



2004

Political Studies GA 3: Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

It was widely considered by students and teachers that the 2004 Political Studies examination was more challenging than in previous years, yet it was pleasing to note that most students were able to demonstrate very good political knowledge and a sound understanding of political concepts. As with previous Political Studies examinations, the 2004 examination reinforced the need for students to carefully read the questions and to carefully consider their responses. Less successful students clearly misinterpreted some questions, resulting in low marks being awarded.

The short answer questions in Section A of the examination were generally well answered by students, although it was evident that many students found this section more challenging than in previous years. Students are advised to consider the following when attempting Section A of the examination:

- Questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5a required students to define a political term. Students need to be precise in their responses. Better students were able to do this, and responses often contained accurate examples to reinforce the definition. There was a tendency for some less successful students to be vague in their responses, and some included incorrect examples
- Questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5b required students to 'briefly describe' three aspects relating to a section of the course. Students are advised to number or use dot points for three separate and distinct aspects. Better students were able to accurately describe aspects in one to two lines; however, there was a tendency for students to write far more than was required. Less successful students merely listed rather than briefly describing each aspect
- Questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5c required students to evaluate an argument. Better students were able to clearly identify arguments and evaluate them in detail by exploring counter arguments, often using relevant and accurate examples to reinforce their comments. Better students also included a brief one to three line summary at the end of their response. However, there was also a tendency for students to write more than was required in these responses. Less successful students struggled to evaluate, gave little or no consideration to counter arguments in their response and used few, if any, relevant examples to reinforce their comments. Students should not use lists or dot points in these answers.

Students are expected to answer only four of the five sets of questions in Section A, and it was pleasing to note that few students attempted to answer all of the questions. Teachers are advised to mirror the format of Section A in their school-assessed coursework throughout the year. This should allow students to practise the skills necessary to accurately answer the questions and to manage their time in the examination.

The standard of essays continued to improve, although time management was again crucial in this aspect of the examination. Students should devote one hour of the total examination time to the essay. Better students wrote long essays which directly and comprehensively addressed all aspects of the question. They were able to include comprehensive examples to illustrate the points being made. Less successful students wrote short essays of less than three pages, essays which only looked at one aspect of the question, or lengthy essays which paid little, if any, consideration to what the question was actually asking. There was also a tendency for students to write lengthy plans, yet very short essays.

Finally, students should use the 15 minutes of reading time to maximum effect to plan their answers to questions. If possible, students are advised to read over their work so as to avoid careless spelling or expression errors.

2004 Assessment Report



Section A – Short answer questions

First Question Chosen	1	2
%	66	34

a

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	13	21	66	1.6

b

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	3	8	26	63	2.5

c

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	7	8	17	31	24	14	3.0

Second Question Chosen	2	3
%	56	44

a

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	18	17	64	1.5

b

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	5	9	24	63	2.5

c

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	7	8	14	31	27	13	3.0

Third Question Chosen	3	4
%	52	48

a

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	23	19	58	1.4

b

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	7	13	28	52	2.3

c

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	4	5	12	32	32	15	3.3

Fourth Question Chosen	4	5
%	24	76

a

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	17	19	64	1.5

b

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	5	12	33	50	2.3

c

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	3	11	29	34	21	3.6

Question 1 – The Australian Constitution

a. What is meant by the term residual powers?



Residual powers are the powers left with the states at the time of Federation. Powers not specifically given to the Commonwealth or Federal Parliament are known as residual powers. Section 107 of the Constitution provides for residual powers. Examples of residual powers include criminal law, stamp duty, police and public transport. Those powers not given specifically to the Commonwealth Parliament remained with the states and are known as residual powers.

Most students handled this question very well, although less successful students cited incorrect examples such as health or tax.

b. Briefly describe three reasons why the six self-governing colonies agreed to federate.

The six self-governing colonies agreed to federate for a variety of reasons. Most of these related to the need for a national approach to a number of issues which included: fear of invasion and the need for the defence of Australia, immigration, a national approach to tariffs and trade, industrial disputes and uniform laws. There was also a growing sense of nationalism and this was reflected in the literature and art of the period.

This question surprised many teachers, yet it was pleasing to note that most students answered it correctly. Less successful students were vague in their responses or gave two responses which were too similar; for example, uniformity of laws and consistency of laws.

c. Evaluate the argument that an Australian head of state should be elected.

This question asked students to evaluate the argument that a head of state should be elected rather than appointed. Better students cited arguments that supported the statement and commented on the separation of executive power from the legislature and the impartiality of the head of state. An elected head of state would most likely make the position a more political one, and the position could be given a separate mandate to that of the Prime Minister and government. The cost of electing the head of state would also be high. Better students pointed out that a non-elected head of state would be more likely to be impartial and able to make decisions free of party bias.

Counter arguments supporting the election of a head of state included the importance of an elected head of state in a democracy. It is difficult to hold an appointed head of state accountable if he or she is not subject to the scrutiny of the people through election. If Australia were to become a republic, a president would be elected directly by the people or by their elected representatives and could be held accountable by the people.

Better students argued that, in a democracy, a head of state should be elected and that the appointment of an unelected official with great potential power is undemocratic. Some students cited the events of 1975 to reinforce this. Arguments from the republic referendum of 1999 were successfully applied, such as whether a head of state should be elected by the public, by two thirds of parliament or nominated by just one person. High-scoring responses focussed on arguments for and against the election of the head of state, rather than whether Australia should become a republic or remain a constitutional monarchy. Less successful students paid little attention to the election aspect of the question. Rather, they cited reasons why Australia should or should not become a republic. These responses scored poorly.

Question 2 – Parliament and the Executive

a. What is meant by the term double dissolution?

According to section 57 of the Constitution, if the Senate fails to pass legislation initiated by the government in the House of Representatives, and again fails to pass the same proposed legislation after a period of three months, the Prime Minister may call on the Governor General to dissolve both houses of parliament. As a result, a simultaneous election for all members of both houses of Federal Parliament is held.

