

Political Studies GA 3: Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

Overall the standard of the essays has improved and generally there were fewer really short essays. Essays of less than 2 and a half pages cannot score well as it is unlikely they will have sufficiently explored the main propositions in the question.

There is still, however, a tendency for some obviously capable students to write very lengthy responses to the short-answer questions and to write some fairly mediocre essays because they clearly run out of time. Students must guard against this. Too many students wrote far more than was required for their short-answer responses. This usually proved to be a waste of time and rarely gained the student higher marks. Students should ensure that they write precise, clear and concise answers to Part A short-answer questions to ensure that they gain maximum marks. In Part B, students should try to write more than just a phrase for each of the three distinctly different factors or roles they cite.

Each short-answer question should take the student no more than 15 minutes to complete. Spending more time than this can only detract from the time available for the essay. Students should ensure that they practise writing short-answer questions within the time limit allowed in the November examination.

Significantly fewer students chose to answer all five short-answer questions rather than the four specified, so the message is getting through.

The Part C short-answer questions that required students to evaluate an argument were better handled than in previous years.

Students are advised to read each question carefully. Most questions are straightforward but ignoring a key word or phrase means that a response will score an average mark at best.

Section A – Short answer questions

Question 1

The Australian Constitution

a.

What is meant by the term exclusive powers?

As laid down in the Australian Constitution, exclusive powers are those that are held by the Commonwealth Government only. Examples of such powers include defence, foreign affairs, immigration, collection of customs and excise duties, coinage.

Many students had a very good grasp of exclusive powers but too many stated that Section 51 of the Constitution listed exclusive powers. More successful answers were enhanced by the provision of an example. Some students provided incorrect examples.

b.

Briefly describe three reasons why referendums are usually unsuccessful.

Most referendums have not been successful. Reasons include:

- people oppose the increase of powers to the Commonwealth Government – voters are generally conservative/resistant to change,
- lack of bi-partisan support – the major political parties do not agree on the proposed changes
- many voters vote on party lines when faced with a referendum
- on occasions State Governments urge people to vote against giving the Commonwealth more power
- ignorance of the voters on the key issues.

Most students had no trouble identifying three reasons why referenda fail and gained full marks.

c.

Evaluate the argument that Australia should remain a constitutional monarchy.

Students should have evaluated both sides of the argument that the British monarch should remain the head of state.

Australia should remain a constitutional monarchy because:

- the present system is working well
- it will maintain tradition and history
- Australians cannot agree on the form of a republican Australia
- the Constitution has worked well to date.

Australia should not remain a constitutional monarchy because:

- the monarchy is an anachronistic and undemocratic institution
- of a need for Australian Head of State and one that is not determined by heredity, gender and religion
- retaining constitutional monarchy maintains a colonial type relationship – Australia is not fully independent
- it achieves separation of church and state – link between the British monarchy with the Church of England
- it is inconsistent with notions of egalitarianism, multiculturalism and respect for indigenous culture

- it does not mean a change to Australian political structures and institutions.

Many students had a good idea of what a constitutional monarchy is and were able to evaluate both sides of the argument. Most students made specific reference to the Queen and to the Governor-General and the relationship between the British and Australian systems. This proved to be an unexpected and difficult question for others. Some students concentrated solely on the recent republic referendum and gave a pro-republic argument without considering the other side of the question. Some students just reverted to simplistic and incorrect arguments about membership of the Commonwealth, the importance of Britain to Australian security and the flag.

Question 2

Parliament and the Executive

a.

What is meant by the term 'parliamentary privilege'?

Parliamentary privilege is a legal immunity extended to members of parliament to allow them to undertake their representative work. This legal immunity is extended particularly to immunity from libel and defamation laws in order to maximise the notion of free speech in the parliament. The existence of parliamentary privilege is viewed as a mechanism that potentially empowers members of parliament. In recent times, there has been some community unease over the alleged misuse of privilege, and some parliaments have looked into the possibility of allowing citizens mentioned under privilege to have a right-of-reply in the parliament.

The key features of parliamentary privilege include the following:

- the authority for privilege to exist in the Australian parliament is provided by Section 49 of the Australian Constitution. A Privileges Committee has been established to oversee the application of privileges and immunities in the Australian parliament
- members of parliament may, in the course of a debate in either of the parliamentary chambers, make claims or allegations against an individual free from the threat of action for libel or defamation
- that these comments may be reported in Hansard, and are then deemed to be part of the public realm and may be referred to in press again with immunity from defamation action but only in so far as those reports make direct reference to the Hansard
- that the right of privilege may be extended to parliamentary committees and to those making submissions to parliamentary committees
- privilege does not extend beyond the realm of the parliament. An MP's immunity exists only in parliamentary debates or in committees. MPs are subject to defamation laws for any utterances made outside of the parliamentary forum. Sometimes individuals who have been named under privilege challenge MPs to make their claims outside the parliament, and may even refer to the parliament and its privilege as 'coward's castle'.

Most students understood the concept. Many cited the Kirby/Heffernan example from the beginning of the year. Some students exaggerated the extent of what MPs can say or do in parliament. A considerable number of students saw privilege as perks such as travel allowances, gold passes, accommodation and free gifts.

b.

Briefly describe three parliamentary roles of ministers.

