VCE Australian Politics (Units 3 and 4: 2018–2024)

School-based assessment report – Unit 3 and 4

GENERAL COMMENTS

This report provides advice based on the first year of implementation of the [VCE Australian Politics Study Design 2018–2024](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/vce/politics/AustGlobalPoliticsSD_2018.pdf). Schools delivering Units 3 and 4 of Australian Politics must ensure that School-assessed Coursework (SAC) complies with the reaccredited *VCE Australian Politics Study Design* and the VCE assessment principles.

Schools delivering Units 3 and 4 Australian Politics that were in the 2018 School-based Assessment Audit used a variety of support materials in setting tasks for both units, drawing on the following:

* [VCE Australian and Global Politics (Units 1 and 2: 2018–2023 Units 3 and 4: 2018–2024)](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/vce/studies/auspolitics/auspoliticsindex.aspx) Study Design
* [*Frequently Asked Questions*](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/vce/politics/FAQ_Australian%20and%20Global%20Politics%20.docx)
* [*Advice for teachers*](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/vce/adviceforteachers/ausglobalpolitics/introduction.aspx)
* textbooks
* relevant media/news items
* professional networks
* subject associations.

When designing a SAC task, the VCE assessment principles must be adhered to.

The evidence submitted for the 2018 Unit 3 and 4 School-based Assessment Audit showed that all schools were meeting the requirements of the VCE study design and the VCE assessment principles. Schools submitted evidence of school-based assessment practices that ranged from:

* Evidence deemed to be exemplary, demonstrating a clear understanding of the VCE assessment principles and the requirements of the current study design.
* VCAA assessment standards and requirements being met adequately.
* Evidence and responses where minor errors were detected or certain aspects of the VCAA assessment standards and requirements were not originally being met, requiring submission of further evidence.

Comments and feedback provided by the Audit Panel with recommendations for improvement concerned both Outcomes 1 and 2 and were in relation to the VCE assessment principles of Validity, Efficiency and Authentication.

**Validity**

*Assessments allow for decisions to be made regarding a student’s ability to demonstrate outcome requirements and levels of achievement.*

Specifically, the audit found that terminology from older/previous study designs was being used in SAC tasks, which did not align with the *2018–2024 VCE Australian Politics Study Design*. Schools are encouraged to provide greater detail explaining how their SAC task fulfills the outcomes, key knowledge and key skills of the study.

The SAC task must be achievable for all students and allow students to demonstrate their highest level of ability. When developing questions for a SAC task, consider:

* 25% should be lower order questions, such as: list, identify and/or describe
* 50% should be mid-range questions, including: explore, compare and explain
* 25% should be higher order, including: analyse, evaluate, and to what extent?

It was apparent that schools were successfully applying theoretical concepts from the study design to contemporary political examples and case studies. It is important that the 10 year timeframe for case studies and examples in VCE Australian Politics is adhered to. Further clarification on this can be found in the *Frequently Asked Questions*.

The key knowledge in both units includes key terms and concepts that must be explicitly taught and applied. The Advice for teachers provides a glossary of these key terms, however, these terms are not limited to the provided definitions and should be considered within the context of applying them to examples and case studies. Some SAC tasks that were submitted used language/terms inconsistent with the *2018–2024 VCE Australian Politics Study Design* such as ‘the bureaucracy’ which is now referred to as ‘the public service’ and the term ‘ministerial staffers’ which is now ‘ministerial advisers’.

**Efficiency**

*The minimum number of assessments (as per the relevant VCE study design) are set to make an informed decision about each student’s progress and learning and that assessments do not create undue workload and/or stress that could diminish the performance of a student under fair and reasonable circumstances.*

Schools are encouraged to include a cover sheet that includes all the conditions under which the SAC is conducted including reading and writing time. In terms of creating undue workload, the audit deemed some SAC tasks to be too time-intensive.

Schools should note that for an in-class, timed-writing SAC task, it is recommended that the duration should not to exceed 90 minutes. Tasks above 90 minutes could generate undue stress on students.

**Authentication**

*Methods in which student effort is verified and deemed to be their own original work.*

The audit made recommendations for further modification and adaptation procedures to be put in place. Specifically, for schools with multiple classes and where SAC questions had been taken from commercially produced tasks and/or previous exams.

Regarding multiple classes, modifications should be made to SACs that are not being administered at the same time to ensure the SAC tasks do not privilege certain students over others, as well as upholding the integrity of the task from possible breaches.

Regarding commercially produced tasks, it is vital that these tasks are checked against current VCE requirements and adapted to ensure authentication of student work. Schools adhere to different assessment timelines, therefore when other schools are using the same commercially produced tasks, answers could be published in the public domain and could be easily accessible to students. Teachers should also avoid recycling SAC tasks from previous years in order to ensure that information is contemporary, and to ensure authentication of student work.

In terms of drawing on previous examination questions, it is crucial to ensure that these questions still align with the current study design, especially since the reaccredited *VCE Australian Politics Study Design* was implemented in 2018.

The comments/feedback provided to some schools by the Audit Panel recommended that more information be provided on the planned SAC task/s for Unit 3. This in turn would allow the Audit Panel to adequately assess that all key knowledge and key skills are being drawn on to ensure students can satisfactorily demonstrate completion of the outcomes.

The audit showed that a limited range of task types were being used for both Units 3 and 4. Most schools were developing ‘mini’ end-of-year-examination style tasks, with a heavy emphasis on summative tasks focusing on short-answer questions and essays at the end of an area of study. The conditions of the SAC tasks were like examinations; silent, timed-writing.

Whilst both short-answer questions and essays are valid task types outlined in the current study design, the VCAA encourages schools to use a variety of task types for their SAC tasks. Using a variety of task types allows students to develop a range of skills and provides students with opportunities to experience success beyond the parameters of ‘mini’ end-of-year examination-style tasks.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Unit 3: Evaluating Australian democracy

Outcome 1

*Explain the key values and principles of the Australian political system and evaluate the system’s democratic strengths and weaknesses.*

**Task type options**

Select one or more of the following:

* a multimedia presentation
* a case study
* an essay
* a report
* short-answer questions
* an extended response.

Outcome 2

*Analyse the key features of the political system of the United States of America and critically compare the political systems of Australia and of the United States of America in terms of the extent to which democratic values and principles are upheld.*

**Task type options**

Select one or more of the following:

* a multimedia presentation
* a case study
* an essay
* a report
* short-answer questions
* an extended response.

Overview of Outcomes 1 and 2

Outcome 1 is a complex and technical area of study for many students. There is a lot of key knowledge to impart that is then drawn on in subsequent areas of study. The schools audited for Unit 3 clearly explored the breadth of the key knowledge.

The key skills in Outcome 1 are more explicitly defined and emphasise complex tasks such as analyse, explain, evaluate and develop arguments. These are now more prevalent than definitional and descriptive tasks such as outline, define, identify and describe.

In Outcome 2, all schools complied with the comparative study with the US political system.

Different aspects of the study draw on more specific key skills. It was not as clear that all of the schools audited were differentiating tasks based on key skill differences for the different knowledge areas; e.g. “**explain** the key features of the US political system” as opposed to “**critically compare** the US system with the Australian system and the extent to which each reflects liberal democratic values”.

Assessment

Most schools tended to set two separate SAC tasks for each outcome. In most cases students completed a SAC task based on short-answer questions earlier in the area of study, before completing an essay or an extended response task towards the end. This was clearly designed to ensure that the broad area of knowledge was understood and could be built upon for more complex tasks such as essay writing.

Some of the schools audited cited the use of VCAA assessment performance descriptors for SAC tasks in both outcomes. Many teachers indicated that they adapted these descriptors so that they were applicable to the specific requirements of a SAC task. Schools are encouraged to adapt the descriptors in order to meet the demands of their SAC tasks.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Unit 4: Australian public policy

Outcome 1

*Explain how Australian federal domestic public policy is formulated and implemented, analyse the factors which affect these processes and critically evaluate a selected contemporary domestic policy issue.*

**Task type options**

Select one or more of the following:

* a multimedia presentation
* a case study
* an essay
* a report
* short-answer questions
* an extended response.

Outcome 2

*Analyse the nature, objectives and instruments of contemporary Australian foreign policy, and evaluate TWO key selected challenges facing Australian foreign policy.*

**Task type options**

Select one or more of the following:

* a multimedia presentation
* a case study
* an essay
* a report
* short-answer questions
* an extended response.

Overview of Outcomes 1 and 2

In Outcome 1, schools drew on a range of policy areas as case studies including: same-sex marriage and climate change policies. Whilst this area specifically lends itself to multimedia presentations, case studies and reports, none of the schools audited were using these task types.

Whilst schools created SAC tasks that incorporated a range of task/command words, some placed too great an emphasis on certain words over others. It is important that students are exposed to and understand the differences between different task types and it is highly recommended that teachers use a variety of these in their school-based assessment. It is also important that the tasks allow for low order (25%), middle order (50%) and high order (25%) responses.

Outcome 2 requires students to draw on two of the challenges in Australian Foreign policy, and this was reflected in the SAC tasks audited. The challenges most frequently referred to were climate change and the threat of global terrorism.

Assessment

Similar to Unit 3, schools tended to set two separate SAC tasks for each outcome, and in most cases, students completed a SAC task based on short-answer questions followed by an essay or extended response. This ensures that the broad area of knowledge in the unit could be understood and built upon.

Schools are encouraged to draw on the full range of SAC task types as set out in the study design so that students can demonstrate what they know in a variety of forms. For example, Outcome 1 specifically lends itself to multimedia presentations, case studies and reports. It is therefore recommended that a variety of SAC tasks be set throughout the course.