



GENERAL COMMENTS

Students were well prepared for the 2008 examination. Most students achieved an appropriate balance between the short-answer and extended response questions, with few students unable to complete the paper. It appeared that students appreciated the importance of relevant evidence and examples, and many displayed extensive knowledge of developments in Australian and US politics during 2008.

Section A was well handled by most students. Four questions in this section asked students to define a piece of terminology. Some found it difficult to clearly and concisely express the key elements required to receive the maximum two marks for these questions. This indicates the benefits of careful thought and planning before writing, even for short and apparently, straightforward questions. Students needed to do more than write a one line statement. A brief expansion, explanation or example was also required in order to demonstrate complete understanding.

The remaining eight questions in Section A asked students to either describe or discuss two factors related to specific aspects of the *International Politics – National Politics VCE Study Design*. Each of these questions was worth four marks. Marks were deducted where students merely stated or listed factors. It is unlikely that a factor can be adequately described or discussed in a single sentence. Better answers stated the relevant factor in one sentence, and then wrote one or more additional sentences expanding on the main point. This often involved an explanation of its significance, and reference to a relevant example.

Many students ensured that the two factors were clearly indicated, perhaps by the use of dot points or numbers. Successful responses also endeavoured to select two factors which were clearly different from each other to avoid the possibility of losing marks due to repetition or ‘double-dipping’.

Few students wrote excessively long answers in Section A. Given the limited number of marks available for each question in this section, overly long responses were not justified. Better students wrote concise and accurate answers in Section A that filled, but rarely exceeded, the lines on the examination paper. These responses made the key point, offered a short description or discussion, and added a relevant example or piece of evidence.

Sections B and C required students to write one extended response related to Unit 3, and one extended response related to Unit 4. There were few very short or under-developed extended responses. Most students wrote at least three pages, although many were able to write four or more pages. In order to write extended responses of this length, some students may have devoted slightly more than half of the examination writing time to Sections B and C. This tactic is justified, provided full answers are also completed in Section A.

The more successful extended responses displayed good writing skills and a clear structure. These responses comprised an introduction, often expressing a contention or core argument, followed by a series of body paragraphs and a short conclusion. Successful body paragraphs dealt with a single element of the response, often commencing with a topic sentence and developing more detail as the paragraph progressed. Better students demonstrated awareness of political events and issues, particularly those that occurred during 2008, and used these effectively in their extended responses. These students recognised that it is difficult to achieve a high mark for an extended response by merely offering a set of general points. They demonstrated an ability to apply general material to specific situations by referring to notable events, isolating relevant issues and trends, and naming and quoting prominent individuals.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

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

For each question, an outline answer (or answers) is provided. In some cases the answer given is not the only answer that could have been awarded marks.

Section A – Washington to Canberra

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	10	30	60	1.5

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A primary election, also referred to as a 'primary', is an election in which voters vote for candidates for a subsequent election. Each of the major US political parties (the Democrats and the Republicans) used primaries in many US states as a means of selecting the party's candidate for the 2008 Presidential election. For instance, Barack Obama defeated a range of other Democrats in the primary elections conducted between January and June 2008, and hence became that party's final candidate in the presidential election in November.

Many students experienced difficulties in providing the required information concisely in this question. Some students confused a primary election with the general election for US President, while others implied that primary elections automatically determine a party's candidate for the general election.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	4	4	20	23	49	3.1

Some students oversimplified the question by describing similarities between the US President and the Australian Prime Minister in a broad sense, rather than their specific roles. For instance, students who stated that both the US President and the Australian Prime Minister are elected, or can be removed from office, did not score well, as these descriptions do not relate to their roles. The most significant similarities between the roles of the US President and the Australian Prime Minister which could have been highlighted included:

- both chair their Cabinet, and head the executive branch of government
- both head their political parties
- both initiate legislation
- both play significant roles in the allocation of budget finance
- both play major roles in foreign policy
- both represent their countries overseas
- both appoint members to Cabinet
- both can influence appointments to the judiciary.