Ministers are important members of the Westminster system of parliamentary government. They hold ministerial portfolios that give them the authority to initiate policy proposals, to apply policy programs, and to oversee the operation of ministerial departments. Under the Westminster model, senior ministers comprise the 'cabinet' and are the executive government. Under the Australian model, cabinet comprises about 16 senior or 'super' ministers, with each senior position having a junior or 'assistant' minister attached. A full meeting of the ministry will include senior and junior ministers. The parliamentary roles of ministers do not vary greatly from senior or 'super' minister to junior or 'assistant' minister. The roles include:

- introducing legislation relevant to their portfolio areas to the parliament, and outlining the rationale/reasons for that legislation via the Second Reading speech
- being answerable and accountable to the parliament for the actions and administration of their ministerial departments (linked with the Westminster notion of 'ministerial responsibility', although students could point out at this juncture that the doctrine is rarely, if ever, discharged)
- being required, under the doctrine of Cabinet or Collective Responsibility, to fully support the policy decisions made by the Cabinet, and to respect the convention that a minister does not speak on a matter of policy outside the area of responsibility of their portfolio/s
- being required to attend Question Time and to answer questions from MPs about matters pertaining to the administration of their portfolio/s
- being required to attend parliamentary committees to answer questions on matters of administration of their portfolios and on policy matters.

There was some repetition in answers to this question. For example, students doubled up on roles such as, debating proposed legislation and scrutinising proposed legislation. Most students had a good understanding of the parliamentary roles of ministers and some even gave examples of particular ministers fulfilling their responsibilities.

Many students gained full marks for this question, although there was some confusion between parliamentary roles and general responsibilities.

c.

Evaluate the argument that parliamentary committees achieve little.

Students might approach this by outlining briefly the nature of the committee system, and then grappling with both arguments for and against the proposition.

In sketching the background to the place of committees in the system, students could have discussed the following:

- define committees as an adjunct to the official process by which the parliament undertakes the creation of legislation
- that the use of the committee has become a recent development in Australian politics (originating with the pioneering of this essentially American idea by the then Senator Lionel Murphy in the late 1960s)
- that committees are formed to allow non-ministerial MPs to sit and review policy or investigate a particular matter and to report their findings back to the parliament (and, via the parliamentary proceeding, to the executive)
- that committees comprise MPs from all the parties that are represented in the parliamentary chamber, but that the governing parties will always have a majority in the House of Representatives
- that the reporting process usually occurs via the committee chairperson, although it is also common for individual committee members to write dissenting reports
- that parliament is not bound to follow recommendations made by committees.

The argument against the proposal that they achieve little (that is, that they do achieve something) might contain the following arguments:

- committees allow back-bench MPs the opportunity to have more input to policy debates and political issues
- committees can help to slow down the legislative process (and therefore act as a brake on executive domination of the parliamentary process)
- committees can allow an opportunity for non-government participants to have a greater say on policy matters than might be allowed under the official debating processes associated with formal passage of legislation
- committees can also provide parliamentarians with the opportunity to undertake a more comprehensive review of particular issues, or may even allow for some critical reflection on and evaluation of previous policies
- committee hearings may draw matters to the attention of the public that might not otherwise be explored through debates and/or question time
- training ground.

The argument in favour of the proposition (that is, those committees achieve little) might contain the following arguments:

- that committees lack any real constitutional power or authority to have their findings included in policies or legislation
- that membership of committees, or the very existence of committees, remains in the hands of the executive and that, in short, the government can dominate the committee system
- that committee representation reflects the party composition of the parliament or parliamentary chambers from which they are drawn, and so is a reflection of the way those chambers operate (that is, they are either dominated by the governing party, or they reflect the obstructionism or delaying of chambers in which opposition parties might have the majority)
- that committees may become platforms from which individual MPs may seek to obtain publicity and that their role as a means of reviewing the legislative process becomes of secondary importance
- committee hearings might become places where political actors engage in personal conflict and this may obscure the committee's role on reviewing policy matters.

This was not an easy proposition on which to pass judgment. Overall, the question was well handled with most students demonstrating a good understanding of the difference between committees and the work that they do. Some students gave excellent examples of current or recent committees and made a distinction between the functions of various committees. Less successful responses failed to demonstrate knowledge of what parliamentary committees are or what they do and simply listed the different types of committees. Very few students disagreed with the argument.

Question 3

Voting and elections

a.

What is meant by the term marginal seat?

A marginal seat is an electorate/seat in which neither of the major parties is assured of victory. The party that wins the seat can change from election to election. A marginal seat is not safe for the major parties. It is a seat that requires less than a small or approximately 5% swing for the sitting member to be defeated. Students could provide an example.

This question clearly tested the students' ability to define a concept in a clear and concise manner. Most did so and many provided useful statistics and examples. Very few students did not understand what the term meant. Less successful students while not able to explain the term well, seemed to have some idea of its meaning. There was some confusion with the idea of a safe seat.

b.

Briefly provide three reasons why voters may identify with and support a particular political party.

Voters may identify with and support a particular political party due to their political socialisation and socio-economic factors such as age, family voting history, religious background, ethnicity, rural or urban location, class and education. Identification can also result from support for a party's philosophy and policy platforms, concern for a single issue (e.g. Greens).

This was a straightforward question and was answered well with most students citing a mixture of social, political and economic factors and scoring full marks. There was some repetition of reasons. This was a question where many students wrote too much. Students had probably prepared for an essay related to this topic and were keen to demonstrate their knowledge.

c.