Most students answered this question very well. Less successful students failed to mention the role of the Governor General and that a full election of the House of Representatives and the Senate is held. Some less successful students thought that a double dissolution only involves a joint sitting of parliament being held.

b. Briefly describe three reforms that could improve the operation of the Australian Federal Parliament

Better students cited the following reforms:

- independent speaker, as in the United Kingdom, where the speaker, once appointed, does not take any part in his/her party's activities, including party meetings
- impose time limits on questions and answers
- extend the length of question time
- ban Dorothy Dix questions by not allowing members of the government to ask questions during question time



- enforce the quorum so that there must be a quorum rather than the current situation where the attention of the speaker must be drawn to the fact that there is no quorum
- extend the number of sitting days to provide more time for the consideration of Bills
- encourage supplementary questions in the House of Representatives
- four year terms for the House of Representatives
- fixed terms of parliament
- better upheld standing orders
- reduce the number of readings of a Bill
- make the government act on the findings of committees.
- abolish the Senate.

Most students had little problem answering the question. Less successful students merely listed responses, or focussed on reforms to the voting system, such as using proportional voting to elect the House of Representatives, or reforms to the Constitution rather than on improving the operation of parliament.

c. Evaluate the argument that ministers and shadow ministers should be selected only from members of the House of Representatives.

Arguments in favour of the selection of ministers and shadow ministers only from the House of Representatives could include:

- representation in the House of Representatives determines the government of the day, it is therefore important that ministers, as central to government, are represented in the peoples' house. The House of Representatives is the peoples' house, it is more representative and therefore more democratic, and ministers and their shadow counterparts should be in the lower house
- the House of Representatives' prime function is to legislate, and as ministers are responsible for introducing legislation they should be in the people's house where they can answer questions and be held accountable for their decisions. Shadow ministers should scrutinise the actions of their ministerial counterpart and therefore would also need to be in the House of Representatives
- question time needs all ministers in the peoples' house for scrutiny. Question time in the House of Representatives receives far greater media scrutiny. The House of Representatives is perhaps seen as the more important house as it contains the Prime Minister and the majority of senior ministers
- having all ministers and shadow ministers in the one chamber could make parliament operate more smoothly.

Arguments against the selection of ministers only from the House of Representatives could include:

- ministers and shadow ministers should be chosen from both houses to allow for the broadest talent, the best people and those with the necessary experience and expertise. Limiting the choice to the House of Representatives would limit range of expertise and talent
- if ministers and shadow ministers are only chosen from the House of Representatives this could lead to ambitious politicians not seeking endorsement for the Senate. Ministers provide a senior presence in the Senate, where legislation is reviewed
- ministers introduce legislation relevant to their portfolio areas to the parliament and they outline the rationale and reasons for that legislation in the second reading of a Bill. Not all legislation originates in the House of Representatives and a ministerial presence is needed in the Senate
- it may lead to the Senate being seen as a far less important and subordinate chamber
- there should be ministers serving on Senate Committees that have an important role to play
- as ministers are responsible to the people through the parliament, this should not be restricted to one chamber
- if all ministers and shadow ministers were in the House of Representatives it would be even more dominated by the executive than it currently is
- when the government does not have control of the Senate (and in recent times it has not), then the Senate plays a very important role as a house of review and more time is taken over the consideration of legislation than in the House of Representatives. It is important to have ministerial representation in the Senate.

This was a difficult question and was generally not well answered. Better students were able to clearly identify arguments and conclude that ministers and shadow ministers should in fact be selected from both houses. Less successful students became sidetracked on the voting systems used to elect each house and how representative each house actually is. Some students also thought that ministers and shadow ministers currently only exist in the House of Representatives, which is false. Examiners should note that students found it very difficult to evaluate in their responses to this question.



Question 3 – Voting and elections

a. What is meant by the term one vote one value?

Electoral systems should ensure that all votes are of equal value, worth, or weight and that there is no bias in favour of some voters. One vote one value ensures fairness and representativeness. Factors such as malapportionment and gerrymanders can cause vote weightage so that some voters are favoured.

This was well answered by most students. Less successful students thought this term applied to preferential voting, where votes are transferred at full transfer value.

b. Briefly describe three key characteristics of the Australian federal electoral system.

Better students cited the following examples:

- compulsory voting
- secret ballot
- universal franchise (with some exceptions, for example, those 'of unsound mind')
- two forms of voting are employed: preferential voting for the House for Representatives and proportional representation for the Senate
- Senate electorate (states and territories) are multimember electorates. House of Representative electorate are single member electorates. The results of House of Representatives elections determine the government
- usually a House of Representatives and a half Senate election are held at the same time
- elections and electoral redistributions are managed by an independent authority, the Australian Electoral Commission
- public funding of election campaigns
- one person, one vote
- one vote, one value
- universal candidature.

This was well answered by most students, however there was a tendency for students to write far too much in their responses. Better students cited three distinctly different key characteristics and described each in approximately two lines. Less successful students cited characteristics of parliament, such as the convention that the Prime Minister is the leader of the party(s) with the majority in the House of Representatives.

c. Evaluate the argument that marginal seats determine Australian federal elections results.

This question posed problems for some students and many found the argument difficult to evaluate. Marginal seats are those in which party representation can change from election to election, and as such are electorates in which no party is assured of victory. A marginal seat is usually considered one in which a swing of up to about six per cent is needed for the sitting member to be defeated. Nearly one third of seats are marginal. When the ALP and Liberal Party get a similar national percentage of the vote, it is where they get the votes that counts.

Convergence of party policy and changes in socioeconomic factors mean there are increasing numbers of swinging voters, so what were 'safe' seats may become marginal or may become safe for a party that has not traditionally won the seat. Political parties spend more time and more money campaigning in marginal seats, which is evidence of the importance of these seats. Marginal seats are 'targeted' by the major parties. Also, the decline of traditional party loyalties means there are fewer safe seats. This has also allowed independents to have a more significant role and influence, especially in marginal seats.