The following is an example of a good response.

1. *Both the Australian prime minister and the US president are the heads of government. This means that they take care of administrative roles and are presented to the world as the leaders of their respective countries.*
2. *Another similarity is that both the PM and the president are seen to be the national representative of their political parties. In Australia, Kevin Rudd is the most powerful Labor Party member. In the US, Barack Obama will soon be the most powerful Democrat and therefore be seen to lead the party nationally.*

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	10	6	23	18	43	2.8

This question was directly related to the important concept of 'checks and balances' in US politics, and many better responses recognised this. The most important constraints on the powers of the US Congress include:

- the President can veto legislation approved by Congress. For instance, President Bush used his veto over a piece of legislation concerning stem cell research in 2006
- the Supreme Court can declare legislation to be unconstitutional
- the Congress can be divided, with one party controlling the House of Representatives and another party controlling the Senate, making the passage of legislation more difficult
- the relatively short term of office of the US House of Representatives (two years) is often regarded as a constraint on its legislative powers
- the US is a federation, and hence the legislative power of Congress is limited by the division of powers between the federal and state governments
- lack of party discipline can lead to difficulties in passing legislation by the US Congress
- ultimately, the Congress is responsible to the people, and members can be voted out if their performance is deemed below par.

The following response discussed two of these points.

The power of the US Congress, the legislature, is constrained by a series of checks and balances. One constraint is through the way the President (executive branch) can veto laws passed by the Congress which was evident last year when outgoing President

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George W Bush vetoed the legislation on stem cell research. A second constraint is the way the Supreme Court (the judiciary) is able to deem legislation made by the Congress as unconstitutional. This was evident in the case of Roe v Wade in which the Supreme Court deemed anti-abortion legislation as unconstitutional as women had a right to privacy.

The use of examples in this answer is particularly effective. While the answer contains two relevant constraints on the power of the US Congress, simply stating them would not have been sufficient to receive the maximum mark for the question. However, adding an accurate example of each constraint certainly added to the depth of the answer.

Continuity and change

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	20	25	55	1.4

Many students were confused between the meanings of the words, 'minister' and 'member'. Too many students failed to understand that while all government ministers are also members of parliament, not all members are ministers. Hence, weaker responses referred to backbenchers as 'ministers' who occupy less important or powerful roles in parliament. Students who were unable to offer a clear, accurate definition did not receive two marks for this question. The following response contained the essential elements.

In the Australian federal parliament, the term backbencher refers to a member of parliament who is not a minister or a shadow minister, and hence plays a less prominent role in parliament, but they are important in siding with their party on legislation and other matters.

Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	2	3	17	17	60	3.3

Most students were well prepared for this question. The key requirement was to describe the constitutional roles, rather than the ceremonial roles of the Governor-General. Some responses were too vague, referring to the Governor-General as the 'head of state', or acting as the Queen's representative in Australia. Although not essential, some better answers displayed good knowledge of the Australian Constitution; many students referred to specific sections of it. The most important roles of the Governor-General set out in the Australian Constitution include:

- the Governor-General can prorogue parliament
- the Governor-General can dissolve the House of Representatives
- the Governor-General can give or refuse royal assent to laws
- the Governor-General can suggest amendments to laws
- the Governor-General can appoint and dismiss Ministers
- the Governor-General is Commander-in-Chief of Australia's armed forces
- the Governor-General can appoint High Court justices.

Question 6

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	3	3	18	20	56	3.2

This question required students to name two possible changes to the Australian federal voting system and then discuss how these changes would improve that system. Most students had little difficulty naming two changes but many offered limited or no discussion of the implications of these changes. While a wide range of changes could be suggested, better responses concentrated on changes that have been suggested in recent times, and then linked these to strengthening Australian democracy and reinforcing democratic values. For instance, some excellent responses discussed the proposal to introduce preferential 'above the line' voting for the Senate, arguing that this would help overcome the current situation in which candidates with a very low primary vote can be elected due to preferences received from other parties or candidates. This suggested change revealed a sophisticated understanding of the Australian electoral and voting system.