Evaluate the argument that proportional representation should be used to elect the House of Representatives.

Elections for the House of Representatives unlike the Senate determine government. Proportional representation is designed to produce a result which mirrors the proportionate support given to groups of candidates. Using proportional representation to elect the House of Representatives would overcome a number of features which do not reflect democratic values including malapportionment (assuming the system would have state representation reflective of population or eliminate states and use the Israeli system where the nation is one electorate), vote wastage, concentrated majorities, minor parties having little chance of gaining representation. Additionally, proportional representation provides voters with a wider choice of candidates.

Proportional representation could be considered more democratic than preferential voting as it produces results more reflective of community opinion but it is a system which can create instability whereas preferential voting in the main delivers stability. Proportional representation can deliver considerable influence to minor parties and independents by providing them with bargaining power and creates conditions where minority governments are forced to seek alliances and shift alliances.

Many students responded with a general argument about the pros and cons of the two voting systems and failed to address the specifics of this question. Whilst there were many good responses this was a difficult question for most students. More successful responses highlighted the positives of proportional representation and then discussed potential negatives such as the difficulty of obtaining a working majority and the likelihood of instability. Some more successful answers acknowledged the Westminster concept of responsible government and linked this to the reduced chances of obtaining a clear majority if proportional representation were introduced to the House of Representatives.

Less successful responses concentrated on how the two different systems work rather than the effects of the different systems.

Question 4

Political parties and pressure groups

a.

What is meant by the term party discipline?

Party discipline means:

- the maintenance of organised collective political action by the insistence that members of a political organisation (a political party) act in accordance with the directives of that organisation
- that individual members of a party organisation agree to act collectively and place the directives and decisions of the party ahead of their individual choices particularly in relation to the way they perform in the parliament
- that individual members of a political party do not vote against the collective party position in the parliament (for this, political parties employ what are known as Parliamentary Whips to ensure that party MPs respect and carry out the collective decision of the political party in parliamentary chambers), and that they do not run against party endorsed candidates at elections

- that a system of sanctions and rewards exist to ensure that individual parties MPs remain loyal to the collective wishes of the party. The rewards include distribution of political patronage (jobs, promotions, resources), whilst sanctions include demotions or even expulsion from the party
- that a political contract underpins the system of party discipline. An individual seeking to become an MP may not realise this ambition without the assistance of the political party. However, having helped get the individual elected as an MP with party endorsement, the party expects the individual to be loyal to that party
- Australian political parties approach party discipline in different ways.

The ALP is arguably the most disciplined of the political parties, with a rigid system of collective decision-making (known as ‘caucusing’) and immediate expulsion from the party should any MP breach party discipline (including ‘crossing the floor’ when voting in the parliament).

The Liberal and National parties allow individual MPs to vote according to their conscience, but history shows that MPs who do this, or do it often, will lose their party endorsement at a subsequent election.

The Australian Democrats explicitly reject party discipline, but find that their effectiveness in parliament depends a lot on acting collectively.

Students had a general knowledge of the term although some of the responses were vague. Most students had a sound idea of following the party line with many students citing the ALP Caucus pledge and the issue of the party vote and crossing the floor. Less successful students assumed that party discipline applied only to a minister.

b.

Briefly describe three tactics that a pressure group can use to further its aims.

The following tactics can be used by pressure groups:

- lobbying of individual MPs with particular emphasis upon communicating with influential parliamentary actors (ministers, leaders of parties)
- undertaking consultative dialogue with ministers
- seeking to establish consultative links with senior departmental bureaucrats
- the conducting of publicity campaigns through advertising and/or press releases
- conducting election campaigns
- seeking to endorse individual MPs or political parties in the lead-up to an election, and using the promise of endorsement (or the threat of actively campaigning against an individual or a party) as the basis to extract commitments to policy action after the election
- undertaking studies and/or research into particular or specific policy issues
- providing funding and/or donations for political parties
- conducting protest activity.

Most students were able to clearly identify and describe three tactics that a pressure group can use to further its aims. This question was well done and caused few problems. When students did not gain full marks it was usually due to a failure to briefly describe the three tactics identified.

c.

Evaluate the argument that strong leadership is essential for political parties.

Students may use this question to explore the role of leadership in Australian politics. In so doing, they may tackle the axiomatic view that Australians respond well to ‘strong’ leaders. They may also recall the dictum once uttered by Bob Hawke that ‘a party that cannot govern itself cannot govern the country’. A discussion of the importance of leadership to political parties might include the following points:

- that leaders are the focal point of the political debate, with the media concentrating on leaders (sometimes seeming to place personality ahead of principles or values) and voters responding to the party system via the leaders
- that leaders are the interface between the parties that they lead and the electorate
- that leaders need to be able to communicate the policy platforms of their parties effectively (students might, for example, note the difficulties some leaders have had with policy debates such as Dr Hewson (Liberal) having problems with ‘Fightback’, or Mr Beazley (Labor) getting into difficulty over asylum seekers
- that leaders have to be able to keep the various component parts of their parties together in order to ensure that they are focused on winning elections rather than partaking of internecine battles.