Nevertheless, there are a number of other factors that determine the results. Parties must also win their safe seats and certainly cannot take these for granted. Other factors, such as the role of minor parties, preferences, issues in a particular electorate (safe seats can be lost), issues that cross party lines and leadership can also play a key role in determining elections.

Better students were able to define what a marginal seat is and stress the importance of winning these seats, using specific elections, such as the one in 2004, to illustrate their responses. They also were able to cite counter arguments and conclude that while marginal seats are crucial, elections are not won or lost purely on the outcome in these electorates; other factors can play a role. Less successful students were vague in their responses and unclear as to what constitutes a marginal seat. They did not raise any counter arguments.



Question 4 — Political parties and pressure groups

a. What is meant by the term Caucus?

This is a technical term used to describe the entire parliamentary wing of the Australian Labor Party when it meets to make decisions on policy, to decide how it will vote in the parliament, and, on occasions, to deal with matters necessary to the running of the parliamentary party (such as electing a leader and electing the ministry or shadow ministry). The Caucus requires its members to abide by collectively made decisions. A Labor MP who breaks Caucus can expect to be expelled from the party. In theory, Caucus decisions are binding on the parliamentary leadership of the ALP.

This question was poorly answered and indicated that, whilst many students have an idea as to what Caucus is, they could not articulate a specific definition in writing. Better students stressed that Caucus is the entire parliamentary wing of the ALP and included some of its roles. Less successful students could link Caucus to the ALP, but either thought it was all members of the party (parliamentary and non-parliamentary), or that Caucus is the senior ministers or shadow ministers of the ALP.

b. Briefly describe three organisational differences between the Australian Labor Party and the Liberal Party.

- Labor has a National Conference that can make binding policy, the Liberal Party's Federal Council is an advisory body only
- Labor requires its members to sign a pledge of loyalty; Liberal MPs are theoretically free to vote according to their conscience
- Labor's National Executive has the power to discipline state branches of the party; state divisions of the Liberal Party are autonomous
- Labor has an official Caucus system in which decisions are made collectively, and the collective will of the party is binding on MPs; the Liberal Party has a 'party room' meeting system that, in theory, does not insist on such rigid discipline
- The ALP has affiliated trade unions; the Liberal Party prohibits the affiliation of any outside organisation (only individuals may join the party)
- Parliamentary Labor leaders are bound by Caucus decisions. The Labor Caucus elects the ministry (although the Labor leader determines who will hold what portfolio). Under Liberal rules, the parliamentary leader is at the peak of the organisation. The Liberal leader chooses who shall be in the ministry.

This question was generally well answered. It required students to give six pieces of information to gain full marks. Less successful students only gave information about one party or failed to cite organisational differences between the two parties, instead giving differences in philosophy or policies.

c. Evaluate the argument that pressure groups have too much influence on the Australian political system.

Arguments in favour of the proposition could include:

- it is elected governments rather than non-elected and non-democratic interest groups that should determine the outcome of policy deliberations
- some interest groups have too much influence because they are too close to political actors (this might include unions that are affiliated with the ALP or producer or interest groups who support the Liberal or National parties)
- interest groups with economic power may exert more influence than those groups representing economically weaker constituents, and this may lead to a distortion in the distribution of social power
- interest groups that are able to organise protests quickly and effectively might be seen as empowering noisy and militant minorities at the expense of broader opinion.

Arguments against the proposition could include:

- the diversity and spread of interest groups means that few groups can claim to exert influence over government
- the ability of interest groups to impact on government is defined by government. In other words, it is government rather than interest groups that have the authority to exercise policy-making power. If groups have influence over government, it is because government allows this to occur
- interest groups can be seen as an important adjunct to the democratic process. Like political parties, they may be viewed as another organisational form through which citizens can engage with the political process. Far from having too much influence, group politics might be seen as an important way of empowering the citizenry.

This question was generally well answered. The key words were 'too much influence'. Better students focussed on whether pressure groups have too much influence, citing specific examples where it could be argued that this is the



case. They evaluated clearly and reached firm conclusions. Less successful students were far too general in their responses, failed to include relevant examples and failed to show any evaluation. Some less successful students merely focussed on the extent to which pressure groups are democratic, which was a pre-prepared response that did not directly address the question.

Question 5 – Australian foreign policy

a. What is meant by the term multilateral relationships?

A multilateral relationship is a relationship involving three or more nation states/countries for reasons including security, strategic, military, diplomatic, political, environmental or economic concerns. Most students had little problem answering this question.

b. Briefly describe three ways in which the Prime Minister can influence Australian foreign policy.

The Prime Minister can influence Australian foreign policy through:

- ministerial appointments, including the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Trade
- bureaucratic appointments, including department heads and ambassadors
- guiding Cabinet policy
- making public announcements on foreign policy
- forming strong relationships with world leaders
- taking an active interest in foreign policy, including having a presence on the world stage.

This question was generally well answered. Better students had few problems giving three clear responses and were able to cite relevant examples to reinforce their answers. Less successful students failed to answer the question, instead focussing on policy outcomes with little reference to the role the Prime Minister played in these areas.

c. Evaluate the argument that Australia has neglected its relationships with its regional neighbours.

This was a very good question and allowed students to clearly give two sides of the argument in their evaluation. The evaluation of the argument revolved around the nature of Australia's relationship with the US and Europe compared regional neighbours. 'Neglected' is the key term, and better students focussed on this, stating that it is difficult to argue that Australia has neglected its relationships with regional neighbours but perhaps more reasonable to argue there has been a change of focus/emphasis or that Australia has not strengthened regional relationships.

Better students argued that the Howard Government's emphasis on the relationship with the US has been detrimental to Australia's relationships with countries of the Asia-Pacific region. They stated that it is incompatible to have an obviously strong relationship with the US, especially in the war against terror, and still have a strong relationship with the region. John Howard has also stated that Australia has neglected its relationship with Europe. The level of Australia's foreign aid to the Asia-Pacific region and criticism from some quarters were also considered. Some students considered that the Free Trade Agreement with the US was counter-productive to regional relationships; however, they also pointed out that other nations in the region (such as Singapore) have also signed similar deals with Washington and that Australia has a free trade agreement with Thailand and Singapore, and has also started negotiations with China.

