

Contemporary Australian Society GA 3: Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

Although this was the first year of this new study, student responses showed a good grasp of the content and ideas in the study design, and the requirements of the examination paper. Responses reflected varied approaches to the teaching of Contemporary Australian Society, with particular strength in the range of communities studied, and understanding of how communities function. It was impressive to see that students were studying the big current issues such as asylum seekers and were also studying about their own communities.

Students usually completed all sections but often needed to pay more attention to the explicit requirements of specific questions. This was particularly evident in Section C, the analysis of the representation, where students needed to refer to evidence from the representation and from their own study, but often neglected to do so.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section A

Question 1 (Average mark 6.27/Available marks 10)

This question explicitly asked for the identification of two changes (economic, social, eco-social) and the description of significant impacts on one (or two) community. This was generally well answered with discussion of a variety of changes and communities. Students who discussed the way in which one change led to further changes did well, provided they also discussed the impacts of the second change. However, students who only referred to one change even if it were an important one, effectively halved their marks.

Good answers drew on case studies and explained how particular changes affected the communities discussed. For example:

A significant economic change has occurred this year. The X Dementia Carers Group usually receives approximately \$300 in funding from the government. However the community only received \$235 this year to support their program. This has made it difficult for the community to exist, because they cannot afford to go on outings or hold seminars as often.

Another example is as follows:

Globalisation has helped dramatically. With this new acceptance of homosexuality, it has allowed people to see that they are not the only gay people in the world.

Answers that examined changes to a specific community performed better than answers about the general Australian community. Although definitions of community were relevant, students who included them at the start of their answers often did not answer the question; rather the response seemed to be the one prepared as practice.

Question 2 (6.02/10)

This question required a brief description of how two factors helped establish a particular community identity. It was generally well answered.

Some excellent answers, clearly identifying and discussing factors like the use of symbols and rituals, the role of government policy and/or funding, the nature of the physical environment and shared goals and explaining the ways these led to a community identity.

For example:

When the X Little Aths Club re-opened (in a new locality) new uniforms were produced for the competitors with funding from many of the families involved in the club, brand new, bright and colourful uniforms helped to establish the identity of the club ... (and) made each member feel like they were part of the community. Another factor which helped establish a sense of identity was the introduction of the centre club banner which was recognised in every competition by other competitors as the X Little Aths Club.

And

Some may say that the government has only eroded the Serbian community but this is not really true as in 1963 they provided the money for the building of an Orthodox church and a hall. This enabled the elders to teach their history to the younger generations. This is where most of their spiritual bonding occurred.

Students who did less well often listed many factors rather than describing two, or did not explain the relationship between the factors and the identity of the particular community.

Section B

Questions in Section B were expected to be more detailed than those in the first section. The notion of a national culture is one which requires discussion and analysis, as signaled in the directions about length and time as well as in the actual wording of Question 3: ' ... Explain what these tensions suggest about a national culture', and Question 4: ' ... Some people claim contributes to a national culture'.

Question 3 (8.2/15)

This question required discussion of the relationship between one particular community and ‘the wider community’ and the implications for the possibility of a national culture. It elicited varied answers based on groups such as Aborigines, the Gay community, and asylum seekers. The Aboriginal community was the most popular community chosen to demonstrate tensions. The better responses used the historical and current injustices to Aboriginal people to build a picture of how our mainly British culture has failed to develop inclusive policies and attitudes that create a genuine philosophy of reconciliation.

Successful answers also discussed the implications for the idea of a national culture.

For example:

As Australia struggles for reconciliation, these tensions have brought about some backlash from some members of wider Australia who still seek a national culture based on a monoculture ... However, these tensions suggest that a return to a single national culture would be virtually impossible, with the advances made already. Instead, they suggest we should look to a national culture which explores its multiculturalism and takes pride in its diversity.

Or

But reconciliation has not fully occurred yet, and this suggests that the idea of a national culture is an unrealistic idea ... The ‘Aussie’ culture is quite different from the ‘Aboriginal’ culture and merging them would be impossible.

Although there were some fine answers, many students did not discuss a national culture and so could not achieve highly.

Question 4 (6.95/15)

This question required consideration of one major belief, value or activity, and the way it is thought to contribute to a common Australian culture. The notion of a national culture needed to be discussed as indicated by the words ‘some people claim’ pointing to the contentious nature of ideas about even the possibility of a national culture. Most students emphasised the role of one factor. In their answers students discussed many values or activities such as sport, religious belief, and the idea of ‘a fair go’.

Successful answers recognised that ‘a national culture’ could be constructed. For example:

The Australian government can also be seen to have a socializing effect on its own population in relation to sport, spending millions of dollars to bring the Olympics to Sydney. This not only reinforces the idea of national culture to Australians but also to the rest of the world.

Others noted that the ideas said to be common in Australian culture were illusions:

So why do we take pride in something that only exists for such a minority? The only answer I can come up with is that the idea of having a ‘fair go’ is the Australian culture we’d like to have.