More successful answers might seek to explore the extent to which leaders are powerful within their political parties. Particularly sophisticated responses would identify the limits to the power of leadership. These would include:

- that party leaders are not in a position of total influence. Their position is subject to the approval of their parliamentary party colleagues, and, if they are Australian Democrat leaders, to the party rank-and-file
- that in some instances party leaders may not be as powerful as some other actors. For example, party leadership in the ALP has been at various times subject to the approval of the factions. In such instances (the Hawke leadership being quite prominent), factional leaders might be more powerful than the party leaders.

Successful answers to this question noted the importance of strong, effective leadership and explained why it was important in terms of party policy, promoting cohesion and unity within the party. Some students talked only in terms of

leadership and devoted their entire answer to Howard, Beazley or Crean. Many students turned their response into a discussion of the 2001 election and failed to specifically address the importance of leadership for political parties or they concentrated on leadership to the exclusion of other factors that are of importance to political parties.

Question 5

Foreign policy

a.

What is meant by the term ‘bilateral relationship’?

A relationship between two nations, often, but not exclusively with, a formal treaty or understanding the relationship is usually, but not exclusively, based on economic, military and political/diplomatic factors

Many students were specifically aware of the meaning of the term ‘bilateral relationship’. Students generally understood that the term implied a relationship involving something constructive such as trade or security. Less successful students confused the term with bipartisanship.

b.

Briefly describe three roles of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

- provide advice to the government
- conduct research on foreign policy matters for the government
- implement foreign policy
- monitor international security issues and brief the government
- provide travel warnings
- issuing passports
- promote and encourage trade.

Strong students implied that DFAT does have a significant role in policy development, a role that may be larger than that of other government departments. Many students were able to cite recent developments, e.g. issuing travel warnings linked to Bali. Other students talked about foreign policy objectives such as being a good global citizen rather than focusing on how DFAT might achieve this. Some students simply listed foreign policy aims, and many other responses to this question were very general.

c.

Evaluate the argument that ANZUS is still the most important security relationship in Australian foreign policy.

- US alliance central to foreign policy since 1942
- underpins all security arrangements and relationships e.g. Joint facilities, bases, exercises, intelligence and doctrine sharing
- involvement in US led conflicts and coalitions e.g. Korea, Afghanistan etc.

Students had a sound understanding of ANZUS and its importance and most were able to compare this relationship with others. More successful responses focused on the Australia/USA link and noted changes in the relationship and changes in our region. The word ‘still’ suggests the need to provide some historical perspective and many students had an excellent knowledge of the origins and evolution of ANZUS. Many responses, however, gave a detailed historical discussion and failed to focus sufficiently on contemporary developments. The New Zealand estrangement received too much attention. Many students saw this question as an opportunity to write all they knew about ANZUS.

Section B – Essay questions

The Australian Constitution

Question 1

‘Since 1901, the Commonwealth Government has increased its dominance over the States in a variety of ways. As a result, Commonwealth – State relations have worsened.’

To what extent do you agree?

This essay requires students to address two issues:

1. The extent to which the Commonwealth government has increased its dominance over the states and the ways in which it has done so since 1901 including:

- referendums
- the use of its financial dominance, use of special purpose grants
- the financial powers the Commonwealth gained in the Constitution, e.g. use of special purpose grants (S96), Commonwealth and State conflicts
- (S109), external affairs power (S51, part 29)
- transfer of powers from the States to the Commonwealth
- High Court decisions (e.g. Mabo, Wik, Franklin, decisions relating to S92)
- the Commonwealth has assumed powers
- the effects flowing from the 1942 Uniform Tax Agreement.

Students should provide a number of examples to support these points.

2. The extent to which Commonwealth–State relations have deteriorated as a consequence of the dominance of the Commonwealth government.

Those who support this contention would suggest that:

- states have lost their financial independence
- Commonwealth controls the purse strings but the States have considerable financial responsibilities; as a result States have become subservient to the Commonwealth
- difficult for states; cannot plan ahead
- Commonwealth has intruded into areas that have traditionally been state responsibilities.

However, it could be argued that despite the increase of the Commonwealth's powers Commonwealth and State relations have not necessarily worsened:

- States pleased to hand over powers to the Commonwealth
- it is inevitable on efficiency grounds that the Commonwealth has increased its powers and states recognise this
- difficulties between the Commonwealth and State government's arise as a result from other factors such as party policy differences and budgetary constraints.

Most students were able to deal well with the first part of this question and they demonstrated a sound understanding of federal-state financial relations and judicial review. More successful students were able to discuss three or four different ways in which the Commonwealth had assumed a more dominant role. The actual complexity of Commonwealth/State relations was well covered by a small minority of students. Too many students focused entirely on the financial relationship or on referenda and why they fail. Many gave only passing attention to the second part of the question or ignored it all together. Some students challenged the notion that federal state relations have deteriorated and some argued that they have been strained and worsened at certain times but at the moment are quite good. Such students cited examples of cooperative federalism, gun control COAG meetings, tackling salinity and road funding. It appeared that a number of students gave pre-prepared answers to the first part of the question. Some answers focused almost entirely on referenda, conditions for their success and why they fail.

Parliament and the executive

Question 2

'The Australian Constitution remains largely unaltered and therefore is in need of significant change.'

To what extent do you agree?

There are two parts of this statement; students are expected to discuss both.

1. That the constitution has changed little since 1901:

In key constitutional areas, there has been little change to the Constitution. Many changes delivered by successful referendums have resulted in insignificant reforms to political structures. These changes have not worked to change the Constitution to reflect the ways in which Australia's political system actually operates. It could be argued that more change has resulted from High Court interpretation, e.g. Franklin Dam, Wik and Mabo.

2. There are a number of areas in need of significant change. Students should consider the scope of the term 'significant'. It could be argued that the Constitution is in need of change, but not significant change.

Those who argue that the Constitution needs significant change could argue that the Constitution does not reflect the ways in which the system actually operates nor does it reflect key contemporary social and political values such as:

- Constitution underpinned by a constitutional monarchy – no Australian Head of State
- makes no mention of key political players and institutions, e.g. Prime Minister, cabinet, the electoral system
- maintains the Senate as a states house despite the fact that it does not operate as one
- delivers considerable power to the Head of State who is not popularly elected or elected by the representatives of the people
- makes no recognition of prior occupation by indigenous people
- does not formally guarantee key democratic rights – freedom of speech (to an extent guaranteed by High Court interpretation), freedom to contest elections, fair elections.

Students should recognise the difficulty of achieving constitutional change especially significant change. It could be argued that there is no need of change as:

- The Constitution has served the nation well
- Institutions, created by the Constitution, are still functioning well.

This was a popular question and there were some excellent responses. More successful answers considered a number of aspects of the Constitution that may be in need of change, e.g. Bill of Rights, Governor-General/Republic, preamble, codification of conventions and updating the language. Students demonstrated an excellent knowledge of referenda and the reasons for failure. However, too many students concentrated almost exclusively on referenda and weaker students largely ignored the second part of the question.

Question 3

Voting and elections

‘There are a number of factors which prevent the House of Representatives and the Senate from performing their roles effectively.’

To what extent do you agree?

In their answers students are expected to:

1. Outline the roles of the House of Representatives:

- house from which the government is formed
- representative chamber
- to pass legislation
- to debate
- to hear grievances
- to scrutinise issues.

2. Outline the roles of the Senate:

- to represent the States
- to review legislation
- to pass legislation
- to set up committees.

3. Outline ways in which the House of Representatives cannot carry out its roles effectively

- executive dominance
- party discipline
- procedural problems (e.g. question time, gag)
- lack of an independent speaker
- inadequacy of the committee system
- relatively short sitting sessions.

4. Outline ways in which the Senate cannot carry out its roles effectively:

- hung Senate
- no longer represents the States, because of party politics
- has become redundant
- governments cannot get legislation through Senate
- power of minor parties and independents.
- if the government has the numbers, the Senate is seen as a ‘rubber stamp’.

Students are not expected to agree with this statement. Students could argue that although some factors work against the house carrying out their functions effectively, in fact they both operate very well.

Students could also argue that the very factors which may prevent the Senate from performing its functions effectively, e.g. a hung Senate, in fact may lead it to perform its review functions very well.

This was not a popular question. Students demonstrated a good knowledge of the basic roles of parliament. Most students identified the main factors of party discipline, executive dominance and control of procedures of the lower house. The Senate’s success as a house of review was identified as were the problems with proportional representation. Few essays thoroughly discussed the roles of both houses and what ‘effective’ might mean. There was a considerable amount to cover in this question and the more successful answers demonstrated good planning skills.

Question 4

‘The Australian Prime Minister has considerable power, however there are a number of ways in which this power can be constrained.’

To what extent do you agree?

Students were expected to show why the Prime Minister has considerable power. Reasons for this might include some of the following:

- prestige which goes with the job
- international spokesperson
- in the LNP the PM chooses ministers
- chooses members of cabinet
- allocates ministerial portfolios
- heads a very important department
- parliamentary head of a political party
- media profile.

However, Prime Ministers are not invincible and can have their power and influence restrained by:

- a hostile or hung Senate
- a hostile party room can remove them from office (e.g. Gorton)
- losing an election (e.g. Keating)
- pressure from the electorate
- pressure from within their own party, e.g. the factions
- pressure groups
- their own shortcomings
- the media.

Australian Prime Ministers can exert enormous power, but candidates should be able to note that this power is limited. There were a number of students who were well prepared for this question. Students had a good knowledge of a large range of factors that may constrain the powers of the Prime Minister. More successful responses argued that the Prime Minister's powers seem to be expanding. Students stressed the importance of cabinet colleagues, party room support and electoral endorsement. The most successful answers commented on the fragile nature of a PM's power.

Less successful responses gave too much weight to the importance of the different systems used by the Coalition and Labor to elect the ministry. Such responses concentrated on sources of a PM's power and gave limited attention to constraints.

Question 5

The two voting systems used at Federal elections ensure that key democratic values are upheld?

To what extent do you agree?

To a significant extent the Australian electoral system does not uphold all democratic values. As elections determine government, provide a mandate for government to carry out policies and are the foremost mechanism for political participation they must as far as possible, uphold critical democratic values such as majority rule, one vote one value, freedom of speech and candidacy and equality of opportunity for candidates and parties.

In addition to delivering majority rule, equality and freedom, democratic electoral systems should incorporate universal suffrage, secret ballot, minority representation, an independent electoral authority, frequent elections, accessible polling places and choice of candidates.

A number of democratic values are upheld including universal suffrage, secret ballot, choice of candidates, frequent elections, accessible voting and freedom of speech. However, critical values such as majority rule, one vote one value, minority representation, equality and the freedom to contest are not always upheld. Students could recognise that no election system is perfect.

Values upheld

- elections are managed by an independent authority, the Australian Electoral Commission.
- elections offer a choice of candidates
- elections are frequent (perhaps too frequent)
- secret ballot
- universal suffrage (with the exception of those serving a jail term of more than five years and those of unsound mind)
- freedom of speech and assembly although not constitutionally guaranteed have to a significant extent been protected through High Court interpretation.
- voting is accessible through pre-polling, postal voting, mobile polling booths and absentee voting.

Values not upheld

- majority rule (majority rule delivers a mandate to implement policy promises) – five elections since 1945 have delivered governments who on the House of Representatives two party preferred vote have not represented the majority of voters. In 1998, ALP gained over 51% of the H of R vote and lost, in 1990 the LNP gained 50.4% of the H of R vote and lost. This results from two factors, malapportionment and vote wastage
- one vote one value – the preferential system and proportional representation do not deliver one vote one value. Malapportionment is a feature of the Senate system as electorates (states and territories) do not have approximately the same number of voters but each state gets the same number of Senators as does each territory. So a Tasmanian Senate vote is worth 12 times a NSW vote. There is little justification for this as the Senate does not act as a States house. Tasmanian voters are further advantaged. The Constitution guarantees Tasmania 5 H of R seats no matter what its population. A Tasmanian H of R vote is more valuable than a mainland vote as all 5 seats have electoral populations in the bottom range of the 10% variation. Also votes in marginal seats have more value than votes in safe seats. About 25% of electorates are marginal. These electorates determine election results and election campaigns focus on them meaning some voters are given more attention than others
- representation reflective of electoral support – exaggerated majorities occur in the H of R if a party wins many seats by small margins so the party has seats out of proportion to their vote
- minority representation is limited in the H of R as minor parties without concentrated support and independents have difficulty winning seats. In addition, up to 50% of the electorate is unrepresented as only one candidate is

elected. This problem is overcome with the multimember Senate system where representation is in proportion to votes gained

- equality – the H of R and Senate system does not deliver equal outcomes and opportunities for all parties and candidates. In H of R system, the National Party has the advantage of concentrated majorities. In the 1998 election, the National Party gained about 5 % of the H of R vote winning 16 seats, the Democrats also gained about 5 % and did not win any seats. The Senate ballot paper disadvantages independents who do not form a group. The H of R ballot paper gives 1% to 2% of the vote to the candidate on the top of the ballot paper
- equality – the government determines the election date and sets the closing date for candidate nominations from between 14 and 27 days. This gives unfair planning advantage to the government. In addition, the senate quota can create an incentive for minor parties to force a double dissolution
- freedom to stand – deposit of \$350 for H of R and \$700 for the Senate is a barrier for some candidates. Anyone ‘earning profit under the Crown’ cannot be a candidate so all public servants (even those on leave) cannot stand unless they quit their jobs. Also those with dual nationality or bankrupts cannot be candidates
- freedom of choice – it is suggested that compulsory voting is an infringement of freedom however there is no compulsion to vote but rather the compulsion is to register and attend the polling booth.

This kind of question is always popular with students. Students demonstrated a good understanding of the two voting systems and were able to discuss the relative democratic strengths and weaknesses of each system. Many students were able to refer to an impressive range of examples to substantiate the points they raised. More successful responses outlined democratic values early in the essay and incorporated them into discussion. Less successful students devoted too much time to discussing the mechanics and characteristics of the voting systems and cited too few examples. The most successful responses noted the importance of the balance between the two systems in achieving democratic objectives. There were some answers that were obviously pre-prepared and these tended to ignore the question of democratic values.

Question 6

Discuss the factors that influenced the result of a recent (in the last ten years) Federal election

Students will choose a variety of elections hence it is difficult to construct an answer. All answers should include consideration of the following:

- students should indicate the election they are considering.
- election results are influenced by a range of factors – their importance varies from election to election
- students should provide a context for the election, e.g. double dissolution
- students should provide some information about the result, e.g. % of the vote achieved, or number of seats gained, swing.

Consideration of factors such as:

- domestic and international issues, e.g. GST, refugees, September 11
- leadership (government and opposition)
- party policy
- role of minor parties
- government and opposition performance
- state of the economy
- nature of the campaigns
- parties appeal to various constituent groups especially in key marginal seats
- role of media, e.g. leader debates
- election timing
- length government has been in office.

This was not a popular question. Almost all students who attempted this question looked at the 2001 election and were able to discuss the specific factors that influenced this election such as children overboard, border protection and the war on terror. More successful students also discussed the importance of leadership, the opposition, the economy and other domestic policies. Poorer responses offered very little evaluation of these influences and became a narrative of international events with far too much concentration on the Tampa issue and the events of September 11. Many essays gave no detailed account of the result of the election chosen as the basis for the essay. Some students tried to discuss more than one election, e.g. 1998 and 2001 and became confused. This essay required careful thought and planning as there was a large amount of material to cover and students clearly knew quite a lot. Students must ensure that they do justice to their knowledge by carefully planning and organising their material.

Political parties and pressure groups

Question 7

‘Minor parties play an influential role in parliament and elections.’

To what extent do you agree?

A thorough answer to this question would need to do some work at defining what is meant by ‘minor party’ and how this might link with notions of parliamentary and electoral ‘influence’. Astute students needed to eliminate a large number of minor parties from the answer by referring to the fact that very few non-major parties actually win parliamentary representation. This question could be restricted to a discussion of:

- the National Party
- the Australian Democrats
- the Greens
- One Nation.

More successful essays would need to establish the following points:

- the relationship between the use of electoral systems and minor party politics: obviously the issue of winning parliamentary representation is critical, with some minor parties (the Nationals) able to win lower house representation and thus be in a position to participate in coalition politics with the Liberals, and other minor parties only capable of winning Senate representation
- students will need to differentiate between the preferential voting system, which basically seeks to prevent minor parties from winning representation, and proportional representation in which the lowering of the electoral threshold (or quota) is designed to allow minor parties the ability to win representation.

Under the preferential system, the following points need to be made:

- it is very difficult for non-major parties to win representation
- therefore, the parliamentary influence of the minor party is restricted given the relatively poor record of minor parties getting elected in preferential systems
- where a minor party does get elected, it can either work in coalition with another major party and seek to share executive power (as the way the Nationals work with the Liberal party), or the minor party or parties might win the balance of power in the lower house, and seek to influence parliamentary output by using the balance to win policy concessions from the major party in government.

Given the rather limited scope for minor party success under a preferential system, it might be argued that the minor party’s greatest influence might be restricted to the electoral system. In such a situation, the following points would need to be made:

- minor party influence in the preferential voting system is greatest in the area of influencing the flow of preferences. This may be done via the publishing of ‘how to vote’ cards, but also depends on some other important issues:
 - i) that the lower house election is so close that it requires the distribution of preferences to be resolved (and the very good student might note that this is the exception rather than the norm in Australian elections, for the vast majority of lower house election results after the distribution of preferences tend to lead to a confirmation of the result on primary votes)
 - ii) it might also be noted that some minor parties do not seek to direct preferences in this way (e.g. the Australian Democrats)
 - iii) it might also be noted that some minor parties participate in elections to project a particular political or policy issue rather than seek election (e.g. green parties, the former Nuclear Disarmament party, Australians Against Further Immigration, etc.).

Where minor parties can win representation to the parliament under a system that uses proportional representation, their influence may be manifested in different ways.

It should be noted that, in mainland Australia, proportional representation tends to be utilised for the upper or review house. This means that the influence that is usually exercised by minor parties that get elected to these houses courtesy of the proportional representation system tends to be a veto or blocking power (this contrasts with the National Party’s ability to play a pre-emptive role in policy-making by participating in coalition politics with the Liberal Party).

The influence that minor parties might play in this context include:

- the exercise of a ‘negative’ influence – that is, the exercise of the power of veto
- in this situation, a minor party might be able to significantly modify legislation proposed by a government with the threat of blocking a bill, or, indeed, a minor party might even be able to exercise the power of veto over a piece of legislation
- under the Australian constitution, the blocking of legislation can become the trigger for an early election, either under Section 57 of the constitution (the ‘Deadlocks’ provision) or through the blocking of supply (which, under the precedent set in 1975, can lead to the dissolution of the parliament and the removal of a government by the Governor general).

This was not a popular question, although, there were some particularly good responses. Most students who chose this question were able to define the major parties and gave excellent coverage of their role in the Senate and in elections. Some appreciated the special status of the National Party as a minor party that is able to exploit its position via the coalition. Many students were able to comment on the impact of the different voting systems. Most responses commented on the role of the Greens in the 2001 election and provided some excellent examples of the Democrats. They were able to look at a number of ways in which minor parties can be influential. This was a difficult question for less successful students despite seeming very straightforward. Such responses did not look at both parliament and elections in sufficient depth and failed to provide examples of the influence of minor parties.

Question 8

‘Pressure groups have a positive and negative impact on democratic processes in Australia.’

To what extent do you agree?

A more successful response to this question requires students to do some work on establishing the criteria by which the democratic nature of interest group politics might be evaluated. To this end, an essay might need to do the following:

- discuss the notion of ‘democratic’ in the modern context. This means that students might need to differentiate between the notions of direct citizen participation in the policy-making process associated with classical democratic theory, and recognise that most modern democracies are representative democracies where parliaments and governments make decisions on behalf of the citizenry
- discussion of the notion of democracy being governance on behalf of the citizenry. This means that a sense of citizen participation in the political process is strongly felt, but that the rigors of the modern democratic society mean that this participation is via indirect methods such as elections and in moments in which citizens might be engaged such as when a specific policy issue arises and they feel compelled to participate
- students might also need to discuss the notion that the foremost democratic systems are liberal democratic systems in which executive power or the power of government is constrained usually through mechanisms designed to empower the citizenry. This citizen empowerment may take the form of participation in political events (especially as electors) or as opponents of proposals being put by government.

More successful students noted the link between the idea of interest group politics and the notion that the modern liberal democratic state seeks to enhance the view that government occurs with the active participatory consent of the governed. More sophisticated students might even note the link between this argument and the so-called ‘pluralist’ school of political thinkers who argued that interest groups were critically important to democratic practice.

Taking a lead from the pluralist school, the argument that interest groups have a positive impact on democratic processes might include the following:

- that interest groups provide another organisational link between the citizens and the institutions of government
- that interest group politics provides an opportunity in addition to party politics and elections for citizens to get organised and seek to exert some influence over official policy makers
- that interest group politics relied heavily on traditional liberal democratic notions of freedom of assembly (for interest groups are assemblies) and freedom of expression (meaning that interest groups are a legitimate way of communicating policy demands from the citizenry to the institutionalised decision-making process)
- that interest groups provide the basis upon which citizens can either communicate policy demands to government, or can seek to oppose the will of government
- that interest groups are another form of organisation designed to empower the citizenry
- that interest groups can be used by government to ascertain the needs and demands of the citizenry
- that interest groups are a practical example of ways in which power is decentralised from the decision-making institutions and placed in the hands of the citizenry.

The negative or critical approach to this question is based on the question of whether or not interest groups are an effective method of decentralising political power in the community. The very sophisticated students will probably recognise the link between the criticism of the pluralist school by other theoretical schools (elite theory, public choice theory, Marxist theory) that see a link between the influence that interest groups wield and their relationship to a society stratified into unequal layers of wealth and influence. Taking the lead from these critiques, the case against interest groups should contain the following key points:

- that the influence that interest groups wield in the political community is not equal, and that some groups are much more adept at exercising influence than others
- that there appears to be agreement amongst all theorists that the influence interest groups wield is related directly to the economy, with those groups representing economically powerful interests enjoying the best levels of access
- that governments also tend to have an unequal relationship with groups by bestowing ‘insider’ status to some while freezing out others
- that the internal workings of an interest group sometimes raise questions about their democratic legitimacy, particularly where elites or oligarchies are evident (such as in some unions or business groups), or where membership of a group is confined to a small and select group of people

- that some groups may distort the political process by generating more political frisson than is perhaps warranted by their membership or by their tendency to represent minority positions; resort to violence, questionable tactics
- that interest groups inevitably pursue a narrow range of sectional interests that are important to the interest group membership, whilst the political process ought to be about the definition and service of a much broader 'national interest'. It could be argued that a governing system dependent on interest groups is a system that is overly influenced by minority and sectional self-interest
- interest group politics can enfranchise the well-organised minority. This may mean that a group might be able to influence the decision-making process by virtue of its more successful organisation, whereas other mainstream opinions fail to have a counter influence because of their lack of effective organisation.

There were some very successful responses to this question. More successful students were able to write a balanced essay that looked at both the positive and negative impact of pressure groups on the democratic process. There were also some very unsuccessful responses from students who were attracted to the topic but struggled with the question from the outset. It is pleasing to see students discussing some theory about the democratic process and the role of pressure groups within it. More successful responses were able to cite examples from 2002 to support their general points. Less successful responses were almost entirely descriptive with little or no analysis. Such essays merely discussed the positive and negative aspects of pressure groups as arguments for and against pressure groups without tying the discussion to the impact on the democratic processes. There was some evidence of pre-prepared essays being used in this topic.

Australian foreign policy

Question 9

'The Prime Minister is, compared with other factors, the most significant influence on the formulation of Australian foreign policy'.

To what extent do you agree?

Students should consider:

- who influences the formulation of foreign policy? e.g. Prime Minister (PM), Foreign Minister, Immigration Minister, Defence Minister
- what Australian Government organisations are involved in the formulation of foreign policy? e.g. DFAT, DOD, ASIS, ONA etc.
- what external influences are there? e.g. UN, NGOs etc.
- domestic influences
- international pressure.

The answer has to be one that considers all the factors that impact on the formulation of foreign policy. However the answer must then include the relative importance of the PM in that process.

The most successful answers will be those that not only mention the disparate elements but also make judgments based on sound evidence of the changing impact of the PM on the formulation of foreign policy.

There were some excellent responses to this question. The role of the PM in the formulation of foreign policy was well explained. Students had a good appreciation of the PM's ability to make foreign policy on an *ad hoc* basis. More successful students had a very good understanding of the complexity and variety of factors affecting foreign policy. As with previous years this topic was attractive to the very strong students. Some students did, however, concentrate too much on John Howard and recent events with essays based almost entirely on September 11 and the war on terrorism. Less successful responses were too general and failed to examine the wide range of influences on foreign policy.

Question 10

National security and the promotion of economic interests have dominated Australian foreign policy at the expense of Australia's reputation as a good global citizen'.

To what extent do you agree?

Students should consider:

- concept of national interest, e.g. What's considered important – Economic prosperity, security?
- changes in objectives/focus over the years
- what caused the changes?
- what has caused the current changes in direction – Security, economic and political reasons?

The answer needs to include an analytical response to the main proposition. That is, has national security and economic interests actually dominated Australian foreign policy? More successful answers need to clearly demonstrate the dichotomy between national interest and humanitarianism.

This question was a popular one and provided an opportunity for strong students to produce an excellent essay. This question required students to cover an enormous amount of ground and therefore careful planning was essential. Most students tended to agree with the statement. Less successful responses devoted too much time to the economic and security elements which meant that there was insufficient time to deal adequately with the question of good global citizenship. There was too much emphasis on the war on terror and refugees. Many less successful responses were simplistic and failed to recognise the complexity of the process. Some students provided a very good historical perspective of the need and quest for national security. More successful responses made the point that governments do genuinely desire to be good global citizens but that this can conflict with other objectives of foreign policy. More successful responses provided a wealth of examples to support discussion.