The following is an excellent response to the question as it provided meaningful discussion of how the changes would improve the voting system.

The federal voting system which serves to elect representatives to parliament could be improved so that it better upholds democratic values. Accountability, the assumption of responsibility for all decisions, policies and actions within a government, would be better upheld if optional preferential above the line voting in the Senate was introduced as this would allow for greater transparency as to where the votes are going and give a more legitimate mandate. Participation, the intention of involving the

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people in the political process, would be enhanced if the voting age if the voting age was lowered to 16 as a greater proportion of society would be able to participate.

The following response is particularly effective as it links changes to the voting system to the strength of Australian democracy, a core element in the study.

Australia's federal voting system is considered as one of the best in the world. However, there are some possible changes that could be made.

1. *Having fixed election dates for parliament would improve the electoral system as it would ensure that the government could not manipulate the date of the election to suit them as seen in 2007 when John Howard delayed calling an election. This would make the election system more accountable and transparent.*
2. *Making people provide photo ID when they come to vote would improve the voting system as it would help prevent people from voting more than once, undermining the legitimacy of the election. It would make the system more accountable.*

These changes would help make the voting system more democratic.

People and policy

Question 7

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	9	16	75	1.7

There are several aspects to party discipline in Australian politics, however only one aspect was required to score full marks for this question. Many students correctly stated that party discipline relates to members of parliament speaking and voting in support of their party in parliamentary debates and divisions. In other words, they do not 'cross the floor'. Some students illustrated this notion by mentioning MPs who have breached party discipline, such as Senator Barnaby Joyce. In some situations, often involving moral issues, party discipline is relaxed and MPs are allowed a free or conscience vote. Other successful responses referred to the principle of collective ministerial responsibility under which government ministers agree to support government policy, even in circumstances in which they may personally disagree with it.

Question 8

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	6	7	21	25	41	2.9

Many students took advantage of the opportunity this question provided to include specific examples of how the Australian Prime Minister has influenced recent Australian domestic policy developments. Without the use of such evidence, there was a risk of responses being too general or repetitive to receive full marks. The most relevant influences included:

- the Prime Minister sets the legislative agenda
- the Prime Minister can initiate legislation
- the Prime Minister votes on legislation in parliament
- the Prime Minister can seek advice from other ministers
- the Prime Minister can seek advice from the public, interest groups, etc.
- the Prime Minister chairs Cabinet, and can announce policy independent of Cabinet
- the Prime Minister appoints the ministry
- the Prime Minister is often the public face of policy development, and can set or influence the political and policy agenda in the media.

Many appropriate references were made John Howard's influence in the emergency intervention in the Northern Territory in 2007, Kevin Rudd's active role in the development of an emissions trading scheme in 2008, and his actions in formulating and implementing federal government policy in response to the global economic and financial events of 2008.

Question 9

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	3	6	20	22	49	3.1



Few students encountered significant problems in answering this question. Many demonstrated excellent knowledge of the composition of the current Senate, and the potential minor parties have to exercise the balance of power in the upper house of the Commonwealth parliament. This was often complemented by discussion of elements of recent federal domestic policy such as FuelWatch, the luxury car tax and legislation relating to the pharmaceutical product, RU486. While references to the role of the Australian Democrats and the passage of the GST legislation in 1999 were acceptable, it should be noted that this example is now somewhat dated, and more contemporary evidence is preferable. The main ways in which minor parties can influence the formulation of federal domestic policy include:

- voting against legislation
- proposing alternate legislation
- having input to the work of parliamentary committees
- highlighting weaknesses in legislation
- suggesting amendments to proposed legislation
- blocking legislation in the Senate and potentially in the House of Representatives if they hold the balance of power
- entering into coalitions or less formal arrangements with major parties
- entering into preference swapping agreements with major parties during elections in return for influence over policy.

