2022 VCE Australian Politics external assessment report

General comments

In the 2022 VCE Australian Politics examination, students displayed a pleasing level of engagement with contemporary events and trends.

VCE Australian Politics is a contemporary study and the focus must be on examples and case studies from within the last 10 years. To this end, many students referred to the 2022 federal election, the agenda of the Albanese government, recent landmark US Supreme Court rulings, and Australia’s policy responses to current national and global events and circumstances. Those students who relied on examples from the Rudd and Gillard government era did not show an awareness of current political affairs, which remains vital to success in this subject.

The examination consisted of two sections.

* Section A comprised 12 short-answer and extended-answer questions, including two questions with multiple parts. Students were required to answer all questions; however, some students left answers blank.
* Section B consisted of four essay questions – one for each area of study. Students were required to answer one of these essay questions.

Many students wrote lengthy responses throughout the examination. A common practice was unnecessary repetition of questions within student responses, which exhausted the allocated writing space and pushed students to use the extra space. Students are reminded to take note of the number of marks allocated to each question and to write a response of an appropriate length. Where extra space is required for the completion of Section A questions, students must ensure that they use the pages allocated for this purpose at the back of the examination booklet, not the pages allocated to their Section B essay response. Students who use the pages at the back of the booklet must clearly label the question number at the start of their response.

Students need to develop a clear understanding of how to respond appropriately to questions containing different command/task words. A low-order command such as ‘state’ in Question 1a. requires no elaboration or illustration. A command such as ‘discuss’ in Questions 5 and 8 requires more than a simple description or explanation, and might involve looking at both sides of an argument, or offering interconnected or contrasting examples. The high-order command ‘evaluate’ in Questions 9 and 12 requires analysis *and* appraisal. That is, to evaluate students need to break an issue down into its component parts, discuss them and show how they interrelate, look for strengths and weaknesses or advantages and disadvantages – best achieved through use of examples or evidence – and present a judgment based on their analysis. Some ‘analyse’ questions also oblige the student to make a judgment. For example, Question 6 required students to ‘analyse … the effectiveness’ and Question 11 asked students to ‘analyse the importance’. Teachers and students are reminded to practise questions with a range of task words as part of their examination preparation. Students should refer to the [glossary of command terms](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/assessment/vce-assessment/Pages/GlossaryofCommandTerms.aspx) on the VCAA website.

Some multi-faceted questions proved challenging. Students need to read questions carefully, identify each question’s different components, and ensure that they answer each question in its entirety. Students must take particular note of plurals (such as ‘impact*s*’ in Question 3), the use of the word ‘and’ (such as ‘formulation *and* implementation’ in Question 9), the mandated use of contemporary examples, and numbers of factors required, which are usually specified in bold.

Handwriting legibility was again a significant issue in 2022. Students and teachers are encouraged to undertake regular in-class practice of clear, legible handwriting to ensure that students are not disadvantaged by their examination responses being unreadable.

One issue of concern that was apparent this year was some weakness in students’ understanding of the core values and principles that underpin Australia’s political system. These values and principles, such as popular sovereignty, representative government and responsible government, are an integral part of the study design included in Unit 3 Area of Study 1. They not only underpin Australia’s liberal democracy; they underpin the entirety of VCE Units 3 and 4 Australian Politics.

Specific information

Note: Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding, resulting in a total of more or less than 100 per cent.

Section A

Question 1a.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | Average |
| % | 4 | 34 | 63 | 1.6 |

Functions of the Senate include to:

* legislate
* represent the states and territories
* debate bills
* amend bills
* act as a house of review
* scrutinise supply bills
* hold the executive to account.

This opening question was straightforward for many students. However, a significant number of students presented the idea that the Senate represents minorities, which is not a function of the Senate but an outcome of the electoral system. Students were only required to state two functions.

Question 1b.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | Average |
| % | 15 | 22 | 62 | 1.5 |

A high-scoring response needed to show a clear link between one aspect of question time and a lack of accountability, either of the government as a whole or of an individual minister. The question referred specifically to the House of Representatives so it was essential that students confined their answers to a discussion of question time in that chamber.

The most commonly given and accepted response related to governments’ use of Dorothy Dixers as a means of avoiding scrutiny. These questions, asked with a minister’s knowledge, allow that minister to give a prepared reply, to present government policy and action in a positive light, or to embarrass the Opposition.

Other acceptable responses included:

* Question time occurs at the prime minister’s discretion. The prime minister controls the duration of question time and may stop it at any time, even without any questions having been asked.
* Ministers cannot be compelled to answer a question.
* The Speaker of the House of Representatives, who is usually a member of the governing party, presides over question time. A Speaker’s leniency in applying the standing orders or ruling on the ‘relevance’ of a minister’s answer may compromise government accountability.
* House of Representatives standing orders do not allow supplementary questions to be asked, which means ministers’ answers cannot be followed up, except in a new question asked later in question time.

Question 2a.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | Average |
| % | 10 | 33 | 38 | 19 | 1.7 |

The term ‘responsible government’ describes a political system where members of the executive government are drawn from, and are accountable to, the legislative branch. This is a key characteristic of Westminster systems.

The term ‘representative government’ refers to a political system where elected citizens make decisions on behalf of the people and carry out the legislative and executive functions.

Students needed to show an accurate understanding of each of these terms, then to distinguish between the two by explaining the key difference/s between them. Responsible government does not adhere fully to the concept of the separation of powers. While it is to the electors that governments are ultimately accountable, responsible government adds another level of accountability through the parliament.

A significant number of students were unable to demonstrate a clear understanding of these two fundamental principles of Australian democracy.

Question 2b.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Average |
| % | 14 | 17 | 15 | 26 | 28 | 2.4 |

Individual ministerial responsibility (IMR) is the Westminster principle that ministers are individually accountable to the parliament for actions and decisions taken under their authority, within the portfolio, department and government agencies for which they are responsible. In the event of departmental error, a minister should accept responsibility and seek to rectify the mistake. If the failure is sufficiently serious, the minister should, by convention, be dismissed or resign from executive government.

While most students were able to explain the principle of IMR, many struggled to explain its significance in the Australian political system. For a question of this value, students needed to support their answer with contemporary evidence.

Some argued that IMR is important in ensuring standards of transparency and integrity, to keep ministers accountable to the parliament and the people. Examples offered included Bridget McKenzie’s 2020 resignation from Cabinet after a Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet investigation found she failed to disclose her membership of a gun club that benefited from a government grants program that she administered, and Sussan Ley’s 2017 resignation as health minister following a parliamentary expenses scandal.

Some students argued that IMR has declined in significance in recent decades, with ministers now less inclined to resign. A contemporary viewpoint is that it is unreasonable to expect ministers to take direct responsibility for all of the actions of those under their authority. There is now greater reliance on ministerial codes of conduct. The increased size and complexity of government departments have seen alternative accountability mechanisms instituted, such as Senate Estimates processes and freedom of information (FOI) legislation, to offset the growth in bureaucratic decision-making. Other reasons given for reduced significance of IMR included the larger role that ministerial advisers play and the damage ministerial resignations can inflict on governments, particularly those with a small majority. Students referred to ministers’ retention of their portfolios to support these points: Michaelia Cash remained minister for employment after a member of her staff tipped off the media before the Australian Federal Police raided the Australian Workers’ Union offices in 2017, and no responsible ministers lost their jobs over the Coalition government’s unlawful Robodebt scheme. Similarly, students referred to the return to executive government of individuals such as McKenzie and Ley as evidence of the diminished significance of IMR.

Question 3

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | Average |
| % | 12 | 7 | 9 | 10 | 14 | 17 | 18 | 8 | ~~4~~ | 4 |

Broadly, there were two acceptable approaches to this question: first, comparing how political parties affect the composition of the Australian and US legislatures; and/or second, comparing how political parties affect the operation and effectiveness of the Australian and US legislatures in fulfilling their representative functions.

While some students demonstrated excellent knowledge, many failed to adhere to the requirements of the question. A comparison requires an exploration of similarities and differences. The question contained a plural – ‘impacts’ – so students needed to discuss at least two ways in which parties influence representation in the respective legislatures. The impacts discussed needed to be linked to the democratic principle of representation. Some responses were constrained by the writers’ belief that representation simply means to follow the wishes of electors, while higher-scoring responses explored different notions of representation.

Similarities between the impacts of parties on representation in Parliament and Congress include:

* membership recruitment
* control of pre-selection processes
* campaigning and fundraising
* role of party whips in organising party members to take part in debates and votes.