Better students also considered the ways in which Australia has maintained relationships within the region (especially with Indonesia, in the face of terrorist attacks in Bali and Jakarta) despite the difficulties of East Timor, the \$25 billion natural gas deal and other trading relationships with China, and intervention in the Solomons. Their arguments revolved around the balance of the relationships and the perception that Australia favours one area over another. Less successful students merely discussed Australia's closer relationship with the US under the Howard Government, with little evaluation and little reference to the role that Australia has played in the Asia-Pacific region. Some less successful students were also confused as to who Australia's regional neighbours actually are, while others focussed too heavily on historical information rather than current trends and examples.



Section B – Essay questions

Question Chosen	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
%	0	15	6	16	2	24	4	3	5	10	16

The Australian Constitution

Question 1

‘The failure of referendums suggests that the High Court will continue to be the key mechanism for constitutional change.’ To what extent do you agree?

This was quite a popular question. Better students explored the proposition that the failure of referendums means the High Court will continue to be the key mechanism for constitutional change, despite the fact that the High Court cannot actually change the wording of the Constitution. Implicit in this question was the idea that there are other methods of informally changing the Constitution, but that the High Court is the key mechanism.

Better students briefly explored the various reasons for failure of referenda, including the following:

- the difficulty of attaining a double majority, a national majority and a majority of states. In reality, if a simple national majority of ‘yes’ votes were the only requirement, then an additional five referenda would have passed
- voter confusion due to legalistic wording
- lack of interest and/or apathy. It can be argued that Australians generally take little interest in political issues, particularly constitutional issues
- lack of bi-partisanship.

Given the history of failure of referenda, it is likely that they will continue to fail. It is the High Court which has been largely responsible for constitutional change. The High Court interprets the Constitution and applies meaning to it. It can therefore change the meaning of the Constitution without changing its wording.

Better students provided evidence that the High Court is a significant mechanism for constitutional change and made reference to some well-known cases that have had an impact on the Constitution. These could include:

- the trend since the Engineer’s Case of 1920 towards interpretations by the High Court that have favoured the Commonwealth Government
- the first Uniform Tax case of 1942, the 1983 Bass Strait Pipelines case and the 1997 State Duties on Tobacco and Alcohol case each contributed to the increasing financial dominance of the Commonwealth Government
- judicial interpretation by the High Court has resulted in the Commonwealth being given jurisdiction in some areas of residual power; for example, the Franklin Dam case, 1983. By using section 51(29), the external affairs power, the High Court was able to prevent the Tasmanian Government from building the Franklin Dam. The Koowarta case in 1982 also used S51(29)
- the recent criticism levelled at the High Court for becoming increasingly politicised and assuming a more political role (for example, Mabo and Wik).

Students could discuss the idea that the High Court will most likely continue to be the key mechanism for change, which could be easily supported. It could be argued that the High Court is becoming increasingly activist and powerful. Students could also comment that this is likely to continue and that the influence and importance of the High Court as a mechanism for change will not diminish.

Better students not only fully explored the issues in the question regarding referenda and the High Court, but looked at other mechanisms for change, such as S96, which is increasingly being used by the Howard Government, and referral of powers.

This question was well answered by most students. Less successful students tended to concentrate too heavily on explaining the referendum process or on the failure of referenda and did not pay sufficient attention to the role of the High Court. Less successful students assumed that the High Court can change the wording of the Constitution and made no reference to S96.

Question 2

‘The strengths of the Australian Constitution outweigh its weaknesses.’ To what extent do you agree?

Few students chose this question. It asked students to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the Constitution and decide whether or not the Constitution’s strengths outweigh its weaknesses. It would be possible to argue that the strengths and weaknesses are equally balanced and that one does not outweigh the other. Better students **discussed** the



various strengths and weaknesses, rather than simply providing a list. Students choose to discuss some of the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- The Constitution has provided for a stable political system. With the exception of 1975, there has not been a constitutional crisis and it can be argued that even then the conflict was peacefully and effectively resolved. The Westminster system of government has a number of features that contribute to the stability of our political system.
- Despite its relative lack of change, the Constitution has served the nation well and can be seen as a flexible document that has catered for changes that have occurred since Federation. Institutions created by the Constitution are functioning well.
- The Constitution promotes cooperation and allows the Commonwealth and the states to work together in areas of shared responsibility, such as education.
- Australia is recognised as being a very stable democracy and the Constitution provides the foundation for this.

Weaknesses

- The Constitution is difficult to change. Section 128 appears to be a stumbling block for formal constitutional change. It does not reflect the enormous social and political changes in Australia.
- The role and powers of the head of state. The Constitution bestows enormous power upon the Governor General, who is neither popularly elected nor elected by representatives of the people. Reserve powers are not specified and they allow an unelected official to potentially wield great power.
- The dependence on Westminster conventions and the fact that these are not mentioned in the Constitution; for example, there is no mention of key political players such as cabinet and the prime minister.
- There is no mention of the electoral system.
- Conflict between the Commonwealth and the states could eventuate because the division of powers is not defined.
- The Constitution has no Bill of Rights. It is devoid of references to democracy and does not formally guarantee key democratic rights.
- The Constitution is expressed in outdated, legalistic 19th Century language and is not easily understood. It is inaccessible to most Australians. Section 3, for example, states that the Governor General will be paid an annual salary of ten thousand pounds.
- It needs frequent interpretation by the High Court
- It has allowed the Commonwealth Government to dominate the states, particularly in finance, to the extent that states have lost their financial independence
- It does not reflect contemporary social and political values. For example, it is underpinned by a constitutional monarchy which means that the head of state is not Australian
- Section 24 (nexus clause) provides for the Senate to be half the size of the House of Representatives. The Senate does not need to be expanded in size, particularly when states have equal representation but as the House of Representatives grows to meet a growing population so too will the Senate.