Some students tended to include stereotypical material about the national culture referring to such symbols as meat pies and Aussie Rules without identifying the stereotypes. Many did not explore any complexity in the notion of a national culture.

Section C

Question 5

Generally, parts a., b. and c. were well answered, especially by students who responded to the prompts in the questions and made detailed references to the representation to support their interpretation. There was some repetition of what was said in response to these questions even though students were expected to have studied the wording in preparation for the exam.

a. (2.47/4)

Students generally recognised that this excerpt from a newspaper article showed a positive view of globalisation in that Gabrielle Lafitte was able to use the Internet to help protect Tibet. More interesting answers noted that this article also showed the negative effects of globalisation by referring to China’s exploitation of Tibet and some students recognised that the article presented globalisation as a fact whether for good or ill.

b. (2.18/4)

Better students recognised that the changes were technological and related to the comparative speed and ease of the processes, either of the financing of the project in Tibet or the opposition to it. Lafitte is not simply a warrior but a ‘cyber warrior’. Other students commented on the democratising effect of modern communications technology and others on the corporatising of the world economy.

c. (2.32/4)

Students clearly recognised the ways this article presented Lafitte’s research and campaign positively. They commented on the photo, stressing the isolation of the figure but coupled with quotations like ‘he could make a difference’. Many noted the role of the group who worked together on this campaign ‘the worldwide linking of people using imagination and knowledge’. More successful responses summed up the probable impact of the representation. For example:

This representation gives individuals and communities inspiration to help the world and shows that it is possible to achieve such goals by use of the internet.

Noone suggested that the idea that small individuals and groups with communication skills could exercise power might be a problem. Some students read too much into the representation making comments about Lafitte's marital status or lack of social life. Such comments seemed to relate more to technological changes rather than to globalisation and were not relevant to the question.

d. (3.91/8)

This part was worth twice the marks of the others in this question and more was expected. Some students clearly evaluated the future presented. They gave their own views on whether, for example, growing corporatisation is inevitable, positive or negative. Some referred interestingly to ideas about 'globalisation from above' compared to 'globalisation from below'.

The following student achieved well on this question by responding to what was asked:

Globalisation is inevitable so we have to ensure that strict rules and regulations are in place so that adverse effects of globalisation are kept at bay. Like China attempting to exploit Tibet, there have been many similar incidents. For example, BHP mining the notorious Ok Tedi mine. It is our obligation to ensure that corporate led globalisation doesn't overshadow the positive globalisation from below.

This question was not well answered with most students neglecting to explain their views in any detail or refer to evidence from material studied. This was an opportunity for students to refer to some of the examples studied in class, as mentioned in the question itself. Few students received high marks for part d.

Section D

Question 6

a.

This was the most popular topic with many students comparing Aborigines' experiences to those of non-Aborigines or women, or comparing experiences of Australian born citizens to those of newly arrived immigrants or refugees. More successful responses looked at different aspects of citizenship (civil, social, legal, political) and demonstrated how the groups compared in these areas and were affected by historical and current factors. For example:

Aboriginal Australians were not even required to vote until 1987 although they were allowed to in 1962 ... Voting is one of the key privileges of citizenship, if we denied this, then we were clearly saying that they were not Australian.

And

As a result of past policies, the Aboriginal population experience citizenship differently to 'white' Australians. Today, Aborigines have restricted access to education ...

Defining citizenship was important in these answers and prepared for the detailed discussion of particular experiences.

For example:

The young ... don't have the right to vote, drink, smoke etc up to the age of 18. They are unable to make their own decisions on many aspects of life because of discriminations due to their age. They are unable to leave school until the age of 15, and unable to leave home until the age of 16, although from the age of 10 they are held accountable for their actions in a law court and are seen as adults in planes, theatres or for other ticket sales ... They experience limited citizenship.

b.

This topic required a discussion of new forms of communication and their relationship to citizenship. This question was least popular and few handled it properly. Some merely analysed the general effects of uses of the Internet without relating their discussion to citizenship issues. Others recognised the relevance of the representation from Question 5 and used it appropriately as part of the discussion.

c.

This essay topic elicited some of the more sophisticated responses and also some of the poorer essays. The question specifically asked for a discussion of global citizenship with a focus on one current debate. Most used the refugee/asylum seekers issue to build up the concept of global citizen.

Good responses explained how the issue related to global responsibilities. For example:

The responsibility which Australians have to asylum seekers are spelt out in the 1951 Declaration on Refugees which Australia is a signatory to. The declaration states that any person has the right to seek asylum in any country if they are trying to escape persecution, oppression or war. It also states that asylum seekers should have freedom of movement in their country of asylum.

Students often argued passionately about the issue, stressing global responsibilities and how these might conflict with government policies. However, few identified these policies as examples of the rights of global citizens, even though they might comment on the potential problems associated with accepting refugees and so there was less clear recognition of the possible tensions between the rights and responsibilities of global citizens.