Differences between the impacts of parties on representation in Parliament and Congress include:

* strong two-party dominance of US Congress, with increasing partisanship resulting in little representation of moderates
* two major parties compete for government in Australia, but there is increasing diversity of representation in Australia due to the openness of the system to minor parties and independents
* stronger party discipline in Parliament than Congress (for example, bloc voting, ALP pledge for members to ‘toe the party line’)
* government control over parliamentary notice paper but numerous opportunities in Parliament for individuals to represent their constituencies’ interests
* powerful majority party control over congressional committees, therefore over the US legislative program, which constrains individual representatives’ ability to represent the specific interests of their constituencies
* US political parties’ use of strategic devices such as the filibuster may thwart accurate representation.

Many students demonstrated detailed knowledge of the impacts of electoral systems on representation; however, without specific reference to the actions of political parties within the Australian and US electoral systems, students were not rewarded for this knowledge. Some students digressed significantly from the question to discuss presidential elections.

Question 4

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | Average |
| % | 8 | 21 | 71 | 1.6 |

This was an accessible question for most students, although some struggled to make a clear link between their argument and the case for voluntary voting. Possible arguments included:

* US political values of freedom and individualism make it a right to choose not to vote.
* Compulsory voting leads to a greater number of uninformed and apathetic voters, which may see campaigns focus on appealing to marginal voters and ignoring the base, and ‘random’ votes dampening the voice of the engaged majority.
* The US Constitution grants states the right to run elections, which would be undermined by mandatory voting.

Numerous students argued that voluntary voting reduces the donkey vote. This is an Australian phenomenon relevant to only two US states (Maine and Alaska) that recently adopted ranked-choice voting, not the entire US electoral system.

Question 5

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Average |
| % | 4 | 11 | 23 | 35 | 28 | 2.7 |

While there are many constitutional and structural constraints on presidential power that students could have chosen, the majority discussed impeachment. High-scoring responses outlined the chosen constraint, gave one or more recent examples of its exercise, and discussed the extent to which the constraint is effective or democratic. Constraints on presidential power include:

* congressional control of the federal budget, legislation
* impeachment
* the constitutional requirement for Senate approval of treaties and appointments of ambassadors, Cabinet ministers and Supreme Court justices
* congressional power to declare war
* congressional power to override a presidential veto
* two-term limit
* judicial power to rule presidential action to be unconstitutional or unlawful
* the House of Representatives and/or the Senate, especially during periods of divided government
* ‘lame duck presidency’ – relative powerlessness of a president whose term is nearing its end and/or whose successor has been elected.

Question 6

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Average |
| % | 18 | 9 | 15 | 23 | 17 | 17 | 2.7 |

This question required students to demonstrate an understanding of the key roles of US congressional committees and to analyse one or more ways in which those roles influence the effectiveness of Congress. High-scoring responses clearly articulated an understanding of what congressional effectiveness means. They provided at least one example of the work of a committee, and numerous students gave statistics to illustrate the volume of legislation that proceeds.

Too many student responses focused solely on the investigative role of congressional committees, especially the House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol. While this was an excellent example, it was also necessary to consider the role of committees in the legislative function of Congress.

Roles of congressional committees and sub-committees include to:

* formulate and consider bills on specific issues
* determine which bills will be debated in the House and Senate
* resolve conflicts between House and Senate versions of bills
* investigate specific issues
* review and monitor the activities and policy implementation of the executive, including federal executive agencies
* investigate executive appointments and treaties.

Possible impacts of committees on congressional effectiveness:

* committees and sub-committees enable a division of labour, better deliberation, cooperation, debate and specialisation, which helps manage the legislative workload of Congress and may produce better legislation
* committees allow members to master areas of specialisation; the enhanced influence this may generate could be viewed positively or negatively
* committees may serve as an effective ‘filter’ for bills that are unlikely to pass in Congress, thereby improving the efficiency of Congress
* committee control of the legislative agenda may stifle the introduction of bills not deemed to be in the majority party interest
* strong partisanship in committees contributes to legislative gridlock, especially when the two chambers are controlled by different parties
* the distributive tendency of Congress may see committees engage in pork-barrelling and logrolling.

Comparisons with Australian parliamentary committees were not required and, where included, were generally unhelpful in answering the question.

Question 7

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | Average |
| % | 29 | 22 | 49 | 1.2 |

Strong responses to this question included an appropriate example and were specific about what the Australian Public Service (APS) does in the implementation of Australian domestic policy. Some students confused formulation of policy with implementation; the latter entails using policy instruments to achieve the desired outcome of a policy.

Roles of the APS in domestic policy implementation include:

* delivering services and administering government programs (for example, assessing eligibility for JobKeeper and JobSeeker; making sports grants according to ministerial direction)
* fulfilling legislative and regulatory roles within departments and statutory agencies (for example, chief medical officers, Border Force officials)
* tax collection
* monitoring and enforcing Commonwealth laws and regulations.

Question 8

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Average |
| % | 1 | 5 | 15 | 22 | 29 | 22 | 6 | 3.6 |

This question required students to discuss how the media may influence Australian domestic policy. The task word ‘discuss’ requires more than a description or explanation; it might involve looking at both sides of an argument, and presenting the strengths and weaknesses of each. In this case, students needed to identify at least one way the media may exert influence over domestic policy formulation and/or implementation. Their ensuing discussion might have examined the nature, extent and limitations of that influence, best achieved using examples. While there were some strong responses, many students simply described types of media without addressing the idea of influence.

Examples of ways the media may influence domestic policy include through:

* the selection of stories and degree of coverage of policy issues
* investigative journalism
* actively campaigning to prevent or, conversely, to promote and advocate for policy action
* manipulation of public opinion
* cultivating a strong following, especially using social media.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

*The media may influence Australian domestic policy with the issues it chooses to focus on, which can affect public opinion. The gov’t, desiring to act with the will of the majority to gain public support, can then focus on these issues. For example in 2018 Scott Morrison announced a royal commission into the aged care sector, likely driven by the impending release of the ABC’s four corners episode just days later focussing on issues in the sector. Morrison may have decided to conduct the royal commission wanting to appear to be taking action on the issue of aged care, anticipating the ABC’s report would focus attention on it. Another way in which the media can influence public policy is that it can aid with implementation by clarifying policy details to the Australian people. This was seen in the Covid-19 pandemic when many media outlets such as the ABC and the Guardian released explainers on topics such as lockdown rules and jobkeeper eligibility, policies which required public understanding to be successful. Hence, the media can influence policy by assisting with implementation.*

Question 9

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Average |
| % | 7 | 4 | 10 | 12 | 22 | 19 | 16 | 10 | 4.1 |

This ‘evaluate’ question required students to analyse ways in which independents may influence *both* domestic policy formulation *and* implementation, and to reach a judgment or conclusion about the extent of influence that independents can achieve. Many students demonstrated a good understanding of a range of ways and the circumstances in which independents can most strongly, or readily, affect the domestic policy process. Strong responses considered the effects of the composition of the House of Representatives and the Senate, and supported their arguments with contemporary evidence. Common errors were a failure to address both formulation and implementation, confusion of independents with minor party representatives, and use of examples from the early stages of the Gillard minority government (which fall outside the scope of the study design).

Ways in which independents may influence domestic policy formulation and implementation include:

* through negotiation or ‘horse trading’ their support for government policy in exchange for a policy goal of their own (for example, Senator David Pocock’s push for the ACT’s public housing debt to be wiped in exchange for him supporting the Albanese government’s industrial relations reforms)
* collaborating with other like-minded politicians (for example, Helen Haines and Zali Steggall on the need for climate action)
* negotiating amendments to bills (for example, independents negotiated that the Albanese government’s legislated 43% emissions reduction target be ‘a floor, not a ceiling’)
* tabling petitions in Parliament
* speaking in favour of or against policies in Parliament and/or in the media (for example, Andrew Wilkie spoke out against Robodebt)
* running campaigns against sitting members (for example, numerous ‘teal’ independents who were elected in May 2022 on platforms of climate action and integrity have since supported legislation in Parliament consistent with those platforms).

Limitations on independents’ influence over domestic policy include:

* a lack of power when bipartisanship exists between the major political parties (for example, JobKeeper)
* fewer staff than political parties and less access to resources including the public service.

Question 10

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | Average |
| % | 35 | 13 | 18 | 34 | 1.5 |

‘Sovereignty’ is the legitimate or widely recognised ability to exercise effective control of a territory within a recognised border. This is the primary organising principle of international relations, providing states with the authority to represent their territorial entity within the international community. Many students were unable to define this key term and concept. Numerous students wrongly presented a definition of ‘popular sovereignty’ and numerous others made no attempt at this question.

The question required students to use a contemporary example from Australian foreign policy to show their understanding of ‘sovereignty’, which many struggled to do. Examples of other countries’ sovereignty were only relevant where they linked clearly to contemporary Australian foreign policy (for example, Australia’s support of Ukrainian sovereignty since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022). Other contemporary Australian examples of sovereignty include:

* Operation Sovereign Borders
* foreign interference legislation (for example, *National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference) Act 2018 (Cth)*)
* Australia’s *Foreign Relations (State and Territory Arrangements) Act 2020*, which enabled the cancellation of Victoria’s Memorandum of Understanding with China regarding the Belt and Road Initiative
* the recent establishment of AUKUS and reinvigoration of the Quad.

Question 11

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Average |
| % | 5 | 6 | 12 | 18 | 32 | 27 | 3.5 |

Many student responses to this question identified a specific *formal* agreement or treaty and linked it to one objective of the national interest. It was acceptable for students to analyse the agreement or treaty in terms of one broad objective such as Australia’s national security or economic prosperity, or a more specific element of the national interest such as maintaining influence in the Pacific. Strong analyses considered the relevance, advantages and disadvantages of the chosen agreement or treaty, supported by relevant examples. Given the multitude of formal agreements and treaties about which students could have written, there was an overreliance on ANZUS and the Paris Agreement.

The following is an extract from a high-scoring response.

*The AUKUS multilateral security agreement was formally announced in 2021 by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, American President Joe Biden, and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison. The AUKUS pact is intended to promote Australia’s national security by establishing an agreement for the Australian proliferation of a fleet of nuclear submarines based on American and British technology, as well as encourage cooperation between the military-industrial complexes of the three nations in areas such as hypersonic weapons and artificial intelligence. The provision of nuclear submarines can be considered to promote Australia’s national security in that such submarines both increase Australia’s self-defence capabilities in the event of a conflict and serve as a powerful deterrent against potential conflicts or military escalations. That being said, according to Defence Minister Richard Marles, it is “unlikely” that Australia will receive the submarines until “the 2040s”, and in in this sense the AUKUS will effectively fail to significantly promote Australia’s national security until the actual delivery of the submarines.*

Question 12

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Average |
| % | 2 | 4 | 10 | 13 | 20 | 21 | 21 | 11 | 4.4 |

This question required students to give an accurate and detailed description of Australia’s response to *one* of the foreign policy challenges identified in the study design, and to make a clear judgment about the effectiveness of Australia’s response. Each of the challenges is complex, so while it was unfeasible for students to discuss the full range of their chosen challenge, it was generally insufficient for students to discuss only one policy response. For example, many students chose to evaluate Australia’s response to global and regional conflicts, but an evaluation based solely on one or two Australian measures to support Ukraine was too narrow.

Similarly, student answers that only discussed the Albanese government’s recent legislation of a 43% target reduction in domestic carbon emissions were largely unable to present a credible evaluation of Australia’s response to the foreign policy challenge of climate change and environmental issues.

Many student answers were highly descriptive and lacked the required assessment of effectiveness. Moreover, many answers were highly emotive and lacked evidence to support the students’ strongly held viewpoints.

The following is an extract from a high-scoring response.

*Australia’s response to the global conflict – the Ukraine-Russia invasion which began with the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and escalated in 2022, is effective in its use of foreign policy instruments in order to uphold the national interest. An ongoing conflict, Australia is involved via the provision of bilateral military assistance, in the form of munitions, armaments and bushmasters directly requested by Zelensky; an overseas delegation by Albanese in July 2022 on key staffers; humanitarian and emergency assistance via shelter and sanitation needs; and bilateral economic sanctions on Russia, coordinated multilaterally, placing restrictions on imports and exports, as well as measures such a travel bans on restricted persons. These actions uphold Australia’s reputation as a good global citizen, by providing assistance to the struggling state of Ukraine in an international effort to aid the nation.*

Section B

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | Average |
| % | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 6 | 12 | 7 | 14 | 11 | 11 | 10 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 13 |

The assessment of the essay in Section B is global, based upon criteria that are applied holistically and reflect the assessor’s appraisal of the whole answer. The assessment criteria, as detailed on the examination paper, are as follows:

* development of a coherent and relevant argument that addresses the specific demands of the essay question
* demonstration of political knowledge that is accurate and appropriate for the essay question
* accurate use of key political terms and concepts
* use of contemporary examples and case studies to support explanations, points of view and arguments.

Question 1

Students were asked to discuss the extent to which they agreed with the statement ‘Responsible government effectively enables citizens to hold federal politicians to account.’ To score highly on this question, students needed to demonstrate an accurate understanding of the key concepts of ‘responsible government’ and ‘accountability of government’. Central to responsible government is the requirement that all members of the government hold a seat in, and are directly answerable to, parliament. Citizens may hold governments to account through elections.

Higher-scoring responses demonstrated strong knowledge of the roles that elections and parliamentary practices play in holding governments to account, the role of Cabinet, the doctrines of collective and individual ministerial responsibility, and Australia’s partial separation of powers. They discussed strengths and shortcomings of responsible government in Australia, which relies upon conventions and transparency, and they supported their arguments with contemporary examples.

Weaker responses failed to define the key terms and to present a considered judgment about the effectiveness of responsible government. They often lacked clear contentions and sufficient supporting evidence, and some lost sight of the idea of *citizens* holding politicians to account, which was inherent in the question.

Question 2

This topic, requiring students to judge whether rights and freedoms are better protected in the political system in the US than they are in the political system of Australia, was overwhelmingly the most popular choice of essay topic. The strongest responses to this question established a clear definition of rights and freedoms, explored the relative strength of various sources of protection in each country, and used contemporary case studies to present a nuanced critical comparison.

It was important for students to demonstrate the key knowledge required by the study design. While many compared the effectiveness of the respective constitutions (including the US Bill of Rights and Australia’s express and implied rights), fewer students compared the notion of judicial independence in the two countries. Other sources of protections that could have been explored include the courts, checks and balances, separation of powers, electoral systems, statutory and common law, and international treaties. Some lower-scoring essays diverged significantly from the topic and focused predominantly on electoral systems.

Question 3

This question asked students to compare the degree of influence that the Executive and the Commonwealth Parliament have over the formulation of domestic policy. The more successful responses clarified the dominant role of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in domestic policy formulation and demonstrated a good understanding of parliamentary legislative processes. While supporting evidence focused predominantly on the key policy that students studied during the year, many students supported their arguments with reference to a range of policy issues and specific pieces of legislation.

Responses that were more sophisticated examined a range of factors that affect the degree of influence that the Executive and the Parliament have in policy formulation. Such factors included whether the government has a strong electoral mandate, the size of a government’s majority in the House of Representatives, the balance of power in the Senate, and the urgency of a policy response to events such as a national emergency or pandemic. Some weaker responses discussed a range of influences on policy formulation without showing their relevance to the executive or parliamentary influence.

Policy issues studied by students this year included JobKeeper, Robodebt, COVID-19 vaccinations, and climate change and emissions targets.

Question 4

Students were asked to examine the extent to which the changing media landscape allows public opinion to have more influence on contemporary Australian foreign policy. This proved to be a particularly challenging question and students struggled to address all of its parts. Few students articulated in depth the notion of the changing media landscape. Some presented sound arguments as to how new forms of media play a greater role in shaping and allowing expression of public opinion than do traditional forms of media. However, while students were able to discuss various measures of public opinion and a range of media coverage on foreign policy issues, many had difficulty supporting an argument that media and public opinion are particularly influential.

Many students adopted a more traditional approach to the topic, exploring the nature of foreign policy and explaining the key inputs to foreign policy formulation. Where such exploration supported a contention about the degree of influence that media and public opinion have in foreign policy formulation, this approach was largely successful.

As was the case for all essay topics, the strongest responses supported a clear contention and coherent argument with competent use of contemporary examples and case studies. Policy changes that students argued had been influenced by media and public opinion included responses to climate change and the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers. Contemporary foreign policy decisions and actions that students contended were not significantly influenced by media and public opinion included the reinvigoration of the Quad, the creation of AUKUS, and Australia’s support for Ukraine in the form of humanitarian aid, military hardware and military training.