Less successful students struggled to discuss strengths of the Constitution and tended to concentrate on only one or two weaknesses, in particular S128 and the need for a Bill of Rights. They were far too simplistic in their responses.

Parliament and the Executive

Question 3

‘The Australian Senate frustrates good government.’ To what extent do you agree?

Although this was a complex question, it was attempted by a number of students and was generally answered well. Better students began by discussing the notion of ‘good government’. Very good essays pondered the dilemma for liberal democratic states which try to balance the need for government to have sufficient authority to have its policy program enacted with the need to protect minority interests and have a system that provides checks and balances on the power of the executive. In constructing evaluative criteria by which the idea of ‘good government’ might be understood, better students raised the following arguments:

- liberal democracies seek to achieve a balance between efficient government and the imposition of checks and balances on executive power
- effective government requires the executive to be able to enact its policy program
- accountable government seeks to ensure that the executive is answerable for its actions
- the question of executive power is pertinent: a system that does not have inbuilt checks on the power of cabinet can lead to ‘tyranny of the executive’
- a system that does not allow government to govern can lead to legislative paralysis or ‘grid-lock’.



They also demonstrated knowledge of where the Senate fits in to the Australian system. This included:

- recognition of the Senate as the 'states' house'
- recognition of its role as a 'house of review'
- recognition that the constitutional framers deliberately established the Senate to have co-equal power with the House of Representatives on all matters except taxation Bills
- recognition of the Senate's role in debating Bills.

Arguments supporting the proposition that the Senate frustrates good government included that:

- the Senate's constitutional power can lead to governmental paralysis (as per the 1975 constitutional crisis), and that such paralysis is antithetical to the notion of 'good government'
- the Senate ceased to be a state house in 1910, and has simply become a replica of the party-dominated lower house
- the electoral system employed to elect the Senate (proportional representation) has allowed minor parties and independents to hold the balance of power and thus to exert influence far beyond their support base
- the application of party considerations ahead of the notion of state representation in the running of the Senate's affairs undermines the original intention of the constitutional framers to have this chamber represent the interests of the states.

Arguments against the proposition rested primarily on equating good government with the need to exercise constraint over executive power (that is, to apply checks and balances). The following points were made:

- the community is concerned about hastily made legislation or governments legislating in ways not canvassed in election campaigns. If controlled by parties other than the governing party, the Senate can work to keep governments accountable for their legislative program
- the Senate's power to reject legislation is an important brake on the power of the executive
- the failure of the executive to control the upper house can assist the process of making the parliament a meaningful institution. If the government were to control the Senate it would simply become a 'rubber stamp' for the executive
- the Senate can use its powers to create committees that are not dominated by the government to allow for closer scrutiny of proposed legislation and to undertake a thorough review of the actions of the government and its ministerial departments.

Better students were able to cite clear examples where the Senate has played a major role in suggesting alterations to proposed legislation or where the Senate has passed or blocked legislation. This was then successfully related to their definition of 'good government'. They were also able to discuss the role the Senate will play from mid 2005 when the Howard Government will have a majority, a situation not enjoyed by any federal government for over 20 years. Less successful students made no attempt to discuss the concept of good government; instead, they merely discussed the theoretical function of the Senate. They also made little or no reference to the role the Senate has played in specific legislation.

Question 4

'The convention of ministerial responsibility is only effective if the Prime Minister is willing to uphold it.' To what extent do you agree?

This was a very difficult question and was attempted by only a handful of students. It required a discussion of prime ministerial power within the context of the operation of a Westminster system of parliament. Better students were able to locate the topic within a broader understanding of the Westminster system, raising the following points:

- the concept of 'ministerial responsibility' is a convention associated with the Westminster system of government
- ministerial responsibility must be understood as being a customary practice rather than a legalistic rule or statute
- the convention of ministerial responsibility holds that a minister found to have presided over his or her portfolio with impropriety, including the impropriety or maladministration of officials within the department, is expected to resign from the ministry
- the Westminster system also makes a number of other important assumptions, and other conventions apply with respect to the formation of governments, the convening of cabinets, and the role of the prime minister. Under the Westminster system, the cabinet is by convention the government and thus responsible for initiating policy and being answerable to the parliament for its actions, and the parliament is there to debate the initiatives of cabinet



- one of the political consequences of the application of the Westminster model to a modern political setting is that the prime minister emerges as a very powerful figure. This power is derived from the prime minister's chairing role in the cabinet as well as the tendency for the political community (voters and the media) to see the prime minister as the personification of the government.

In constructing an argument in response to the question, better students outlined the parameters of the Westminster convention of ministerial responsibility. They also argued that its application is important to the notion that the parliament acts as an overseer of the affairs of the cabinet. Responses to the question contained the following points, mitigating the assumption that the convention is applied (and, in the process, supporting the proposition that ministerial responsibility is only effective if the Prime Minister is willing to uphold it):

- the advent of disciplined party politics within Westminster parliaments militates against the application of ministerial responsibility. With the security of a parliamentary majority administered by party Whips, ministers and the prime minister know that the government will be safe from parliamentary motions of no-confidence
- that even in the Australian setting where an upper house exists that is often controlled by parties other than the governing party, motions of a want of confidence in the government that are passed by the Senate do not apply to the House of Representatives. The only way the Senate can force its will on the government is through the process of deferring or rejecting supply
- as a consequence of all of this, the cabinet and the prime minister have few parliamentary constraints on them. This means that the decision to apply conventions such as ministerial responsibility will be made on political grounds rather than as a response to any regulation or statute
- the conventions of the Westminster system cast the prime minister in the role of convenor (head) of cabinet with the authority to appoint or dismiss ministers (although this power is, of course, mitigated by the prime minister's answerability to the party room as party leader and, in the case of a Labor prime minister, Caucus rules about the construction of Labor cabinets). Because the prime minister's advice is usually accepted by the head of state (the Governor General), who has the authority to appoint ministers and give them the authority to administer their portfolios, the Westminster convention actually reinforces prime ministerial power over the appointment and dismissal of ministers

It would be difficult to reach a conclusion disputing the presumption made by the question, with the only real exception being where minority governments (that is, governments without an absolute majority in the lower house) are forced to apply the convention at the behest of those holding the balance of power in that chamber.

