



**2013**

**Australian Politics GA 3: Examination**

## **GENERAL COMMENTS**

The overall level of student achievement in the 2013 Australian Politics examination was high. Few students left questions unanswered or incomplete.

Each of the four questions in Section A was based on an extract linked to each Area of Study. Most students had no major difficulty in understanding the general meaning of these extracts, although many students did not incorporate key ideas or quotations taken from the extracts in their responses.

The 2013 examination included two multiple-choice questions. It was apparent that the majority of students who performed well in the examination overall gave a correct response to these questions and, conversely, those who performed less well answered one or both of the multiple-choice questions incorrectly.

Some students wrote too much in Section A and were left with too little time to complete Section B. Many students wrote lengthy extensions of their Section A responses in the extra space at the back of the examination booklet. In some cases, these extensions were several hundred words long. The time taken to write overly long responses for Section A inevitably reduced the time available to complete Section B. It was clear that some students did not fully develop their essay responses in Section B and their marks for this section fell short of what might be expected if more time had been devoted to it.

A number of questions in Section A required students to outline or describe two key factors, such as roles, differences or reasons. Students needed to give sufficient consideration to each example. The less successful responses were unbalanced; often, one factor was considered in excessive depth, while discussion of the second factor was too brief.

Most students were able to cite relevant examples to support their answers in Section A. Students were aware of the contemporary nature of this study and hence had good knowledge of recent Australian political issues, particularly in relation to domestic policy. These issues included the introduction of a price on carbon, the introduction of the National Broadband Network (NBN) and the development of DisabilityCare, all of which were prominent in Australia in 2013.

Section B required students to write one essay. Better responses displayed good writing skills and a clear structure. These established a primary argument or contention in the first paragraph and presented a series of supporting arguments. In many responses, these arguments were divided into body paragraphs, followed by a short conclusion that drew the response together. Body paragraphs often commenced with a topic sentence and developed more detail as the paragraph progressed. Students with the most successful responses built depth and detail into their essays through the use of relevant, topical evidence taken from the many significant events that had occurred in Australian politics during the year, notably the turmoil within the Labor government and its replacement by the Abbott government in the September election.

It was apparent that, in several parts of the examination, many weaker students relied heavily on the fact that Australia has compulsory voting. While this aspect of the Australian system was worth mentioning in some questions, some students wrote about it at length, often at the expense of many other more relevant or interesting points they could have discussed.

## **SPECIFIC INFORMATION**

**Note: Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.**

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what the answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding errors resulting in a total less than 100%.

# 2013 Examination Report



## Section A

### Australian democracy

#### Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	32	68	0.7

D.

This was a multiple-choice question and it required students to have a precise understanding of the purpose of 'Question Time' in the Australian Parliament. Students who selected option C. were unaware that Question Time operates in the Senate as well as the House of Representatives, and that questions can be directed to any member of the ministry, not just the prime minister.

#### Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	34	66	0.7

B.

This question required students to apply their understanding of a 'Dorothy Dixer' to a specific situation. As Scott explained in the extract, a Dorothy Dixer is a parliamentary question that invites the government to 'tell everyone how well the government is doing'. A careful reading of the four options showed that the only one that meets that definition is option B., which would allow the Treasurer to boast of the government's achievements in reducing the level of unemployment.

#### Question 1c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	7	9	26	23	35	2.7

Some of the ways in which Question Time could be reformed to make the government more accountable include the following.

- Questions from the government backbench directed at government ministers could be abolished. As Scott notes, the answers to these Dorothy Dixers are often long, boring and self-congratulatory. They achieve little in making the executive more accountable.
- Question Time would be more effective if the presiding officers (the House Speaker and the Senate President) were truly independent. An independent Speaker could apply the standing orders (such as insisting that answers be relevant to the question) fairly and consistently.

Many students outlined these two reforms. However, some students suggested reforms that assessors did not accept. For example, the idea that members of the public be allowed to directly question the executive during Question Time is unrealistic. Similarly, the suggestion that the government be allowed to direct questions to the opposition shows a basic misunderstanding of the purpose of Question Time.

#### Question 1d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	4	7	25	20	44	3

Other than holding the government to account, the roles of the Australian Parliament include the following.

- the legislative role – Parliament is the supreme lawmaking body in the Australian system of government. Major changes to the law of the Commonwealth must be passed by both houses of the Australian Parliament. All pieces of legislation must also receive royal assent before they can be enacted.
- the representative role – As its name suggests, the lower house is made up of 150 people elected to represent a geographic area, known as an electorate. Each Member of the House of Representatives (MHR) should try to advance the interests of their electorate. The upper house, the Senate, provides equal representation to the six states as well as two senators for each territory.

Other roles students could have described include scrutinising legislation via the parliamentary committee system; a forum for discussing, researching and debating issues of national interest or public importance; and the formation of government in the lower house.

# 2013 Examination Report



Students were well prepared for this question and few had difficulties gaining two marks for stating two additional roles of parliament. However, some were unable to receive full marks because their description of each of these roles lacked detail.

## Question 1e.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	6	8	19	31	27	10	3

This question was based on a phrase taken from the extract in which Andrew Scott argues that Question Time is dominated by political parties, in particular the two major parties that comprise the government and the opposition. While on occasion Question Time performs its core role of holding the government accountable for its actions, Scott suggests this is comparatively rare. Most often, Question Time sees the two major parties attacking each other with the aim of weakening their opponents and undermining their support. Scott implies this is a rather pointless exercise and that the time could be spent much more productively if issues were ‘discussed in a more complex, intelligent and sensitive way’.

Students with stronger responses demonstrated that they had read and understood the extract. Many referred to the adversarial nature of Question Time, in which members of parliament often perform in ways designed to attract media attention.

The following comments taken from longer responses demonstrate an understanding of the key element of the question.

*In many cases, questions asked in Question Time may not be about legislation or policy but may just be an attempt by the Opposition to embarrass a government Minister with personal attacks.*

*Often Question Time is an extremely partisan exercise in which there are two clear sides, the government and the opposition ... there is rarely any accord to be found between the two major parties.*

## Australian democracy in perspective

### Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	8	46	46	1.4

A political party is an organisation that seeks to win seats in a legislature on the basis of a particular ideology and set of policies. It fields candidates at an election either to win government or to promote the advancement of a set of values or beliefs. An example of the former is the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and of the latter, the Australian Greens.

A successful answer to this question required two essential elements. First, it needed to state that a political party reflects the shared interests and beliefs of its members and, second, that a party seeks to win political power by contesting elections. It is this second element that differentiates a political party from an interest group. Many students did not mention this second element, as their definitions lacked precision and they did not receive full marks.

The following were successful responses to this question.

*A political party is a group made up of people who share political views and ideologies and seek to be involved in the political process, through forming government like the ALP and the Liberals, or through running candidates in elections like the Greens.*

*A political party is a group of people or members who hold common goals, ideals or policy aims and seek to be elected by the people to represent them in Parliament if successful at an election.*

### Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	9	9	23	25	35	2.7

Most students compared the Australian and United States (US) political party systems. The key differences between these systems include the following.

- Party discipline is less tightly enforced in the US than it is in Australia. Better responses referred to the influence of the Tea Party in reducing the unity of the US Republican Party.
- US parties make widespread use of primary elections to nominate candidates for election. This is not widely used in Australia.
- The two major parties dominate the US political system to a greater extent than they do in Australia.

# 2013 Examination Report



- One of Australia's major parties, the ALP, has its origins in the labour movement. That is not the case in the US.

Some students outlined key differences between the Australian political system and that of another system they had studied, but with no reference at all to political parties. For instance, some responses referred to the different ways in which the governments of Australia and the US are elected. This indicated that these students had not read the question carefully and consequently did not focus on the key element of the question.

## Question 2c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	10	9	24	34	24	2.6

Political parties can affect the democratic operation of the Australian Parliament either positively or negatively. Ways in which they can do so include the following

- effects on representation – Political parties provide choices for voters, they represent a range of ideologies and policies, and they provide a means by which individuals can participate in the parliamentary process. On the other hand, party discipline reduces the ability of parliamentarians to represent their electorates on the basis of either trustee-type or delegate-type representation unless there is a conscience vote. Also, the dominance of the two major parties, especially in the House, means that minority interests are not particularly well taken care of. In the Senate, the minor parties may have the balance of power and so may exercise disproportionate influence over majority interests.
- effects on accountability – Parties are extra-legal bodies that have almost no regulation. Parties control parliamentary procedures, such as Question Time and the committee system, in a way that serves their political interests; the accountability of the executive to the parliament is reduced. Parties control the pre-selection process and the election of a leader in ways that disempower voters. The organisational wings of parties have a great deal of power and make many decisions that are neither transparent nor able to be held to account. On the other hand, parties make the government and the parliament accountable to voters, as a whole party can be removed from government or the composition of the Senate changed at election time.

Most students handled this question well. Many made good use of their knowledge of recent leadership tensions within the ALP to illustrate their response.

## Question 2d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	5	5	14	26	30	20	3.3

Aspects of other political systems that Australia could adopt to make its system more accountable include

- popular election of the head of government and the head of state (US)
- use of primary elections to allow greater involvement of citizens in the political process (US)
- introduction of fixed-term elections (US)
- use of a proportional voting system to elect the lower house of parliament (Germany)
- provision of a truly independent Speaker (Britain)
- enforcement of individual ministerial responsibility (Britain) via a ministerial code of conduct.

A number of students suggested that Australia could adopt the US concept of the separation of government powers as a way to make the Australian political system more accountable. While this was acceptable, some students implied that Australia has no separation of powers at present. They needed to make it clear that their suggestion was that Australia adopt a greater separation of government powers than it currently has.

Weaker students suggested that Australia could adopt the US system of voluntary voting. However, it was not explained how this might make the Australian political system more accountable.

## Domestic policy

### Question 3a.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	19	81	0.8

Most students were able to name a department of the Australian Public Service, such as the Department of Health, the Department of Education or the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Some students incorrectly named a statutory

# 2013 Examination Report



authority or a section within a department, such as the Australian Electoral Commission, the Australian Federal Police, the Australian Defence Force or Medicare.

## Question 3b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	6	7	16	30	41	3

While the traditional role of the public service is to administer public policy, the public service also has a significant role in policy formulation. The government is very likely to seek the advice of experienced and knowledgeable bureaucrats in the development and formulation of new or amended policies. This might involve researching and writing policy briefings for the relevant minister. For instance, in seeking policy options for the processing of asylum seekers, the Immigration Minister is likely to seek the advice of members of the Immigration Department. Once a policy has been formulated, the public service plays a vital role in its implementation. For instance, Treasury officials play a vital role in putting Australia's taxation regulations into effect.

Many of the students with less successful responses merely repeated the key words 'advice' and 'implementation' in their answers. Conversely, students with better responses demonstrated understanding of these terms by using words or phrases such as 'to provide information' or 'to put into effect or operation'.

A weakness of some responses was students' use of examples of advice being offered to the government by groups or individuals who are not part of the Australian Public Service. For example, while Ross Garnaut advised the Rudd and Gillard governments in relation to climate policy, he was not employed by the Australian Public Service when he did so. Similarly, the Gonski Review of education conducted for the Gillard government was not a public service review.

## Question 3c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	6	7	26	30	31	2.8

The Australian Public Service is made up of thousands of experienced and knowledgeable personnel. Many have worked for a series of governments and have built up considerable expertise in the policy issues likely to arise within the ministry. It is logical that the government will take advantage of this.

The public service traditionally offers 'frank and fearless' advice to the government. This means that the public service is willing to provide advice that may not necessarily be in the immediate political interests of the government. However, such independent advice is likely to improve policy formulation and governments should be willing to receive it.

The following answer incorporates two key elements.

*One reason is that the bureaucracy does not have any political bias. This allows the bureaucracy to be reliable and impartial which is critical to the expression and collection of data and advice, giving the government a trustworthy base to work off when formulating policy. Another reason is that the bureaucracy are highly professional and often leaders in their specific field. The best advice comes from the most knowledgeable people in that specific field and if they are hired by the bureaucracy then the advice should come from that source.*

# 2013 Examination Report



## Question 3d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	6	3	8	12	22	22	27	4.2

Students displayed excellent knowledge of contemporary domestic policy issues in answering this question. This included the introduction of plain packaging for tobacco products, the introduction of carbon pricing, the introduction of the NBN and the asylum-seeker policy. Better students recognised the significance of the phrase ‘sought to influence’ in the question in that much of the policy advice and pressure coming from organisations or individuals is largely ignored by government.

Minor parties have provided policy advice in relation to the asylum-seeker issue. For instance, the Australian Greens have maintained a steady stream of advice to the government. Much of the advice offered by the Greens focused on how this challenging policy issue could be better handled.

Prominent experts have provided advice to the Gillard government in relation to asylum-seeker policy. In 2012, the Houston expert group made a series of recommendations in relation to asylum-seeker policy, most of which were accepted and implemented by the government, including the extension of offshore processing.

## Foreign policy

### Question 4a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	18	24	58	1.4

Most students understood the meaning of the term ‘middle power’. It does not relate to the geographic location of a nation nor to the role that a nation plays in acting as an agent between other nations. Rather, it relates to the degree of influence in global forums or in global issues that a nation exercises. Many students correctly identified Australia as a middle power that is often said to ‘punch above its weight’ in global affairs. Australia is not a member of the group of most powerful G8 nations, but it is a member of the G20.

The following responses received full marks for the question.

*A middle power means that we are not a superpower in the world and so we have limited influence globally but regionally we have a large influence due to our economic status.*

*The term ‘middle power’ refers to Australia as a nation with relatively strong economic and military powers as a developed nation, but to a lesser extent than the ‘super powers’ such as the US or China.*

### Question 4b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	1	2	14	28	55	3.4

Most students displayed very good knowledge of the ways in which Australia has used its foreign policy to contribute to a more peaceful and prosperous world. Although not essential, better answers were supported with relevant and recent examples.

Some of these ways include

- the use of the official foreign aid program
- provision of emergency and humanitarian relief
- Australia’s role in the United Nations (UN)
- peacekeeping operations in various parts of the world
- the active promotion of free trade agreements
- support of global efforts to confront terrorism.

The following answer contained two of these specific ways.

*i. Australia has historically donated, and despite a relative decrease, continues to donate billions of dollars (\$5.4 billion forecast in 2013–14) of foreign aid to countries around the world, the largest recipient of which is Indonesia. This obviously contributes to a more prosperous world with increased economic transfer, but also creates peace by creating and strengthening ties of support and dependency with otherwise volatile partners such as Indonesia.*

# 2013 Examination Report



ii. *Australia has taken part in numerous peacekeeping missions, having contributed 65 000 personnel to such missions since 1947 and engaging in operations such as INTERFET, RAMSI and Afghanistan in order to create peace and stability.*

## Question 4c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	4	9	36	51	2.4

Asia is the fastest-growing economic region in the world. Located on the edge of Asia, Australia has actively sought to take advantage of its position, primarily by increasing our trade with the region. The direct benefits of this trade include export revenue, increased employment opportunities and access to a wide range of affordable imported products. Australia has also taken advantage of guest workers from the Asia-Pacific region to fill labour shortages.

Some students with weaker responses failed to explain what advantages might flow to Australia from its location in the Asia-Pacific. Many of these responses stated that China was Australia's largest trading partner. While true, that was not sufficient to receive more than one mark for this question.

In terms of national security, Australia has continued its close alliance with the United States. This point was highlighted in the following response.

*Australia has capitalised on its Asia-Pacific location in its role as American's 'southern anchor'. By announcing over 2 500 US troops in Australia in 2011 Australia has allowed itself to be secured by close military ties with the US by offering itself as a base in the Southern hemisphere for the US military.*

## Question 4d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	6	4	9	17	30	23	10	3.7

It was pleasing that most students had a good understanding of the term 'bipartisan'. While it was not essential to explain this term, it was apparent that most students knew that it relates to situations in which the government and the opposition are in basic agreement as to the aims and roles of foreign policy. The key requirement of the question was to discuss the extent of bipartisanship. Many successful responses argued that Australian foreign policy is traditionally bipartisan and this remains largely the case. Others suggested that this bipartisanship may have been challenged in recent times.

Stronger responses discussed the reactive and confidential nature of foreign policy, and the fact that it is made in the broader national interest, which means it is much less subject to the influence of partisan, sectional interests in the Australian community. Some students referred to the trip made to Afghanistan in October 2013 by Prime Minister Tony Abbott and Opposition leader Bill Shorten as evidence of the bipartisanship of Australian foreign policy.

Excellent responses noted that while a foreign policy issue might appear to involve an intense partisan contest between the two major parties, when analysed at a more fundamental level, a strong element of bipartisanship emerged. For example, the issue of asylum seekers arriving by boat involved considerable debate between the government and the opposition in the lead up to the 2013 federal election. However, as some students argued, this debate did not involve vastly different policy positions by the major parties.

The following is the opening passage of a successful answer.

*Australian foreign policy is usually bipartisan in nature. This is because increasing Australia's relations with other countries and preserving Australia's well-being by catering for its national interests is seen as being significantly more important than bickering to gain votes.*

A number of responses highlighted a growing partisanship in recent Australian foreign policy. The following segment of an answer displayed this line of thinking.

*While traditionally bipartisan in nature, recent times have seen foreign policy become more and more polarising as compared with the past, with the government and opposition disagreeing on some foreign policies.*

Examples used to illustrate this approach included

- different policies regarding climate change, including the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol
- support for Australia's bid to become a member of the UN Security Council
- significant reductions in Australian foreign aid announced by the Abbott government



- Prime Minister Tony Abbott’s statement that, under his government, the focus of foreign policy would be ‘more Jakarta, less Geneva’.

## Section B – