain and Student Voice Council Executive member. Completing Accounting and Management courses at university during her SACE, as well as a Certificate III in Business, Kahlan has utilised the myriads of learning opportunities available to her, winning a number of awards to reflect her academic, extracurricular and community achievements along the way. Her personal and social capabilities have been especially evident through her participation in the Clean Up Australia Day Event, as well as fundraising for F1 in Schools.

Evan Mewett

As school-based Dux in both Stage 2 Music Explorations and Mathematical Methods while in Year 11, Evan has demonstrated his ability to engage critically across disciplines, approaching both mathematical and musical concepts with precision and creativity. He has participated in national STEM competitions, as well as the Defence Work Experience Program's STEM Immersion Week. As Year 12 Music Captain, Evan mentored younger musicians, coordinated ensemble performances for large-scale community events, and hosted recital nights at school. He also completed a Certificate III in Christian Ministry and Theology, and balanced his SACE subjects and VET certificate with an aviation course.

Tooba Mumtaz

Tooba has shown incredible resilience and growth despite facing significant personal challenges. While caring for her younger sister and her father during his terminal illness after the loss of her mother, Tooba maintained high achievement levels in all her subjects and excellent attendance. She remained positive and welcoming, building strong connections even during difficult times. Her academic performance stayed strong, and she achieved impressive results in the University Clinical Aptitude Test (UCAT).

Orion (Ori) Packer

Orion has held leadership roles throughout his SACE journey, including House Captain, School Vice-Captain and Pedal Prix Captain. In these roles, he has engaged with the school community with compassion, humility and respect. Particularly as Pedal Prix captain, he showed initiative by introducing regular training sessions, increasing involvement from younger students, and applying for sponsorships from local businesses. As an exchange student to Japan, Orion built lasting connections with his host family. He led and organised countless fundraising activities for causes ranging from men's mental health, poverty, homelessness and refugee support. Orion has supported a family friend, who is a member of the Stolen Generation, to create a family tree to better understand his history.

Lilianna Pourgiezis

Lilianna is hoping to study Medicine at the University of Adelaide. A keen volunteer within and outside of school, Lilianna has a passion for helping people. Ever since she dissected a heart in Year 10 Biology, she has had her own heart set on a career in medicine. As a member of the Wilderness School Student Foundation committee, she helped run school tours for prospective students and their families. As a member of the International Committee, she helped run inclusive events and serve multicultural food to students. Lilianna played social netball and volleyball for her

school this year. Prior to Year 12, Lilianna volunteered through a Reading Buddies program for disadvantage students to help them with their reading.

Emily Richardson

Emily is an agile cross-disciplinary student who has excelled in her wide range of SACE subjects and won multiple awards while also serving as School Vice-Captain. A skilled debater and public speaker, Emily has had extensive involvement across a range of other extracurricular activities, including basketball and the Duke of Edinburgh Award. She led her school's Lent Campaign, aimed at involving the school community in service of a worthy cause, and helped deliver a range of initiatives which raised over \$11,000 for the Australian Bragg Centre for Proton Therapy. Emily has also been a member of her school's Reconciliation Action Plan Committee where she has been a strong proponent of truth telling and the value of embedding Aboriginal history and culture in meaningful ways.

Maram Salim

Maram started her SACE journey at the same time that she started to learn English – quickly excelling in both through her tenacity and hard work. She put in extra effort to bridge her language gap, organising extra time with her teachers to deepen her understanding of content she had been unfamiliar with. Importantly, as Maram advanced, she took time to provide constructive feedback to her peers and encourage them in their own improvement. Despite only having been at her school for a year, Maram has forged strong relationships with her teachers and peers through respect and understanding.

Alexandra Seal

South Australia's 2024 Young Citizen of the Year, Alexandra is an accomplished scholar and advocate. Her business, Six Spaces, which donates a percentage of profits to charities such as families4families also sees her handcraft polymer clay jewellery. Her advocacy work includes creating globally shared fliers for the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary/ Congregation of Jesus (BVM/CJ NGO) at the UN and a compelling video for the Mind the Gap movement for UN Women. For her Research Project, Alexandra created a short film for families4families to share with rehabilitation clinics for people and families impacted by acquired brain injuries. Alexandra's leadership and strong sense of social justice have been evident in her roles in the Peace and Justice Group, Environment Committee, and as chair of her school's UN committee.

James Skelton

James is an accomplished classical musician and scholar with a strong academic record. He has demonstrated exceptional literacy skills through detailed applications for his further studies, and artist performance biographies. James won the 'Most Promising Wind Player' award at the Australian Concerto & Vocal Competition, performing two major clarinet concertos from memory. He has also been recognized with the Music Teachers' Association of SA 'Grace Barbara Turner Award for Excellence in Performance' for three consecutive years and was a finalist for the 5MBS Young Virtuoso Awards. As a dedicated musician, James has excelled in SACE Music subjects and national competitions, earning distinctions in piano and clarinet diplomas. His leadership roles as College Captain and Prefect, along with his involvement in co-curricular activities, highlight his personal and social skills. James aspires to pursue a career as a classical musician and has applied to leading music colleges in London. James has completed the HeadStart University of Adelaide course in Human Anatomy and Physiology, achieving High Distinctions.

Angus Smith (Kangaroo Island)

Throughout his SACE journey, Angus has consistently gone above and beyond both in his academic and extracurricular endeavours. Excelling in his SACE subjects through his interest in the content and ability to think critically and creatively about his approach to different assessment tasks, Angus has also taken the time to assist his peers with their understanding of key mathematical concepts. Through his Bronze Duke of Edinburgh Award and participation in the Oliphant Science Awards, Angus also displayed a deep commitment to growth, teamwork and leadership. His well-thought out and innovative submission to the Oliphant Science Awards also saw him take the second prize home.

Lev Tarasenko

Lev, who won the Oliphant Award for Scientific Writing, is an expert communicator with a keen interest in STEM subjects. As part of a 6-student team, he built, deployed and monitored a rig located in Port Adelaide River in collaboration with AusOcean. He was selected to attend the South Australia Space School Camp and has also completed a Certificate III in Christian Ministry and Theology. Lev has been a strong leader in his school community, taking on formal roles as Student College Leader and Deputy House Captain, and also worked on a casual basis at his school over school holidays undertaking maintenance and groundwork.

Sophia Tayeb

Sophia, as President of the Student Representative Committee, has played a key role in amplifying student voice at her school and bringing everyone together for shared

causes. She led and organised fundraising initiatives for International Women's Day and R U OK Day, as well as for a school in Nepal. Through her involvement with Anglicare and the SONY Foundation Camp, Sophia volunteered time to care for children and young people with disabilities. She successfully completed two seasons as cox to win regattas and national rowing titles. Sophia has also achieved the Gold Duke of Edinburgh Award.

Joshua Wabnitz

Benjamin Walkuski

Winning Dux awards for four of his SACE Stage 2 subjects, along with his school's Gold Medal for excellence across academic, sporting and citizenship domains, Ben is a true all-rounder. His proficiency in his Stage 2 subjects, coupled with his willingness to share his knowledge and expertise with others, has seen Ben become a sought-after peer mentor for his classmates. He also set up a Mathematics support program at his school, and led study sessions for other subjects even during school holidays, demonstrating a deep commitment to education and community. Showing particular insight into how his autism influences his interactions with others, Ben has taken a proactive approach to offering and accepting perspectives, and respecting the autonomy of others. Ben hopes to study Psychology after school.

** Modified SACE subjects meet the learning needs of individual students with impairment in intellectual functioning and/or adaptive behaviours associated with their disability.*