Less successful students failed to understand the complexity of this question and struggled to provide appropriate examples of when the prime minister has or has not upheld the convention of ministerial responsibility.

Voting and elections

Question 5

'The Australian federal electoral system delivers high levels of participation but does not fulfil key democratic values.' To what extent do you agree?

This was a very popular question and was generally well answered by most students.

The Australian electoral system does deliver high levels of participation – approximately 93%. Better students briefly compared Australian participation rates to those in other countries; for example, the US and UK which have 50–60% and 60% participation rates respectively. There are few restrictions on who can and cannot vote, and participation is high due to compulsory voting (that is, compulsory enrolment and attendance at the polling station on election day).

Better students also discussed that, in addition to compulsory voting, the Australian electoral system has a number of mechanisms to promote participation including:

- postal voting
- pre-polling
- mobile polling booths
- absentee voting
- most voters do not have to travel more than 10 kilometres to a polling station
- elections are held on a Saturday (compared to the US, for example, where voting is on a Tuesday)
- services are provided to assist those with disabilities or language difficulties
- those with no fixed place of address can register as itinerant electors.



Despite high participation rates, there are a number of ways in which the Australian federal electoral system does not fulfil key democratic values. Elections determine government, provide a mandate for government to carry out policies and are the foremost mechanism for political participation, therefore they must as good 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. Better students recognised that no election system is perfect.

Key democratic values that are upheld include:

- elections are managed by an independent authority, the Australian Electoral Commission.
- elections offer a choice of candidates
- elections are frequent (perhaps too frequent)
- they are conducted by secret ballot
- there is 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.

Key democratic values that are not fully upheld include:

- 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, the ALP gained over 51% of the House of Representatives vote and still lost the election; in 1990 the Liberal/National Party gained 50.4% of the House of Representatives vote and lost. These 'bogus majorities' result from two factors – malapportionment and vote wastage
- one vote one value: the preferential system and proportional representation do not always deliver one vote one value. Malapportionment is a feature of the Senate system because electorates (states and territories) do not have approximately the same number of voters but each state and territory gets the same number of Senators. So, a Tasmanian Senate vote is worth 12 times a NSW vote. There is little justification for this as the Senate doesn't act as a states' house. Tasmanian voters are further advantaged: the Constitution guarantees Tasmania five House of Representatives seats no matter what its population. A Tasmanian House of Representatives vote is more valuable than a mainland vote, as all five 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 can determine election results therefore election campaigns focus on them, meaning that some voters are given more attention than others
- representation reflective of electoral support: exaggerated majorities occur in the House of Representatives if a party wins many seats by small margins, so the party has seats out of proportion to their vote
- minority representation: limited in the House of Representatives 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
- equity: House of Representatives and Senate systems do not always deliver equal outcomes and opportunities for all parties and candidates. In the House of Representatives system, the National Party has the advantage of a concentrated majority. In the 1998 election, the National Party gained about five per cent of the House of Representatives vote and won 16 seats, however, the Democrats also gained about five per cent and did not win any seats. Senate ballot papers disadvantage independents who do not form a group and those unable to make preference deals with the major parties. The House of Representatives ballot paper gives one to two per cent of the vote to the candidate on the top of the ballot paper
- equity: the preference system for the Senate (combined with voting above the line) means that a minor party that gains two per cent of the vote can win a Senate seat, whereas a party that gains much more of the primary vote may not get a seat due to preference deals and a lack of information on how to vote cards; for example,



Family First in the 2004 election gained a Senate seat in Victoria with about one point nine per cent of the primary vote, despite that fact they were significantly out polled by the Greens. In addition, no parties, with the exception of the Liberal Party, indicated to voters on their how to vote cards where below the line preferences were going

- equality: the government determines the election date and sets the closing date for candidate nominations at between 14 and 27 days. This gives an 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: the deposit of \$350 to stand for the House of Representatives 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; rather the compulsion is to register and attend the polling booth.

Better students not only focussed on the high participation levels in Australian elections, but also had a clear understanding of the key democratic values and the extent to which they are upheld. They went beyond merely saying that elections must be 'frequent, free and fair' and explored in detail the values of majority rule and minority representation, the concept of representative government and the extent to which voters can keep governments accountable. Better students were able to reinforce their evaluation with recent statistics, with some even including information from the 2004 election which was held only six weeks before the Political Studies examination. Less successful students had a very simplistic view of democratic values and often failed to move beyond a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of compulsory voting. Some less successful students merely described the voting systems for the House of Representatives and the Senate without any attempt to address the question.

Question 6

'In the last 10 years, federal elections have demonstrated a change in traditional patterns of party identification. To what extent do you agree?'

This was not a popular question and was quite difficult. Students attempting this question needed to demonstrate some knowledge of basic Australian political sociology as well as an appreciation of the results of the 1996, 1998, 2001 and 2004 federal elections.

In relation to political sociology, better students were able to identify that:

- Australian elections usually involve a battle between the two major parties (Liberal and Labor) for whom the majority of Australian voters usually cast a primary vote
- Australian voting alignments tend to reflect a set of socioeconomic and cultural features: specifically, that blue-collar employed, lower income earning, non-English speaking background voters tend to be considered as core constituents of the Labor party, while small business oriented, higher income earning and white-collar employed voters tend to vote Liberal
- there has been a long tradition of minor party politics that has impacted on the electoral process notwithstanding the anti-small-party bias of the preferential voting system used for House of Representatives elections.

Establishing these points gave students criteria through which voting behaviour from the relevant elections could be considered. Students could then refer to political scientists' debate over the trend in Australian voting behaviour, which comprises two perspectives:

- the argument presented by David Kemp that traditional party voting alignments are in inevitable decline as modern society becomes less polarised as 'workers' and 'owners of capital'
- the counter argument put by Don Aitkin that the Australian system is a two party system, and that the long-term voting alignment pattern is one of support for one or other of the major parties.

Evaluation of this question necessitated reflection on the 1996, 1998, 2001 and 2004 federal elections. Better students made the following points:

- the total vote cast for major parties fell during these elections from 80% to 70%
- lower and upper house voting for minor parties increased in these elections, with parties such as One Nation and The Greens enjoying swings in their vote. This was also reflected in the election of One Nation and Green candidates to the Senate
- in the 1996, 1998 and 2001 elections, a number of independents were also elected. This, too, reflects a decline in major party voting and a commensurate rise in voter support for minor parties and independent candidates



- surveys of voter behaviour done under the auspices of the Australian Electoral Survey have found a decline in the number of voters who identify themselves as 'very strong' partisans.

Better students handled this question well, and were able to discuss in considerable depth arguments for and against the proposal that traditional patterns of party identification have changed in recent elections. They were also able to mix the theory with examples of voting trends over the past ten years. Less successful students struggled to understand the complexity of the question. Instead, they used sweeping statements to attempt to illustrate changes in party support. One such comment was *Gone are the days when the businessman voted Liberal, the Catholic voted Labor and the recreational drug user voted Green*. Little evidence from recent elections was offered.

Political parties and pressure groups

Question 7

'In order to be successful, minor parties need dynamic leadership.' To what extent do you agree?

Very few students attempted this question, which invited students to identify the key minor parties that have operated in the Australian political system and to make links between such parties and their leaders. Better students explained what they understood to be dynamic leadership and that other characteristics/factors are necessary for success (electoral success or other) including policies, support from the major parties, extent of party membership and parliamentary representation.

The parties/leaders that could be used as examples included:

- the Australian Democrats (with the party's recent leadership problems)
- the Australian Greens (with obvious identification of Dr Bob Brown as leader)
- Pauline Hanson's One Nation (with Pauline Hanson as leader)
- the National Party (John Anderson and Tim Fischer and their role in the coalition).

Better students pointed out that dynamic/strong leadership is not enough to guarantee the success of minor parties.

The 2004 election result led some students to include reference to the Family First party. Students justifiably claimed that Family First's success demonstrated how a party can succeed without a popular, infamous and/or charismatic leader (although this would be the exception rather than the rule). Better students also pointed out that the Family First success was in a large part due to the way the ALP directed its Senate preferences.

It was necessary for students to discuss the status of the National Party. Some disputed whether the Nationals are in the same category as other minor parties, given their coalition status and anecdotal evidence that the Nationals have a larger branch membership than the major parties. Some students successfully attempted to bring the Nationals into consideration by referring to its small national primary vote as a critical criterion, and also pointing out that the National Party's influence on Australian politics depends in no small way on its ability to interact with a major party through the coalition process – an approach that is usually associated with minor party politics.

Better students noted that:

- there have been many minor parties contesting federal elections, but that not many have actually been able to succeed in winning representation in the Australian Parliament. They also indicated how the two electoral systems used have different implications for minor parties, with the preferential system providing less scope for success than proportional representation
- Australians understand the political system through the party system, but that the appreciation of the party system also involves recognition of the party leader. This is assisted by the way in which aspects of our political culture focus on the leader, including the way the media tends to report the election process as a leadership and personality battle. In other words, voters respond to the political debate through parties and their leaders. This means that the party leader is an important person in Australian politics – and this would include the leaders of minor parties
- the relative lack of parliamentary representation has an effect on the level of public recognition of minor parties. This may impact on minor party leadership in various ways. A minor party seeking to impact on the election might use a popular or charismatic leader to attract attention to him or herself (for example, Pauline Hanson of One Nation). A minor party may win representation to the parliament (usually the Senate) and this may cast a sitting member in the role of leader. In the case of the Australian Democrats, it should be noted that the selection of the party leader is subject to a vote by the party membership.



Students arguing for the affirmative made links between successful minor parties (that is, those who have won representation to the Senate) and their leaders, or, conversely, the failure of minor parties following problems with leadership. The practical examples of this include:

- the Greens, who clearly have a charismatic leader in Senator Bob Brown and whose advance (at least in terms of percentage of the vote won) has been due in no small measure to his impact
- One Nation, which clearly obtained its early momentum from the charisma and popularity of Pauline Hanson, and which fell apart after her departure from the party
- the Australian Democrats and the correlation between the success the party had under charismatic leaders (Don Chipp, Janine Haines, Cheryl Kernot, and Natasha Stott-Despoja) and their comparative failure under much less charismatic leaders (John Coulter, Megg Lees and Andrew Bartlett)
- the perception within the National Party that it needs to have a leader who best fits with the aspirations and outlooks of the party's regional and rural constituency. Better students referred to the way in which the National Party has looked to leaders such as Tim Fisher and John Anderson to preserve its representational position.

Less successful students tended to concentrate on only one party and as such were unable to make comparisons between the leadership of parties. They failed to explore the notion of success or to consider other factors which can be instrumental to success.

Question 8

'Interest groups can make a significant contribution to the formulation of government policy.' To what extent do you agree?

This question was reasonably popular. Better students argued that interest groups do make a major contribution to government policy-making. This contribution can manifest itself in the following ways.

- Groups often try to exert pressure on the political debate either through seeking to gain access to ministers or through exerting influence indirectly by trying to impact on public opinion, especially during election campaigns.
- Interest groups sometimes have great expertise on particular policy matters and are consulted by the government.
- Some interest groups hold strategically important positions and their compliance is critical to the successful application of policy. As a result, policy is made with these groups in mind or with the active participation (and consent) of such groups.
- Interest groups might be used by governments to monitor the effects of policy decisions.
- Some interest groups have 'clienteles' relationships with public service departments and their associated state agencies, and this allows such groups to influence decision-making.

The above points were discussed in depth with reference to practical examples. Students made reference to:

- the proximity of trade unions and business groups to governments undertaking reform of industrial relations policies and laws. A similar relationship exists between governments and key producer groups such as farmers, graziers, miners and other primary producer groups
- the use of public awareness campaigns by environmental conservation groups in their bid to have areas of environmental significance subject to conservation outcomes in policy-making
- the competition over policy, such as the rivalry between car user groups and transport user groups for influence over transport policy
- the proximity of groups like the Returned Services League to decisions on things like shop opening hours during ANZAC Day
- the way citizens join promotional interest groups if they want to pressure the government into doing something, or if they want to mount opposition to a government proposal.

Students also discussed the theoretical assumptions that underpin the argument that the participation of interest groups in policy-making is an integral and acceptable part of the liberal democratic system. In particular, they made the link between the argument that interest groups help decentralise political power and act as another link with the processes of government and the American 'pluralist' school of political theorists. Other students realised that interest group activity, in seeking to influence government decision-making, is seen as an acceptable form of liberal democratic politics without making reference to pluralism.

Those students who did raise the argument that interest groups might be seen as an integral part of the liberal democratic experience also referred to counter arguments that suggest that interest group activity is seen as an



undesirable form of liberal democratic politics. In particular, they argued that interest group activity might distort the policy-making process in favour of well organised and well resourced groups which seek to maximise policy outcomes to suit their sectional interests at the expense of the broader community. This counter position argues that a policy-making process dominated by self-serving sectional interest groups undermines the notion of the government serving 'national interest'. The approach (usually associated with Public Choice theory) argues that the role of government is to find ways of making policy without the input and/or interference of sectional or promotional interest groups.

Some students also used recent examples of how Australian governments have responded to the role of interest groups. Such essays included discussion on:

- the Hawke Government's close relationship with business associations and the trade union movement as part of its 'Accord' process
- the close relationship between the Hawke Government and the major environmental organisations where the government addressed parts of the conservation agenda in exchange for environmental interest group support in elections
- a, not dissimilar, relationship between the Howard Government and small scale local conservation groups where policy support was exchanged for elector support
- the relationship between farmers, graziers and other agricultural interest groups and the National and Liberal parties
- the way governments have interacted with ethnic communities in the formulation of 'multiculturalism', or the times where governments have sought to play multiculturalism down as a policy and have consequently cut off communications with ethnic groups.

Less successful students interpreted this question to be about the advantages and disadvantages of pressure groups and gave pre-prepared answers which lacked reference to the question. They also stated that pressure groups do make a significant contribution to the formulation of policy, but were unable to give any examples of where this has or has not been the case.

Australian foreign policy

Question 9

'The formulation of Australian foreign policy is dominated by domestic political considerations.' To what extent do you agree?

This was a very popular question. Better students focussed on the domestic considerations that dominate the formulation of foreign policy, including public opinion, the impact on domestic policy areas, the role of the opposition, the media, and the views of key sectional interests and pressure/interest groups. They also considered the comparative impact of major international events.

Better students considered the processes involved in the formulation of Australian foreign policy and used this as a basis for discussing the relevant influences on policy-making. They recognised the need for governments to retain power, which means the government will define national interest terms of their policy priorities but also have an eye on popular opinion. Better students acknowledged the impact of domestic politics on the formulation of foreign policy and also debated the extent to which it is a dominant force compared to other factors, including Australian international relationships, changes of government, security and economic considerations.

The impact of economic considerations was discussed through the use of examples such as Australia's involvement in the WTO and the Free Trade Agreement with the US, an agreement which faced considerable domestic opposition yet had the support of the ALP.

Security issues have international and domestic resonance. Significant public support for the 'war against terror' and the ALP's recent policy change on troops in Iraq, suggests that domestic considerations do play a part in the formulation of foreign policy.

A turn around in public opinion (for example, as a consequence of events in Iraq or the Vietnam War) may drive policy change but such change would not be free of international considerations. Some students also used the refugee issue to emphasise that governments (and oppositions) make decisions that are publicly popular.

Less successful students tended to concentrate exclusively on domestic influences or external influences on Australian foreign policy. Furthermore, they explained the process of foreign policy formulation in great detail but were unable to relate this to the actual question. Some students concentrated heavily on the theory of Australian foreign policy formulation with few, if any, examples to reinforce their comments.



Question 10

'Australia is now a more effective global citizen due to the Howard government's foreign policy initiatives.' To what extent do you agree?

This was a very popular question. Responses included a definition of what is to be an 'effective global citizen'. This definition determined whether the students agreed with the statement. Better students also introduced a comparative element so that they could respond to whether the government is 'now a **more effective**' global citizen. That is, more effective than previous, recent governments.

Better students demonstrated an understanding of the key foreign initiatives of the Howard Government and the extent to which Australia is perceived both internationally and domestically as making a contribution to the global community in areas such as:

- global and regional security
- economics and trade
- human rights
- the environment
- refugees
- aid programs
- treaties, alliances, agreements
- drug trafficking
- involvement with United Nations programs

Students used a range of examples to reinforce their position on the extent to which Australia is a more effective global citizen under the Howard government. Examples could include:

- Australia's involvement in the Iraq wars and Afghanistan
- bombings in Indonesia and assistance provided to Indonesia
- free trade agreements
- Australia's failure to sign the Kyoto protocol and other international treaties
- Australia's role in East Timor
- Australia's role in the Solomons
- refugee and immigration policies
- the Howard Government's attitude to the United Nations
- criticism of the amount Australia spends on foreign aid.

Less successful students were too simplistic in their analysis of Australian foreign policy and failed to acknowledge that there are arguments both in support of and against the contention that Australia is now a more effective global citizen. Furthermore, they tended to be very descriptive in their discussion and were unsure how to relate examples of Australian foreign policy to the concept of effective global citizenship.