Contemporary Australian foreign policy

Question 10

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	10	25	65	1.6

This question required a brief description of two words, and it appeared that some students did not organise their thoughts before writing. This often meant all the available space was used without providing the essential information. It was essential that ‘security’ was described using terms such as ‘lack of threat’, ‘stability’, ‘safety’, ‘good governance’ or ‘peace’.

Many students used the term ‘arc of instability’ in describing the region. This term, while relevant, was most effective when accompanied by further explanation of where this ‘arc’ is located. The use of the term in isolation was too vague if it did not make specific reference to the Asia-Pacific region, comprising South-East Asia, and the South Pacific.

Question 11

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	4	6	22	20	48	3.1

Most students were well prepared for this question, and successfully described two roles of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). However, some less successful responses confused the roles of DFAT with the roles of the relevant government Ministers of Trade and Foreign Affairs, or with the broader aims of Australian foreign policy. Such responses did not meet the requirements of the question unless they described how DFAT may play a vital role in supporting the executive in the pursuit of its broad foreign policy objectives.

Better responses identified and described two specific roles of DFAT, including:

- issuing travel advice and warnings to Australians planning overseas travel
- advising the government on foreign and trade policy issues
- advising the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Trade
- negotiating trade agreements
- providing information and assistance to Australian businesses trading and operating overseas
- managing and running of Australian embassies, consulates and high commissions, which can act as Australia’s ‘eyes and ears’ around the world
- issuing Australian passports.

Question 12

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	10	9	20	22	38	2.7

It was evident that most students were aware of two situations in which Australian foreign policy has been affected by human rights issues. The use of foreign aid, trade embargoes, and the interventions in East Timor or the Solomon Islands were often mentioned. However, to receive full marks, these examples needed to be linked to specific objectives of Australian foreign policy. The most obvious objective is the desire for Australia to be seen as a good global or



international citizen. The maintenance of national security, and the promotion of Australian economic and trade interests were also objectives discussed by many stronger responses.

The following is an example of a good response.

International human rights issues can have an impact on Australian foreign policy if it serves in the 'national interest'. The recent execution of the Bali bombers has prompted foreign minister, Stephen Smith to re-affirm Australia's opposition to the death penalty and suggest we will lobby the UN. As such, this human rights issue has inspired us to act as a good global citizen. In a similar way, natural disasters earlier this year in Burma prompted monetary relief from Australia which not only allows us to act as a good global citizen, but help build alliances with these troubled nations, and potentially helps them enhance security which may enhance our security and defence, another objective of Australian foreign policy.

Section B – Extended response questions

Question chosen	None	1	2
%	1	74	25

Marks	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	0	1	2	1	2	5	4	6	6	11	12	13	12	10	7	4	1	1	12.8

Unit 3 Democracy in the making

Question 1

This question was selected by a significant proportion of students. The key phrase in the question was 'accurately reflect the wishes of voters' because it reveals the importance of democracy and democratic values such as 'one vote, one value', and a free and fair voting system. Most students recognised this and used their response to evaluate the democratic strengths and weaknesses of the US and Australian federal electoral and voting systems.

The compulsory nature of the Australian electoral system was discussed by most students. While discussion of this matter was certainly justified, weaker responses devoted too much of their response to it, in some cases effectively turning their answer into a discussion of the arguments for and against compulsory voting. This was not required. Stronger responses dealt with the matter, and then moved on to more significant themes.

Better students discussed the merits and drawbacks of the simple majority system used in the US, the preferential and proportional systems used in Australia, and how accurately each system produces electoral outcomes that represent the views of voters. Many students defended the use of proportional voting used to elect the Australian Senate as it provides representation for minority interests rather than the strong majoritarian, 'winner takes all' nature of the US system. Some better responses recognised that the federal voting system of the US includes elections for both the President and the Congress, and distinguished between them.

Further relevant issues considered by many students included:

- presidential candidates in the US are chosen by the people in pre-selection primaries and caucuses, while Australian voters have no equivalent role
- the candidate with the most votes generally wins the US presidential election
- the 'winner takes all' system in the electoral college produces a clear winner
- in Australia, the most preferred candidate wins each House of Representatives electorate
- the party(s) forming government in Australia are more preferred in more electorates than their opposition
- in the Australian Senate the percentage of seats won is proportional to the percentage of votes won per state
- compulsory voting in Australia produces an electoral outcome that is more reflective of the majority and so provides a stronger government mandate than under a voluntary system
- the role of the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), and the absence of an equivalent national electoral body in the US. The AEC ensures a far greater degree of uniformity and consistency in the Australian voting system than the US system. This point was well illustrated in the 2000 presidential election, and the confusion regarding ballot papers in the US state of Florida
- the US system offers voters the opportunity to vote prior to the official election day. In the 2008 US elections, a significant proportion of voters voted early. Other than applying for a postal vote, Australians do not have this opportunity
- the US system can produce Presidents who win the electoral college, yet not the popular vote. For example, this occurred in the 2000 election between Al Gore and George W. Bush



- the 'winner takes all' system of the electoral college is potentially unrepresentative of voters' wishes. For instance, a candidate may win a significant proportion of the vote in a state, yet does not receive any of the electoral college votes for that state
- more voters may choose candidates other than the winning candidate. For example, in 1992, Bill Clinton won 42% of the popular vote, however George H.W. Bush won 38%, and Ross Perot won 19%. Therefore, 57% of voters did **not** vote for Clinton, yet he still won
- in many US presidential elections, only approximately 50% of eligible Americans vote. Hence, it is possible to win the Presidency with about 25% of the potential vote
- it is possible to win the US presidency by winning 11 of the 50 states in the USA, hardly representative of the wishes of voters from the whole country
- minor parties and independents are disadvantaged in the preferential voting system.

These factors demonstrate that both the Australian and the US systems have numerous strengths and weaknesses. Many students appreciated this, and presented a range of factors. Some organised their response in two distinct halves devoted to each system, while some more sophisticated responses used a more integrated response in which each system was compared throughout the entire answer.

Less successful responses compared a limited number of the technical aspects of the two voting systems, but did not make any meaningful statements concerning the democratic merits of each, or how accurately each reflected the wishes of voters. It was evident that stronger responses had planned the content prior to writing, and made frequent reference to the key aspect of the question throughout. Others devoted too much of their response to just one system and produced an unbalanced answer.

It was evident that many National Politics students had analysed the 2008 presidential election during the year, and many drew on this knowledge in their responses. Many referred correctly to President-elect Obama, describing aspects of his victory that were relevant to the question. These included his win over Hillary Clinton in the Democratic Party's primary elections and caucuses and the clear margin he received in electoral college votes in the general election.

Question 2

This question required students to have a good knowledge of the functions of the Australian federal parliament, and also how the operation and structure of parliament could be changed so that it might better fulfil those functions. This question highlighted the importance of planning as it was expected that students would discuss several major functions of parliament. Better responses introduced a range of functions in the opening sections of their response, and then described possible reforms which could be made to parliament. These responses made frequent reference to the functions of parliament. The best responses discussed the functions of parliament within the context of democracy and democratic values. For instance, while these responses appreciated that a key function of the parliament is to hold the government accountable for its actions and policies, they also explained how this function helps achieve democracy in Australia. Less successful responses identified aspects of parliament in need of reform but made few, if any, meaningful links to the functions of parliament or to democratic values.

The major functions of the federal parliament include:

- representing the Australian community and states
- the introduction, debate, scrutiny and passage of legislation
- holding the executive government accountable and responsible for its policies
- raising and analysing matters of national importance and public concern
- gathering information and publicising issues
- controlling and checking of government finance.

Most students sought to discuss the effectiveness of several of these functions by analysing aspects of parliament such as:

- the role of the presiding officers in parliament: the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate. While this factor was mentioned by many students, not all could link it effectively to the functions of parliament. If, as was often claimed, the Speaker of the House lacks control of the chamber, how does this affect parliament's functions such as accountability or the legislative process? Less successful responses also misrepresented the effectiveness of the presiding officers, by implying that they do little more than constantly call for 'Order!' Better responses mentioned the current Speaker, Harry Jenkins, his role in the operation of the current parliament, and drew comparisons with previous Speakers, such as David Hawker



- the role of parliamentary question time. Most students discussed this prominent aspect of parliament, although many presented a somewhat simplistic and general view of it. Only a few of the better responses referred to a specific event from question time that highlighted its drawbacks. For instance, criticisms of the use of so-called ‘Dorothy Dix’ questions from government backbenchers would be far more effective if complemented by a particular example, or nominated an individual MP who had asked such a question
- the degree of representation within parliament. Many students contended that the composition of parliament does not adequately reflect the broader Australian community
- the control over parliament exercised by the executive, including the extent and power of party discipline. Better responses illustrated this important point by reference to specific instances, such as the use of the gag and the guillotine
- the effectiveness of parliamentary committees
- the role of the Senate as a house of review.

The most common weakness displayed by many responses was a limited discussion of how these aspects of parliament might be improved or reformed. While most students could present some of the problems with the current operation of parliament, fewer could offer any significant improvements. A very topical example of this was the short-lived introduction of Friday sittings by the Rudd government in early 2008. This was arguably the most significant attempt at parliamentary reform in recent years, yet disappointingly few students referred to it in their answers.

Some students sought to extend their response by discussing changes that could be made to the Australian Constitution, or the Australian voting system, and then linking these to the operation of the Australian parliament, in particular the Senate. However, such changes were of marginal relevance to the question and often did little more than highlight a lack of knowledge in relation to the core elements of the question. Better responses concentrated on the operations and practices of the parliament and offered a set of possible, realistic reforms that would make the Australian parliament a more democratic institution, and better achieve its major functions.

Section C – Extended response questions

Question chosen	None	1	2
%	1	11	88

Marks	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	1	2	1	2	3	5	6	6	6	7	10	14	12	8	7	5	2	1	12.6

Unit 4 – The challenge of power

Question 1

This was a challenging question as it focused on a very specific aspect of Australian domestic public policy, and demanded a detailed knowledge of a single policy issue. Some students made full use of this opportunity and wrote excellent responses, displaying extensive knowledge of a recent policy issue in Australian politics. However, others found the demands of the question well beyond their level of knowledge, and struggled to go beyond a few broad observations about a policy matter. Some discussed two or more separate policy issues in their response. In some cases, these students may have been advised to consider writing on the alternative question in Section C. This highlights the need for students not to concentrate too heavily on just one of the two topics contained in Sections B and C of the examination.

Most students appreciated that the question required discussion of a particular aspect of policy rather than a broad policy area. Hence, rather than discussing environment policy in general, some students wrote about an aspect of it such as the management of the Murray-Darling river system, or the introduction of an emissions trading scheme. Other appropriate policy issues considered by students included WorkChoices, the Northern Territory Emergency Response and FuelWatch. However, some policy issues, such as the introduction of the tax on ‘alcopops’, presented problems as students found there was too little material to sustain a full response. These responses were often too short and too repetitive.

Some students recognised that numerous secondary forces and factors lie behind the policies of the government and opposition. These students extended their responses by discussing the significance of influences such as relevant interest groups, prominent individuals such as academics or media spokespeople, public opinion, economic and international events. This approach was successful, provided these forces and factors were related to the policies of the government and the opposition. For instance, in discussing FuelWatch, some students noted the significance of the



bureaucracy, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), motoring bodies such as the RACV and state governments, particularly Western Australia, in the formulation of the policy positions of the government and the opposition. Of course, the role of minor parties and independents in the Senate was also worthy of discussion.

The best responses concentrated almost entirely on the roles of the government and the opposition. These students possessed very detailed understanding of the policy positions of each side of the issue. The Howard government's 2007 intervention into indigenous communities of the Northern Territory formed the basis of some successful responses. The origins of the policy were discussed, and the role and views of prominent members of the government and opposition such as the relevant government ministers and opposition shadow ministers were presented. In some cases, significant statements by these ministers were quoted. Some students linked the policy positions of the government and the opposition to broader party ideology and philosophy, which in some cases produced very sophisticated and mature analysis.

A strength of many of these responses was their recognition that the 2007 federal election effectively reversed the roles of government and opposition in Australia, a complication which some less successful responses found difficult to manage.

Question 2

The contemporary Australian foreign policy extended response question has proved popular with students in recent years, a trend which continued in 2008. Students could have interpreted the question fairly narrowly by concentrating on Australia's relationship with the US, or more broadly by introducing several other significant influences on Australia's foreign policy. Few students argued that the Australia-US relationship is unimportant, although many suggested that other influences had become more prominent in recent years. The better responses reflected contemporary Australian politics by acknowledging that the influences on Australian foreign policy may have altered somewhat since the election of the Rudd government in 2007. Stronger responses used evidence to support their arguments in this regard. In particular, statements of both Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, and Foreign Minister Stephen Smith were cited, which explicitly indicated that the relationship with the US is one of the three major elements or pillars of Australian foreign policy.

Most responses analysed the influence of the US relationship on Australian foreign policy, and then moved to a discussion of other likely influences. The continued existence of ANZUS, Australia's membership of the 'coalition of the willing' and support of the US military intervention in Iraq, the formation of the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement and existence of US intelligence and tracking facilities such as Pine Gap on Australian territory, were frequently mentioned as evidence of the influence of the US on Australian foreign policy. Some students cited Australian support of the US in the Vietnam War as evidence of the influence, however an event which occurred 40 years ago was of dubious value in relation to the question.

Other influences on Australian foreign policy discussed by many students included:

- greater engagement and interaction with Asia. Some students placed too much emphasis on China, and overlooked the fact that nations such as Japan, Indonesia, Korea and Thailand are also of great significance to Australian foreign and trade policy
- the higher priority that Australia now places on maintaining regional security, particularly in the South Pacific. Better students demonstrated knowledge of recent policy in relation to this region, including the Port Moresby Declaration, Pacific Partnerships for Development, and the Pacific Seasonal Workers Pilot Scheme
- Australia's role as a member of the international community, the increased size of Australia's foreign aid program, protection of human rights, support for the United Nations, multilateralism, and being regarded as a good global citizen.

Many students were able to provide examples of the influence of each of these factors on Australian foreign policy, although some students lacked knowledge of contemporary policies formulated and implemented under the Rudd government. Many students mentioned Rudd's ability to speak Mandarin, yet failed to mention much more substantial policy developments such as the signing of the Lombok Treaty with Indonesia, and the formation of the Australia/ASEAN/New Zealand Free Trade Agreement, both of which occurred under the Rudd government.

The change of the Australian federal government in 2007 presented problems for some students. Some students chose to oversimplify this transition by arguing that foreign policy is largely bipartisan, and is unaffected by a change of government. Other responses dwelt on the closeness of the Australia-US relationship under John Howard, while others simplistically assumed that the Australia-US relationship would become less influential under an ALP government. The best source of information about current Australian foreign policy are speeches and statements made by relevant

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government ministers, particularly the foreign minister, and it was apparent that better students had consulted such sources in their study of this aspect of the study design. Some students speculated about the likely effect of an Obama administration on the Australia–US relationship. This was worthwhile as it showed awareness that the relationship can be influenced by events in the US.

Some responses presented personal arguments concerning the merits of the Australia–US relationship or offered an evaluation of its costs and benefits. Such responses were less successful as the question did not ask whether the relationship **should** be of major importance in the formulation of Australian foreign policy, but rather whether it is.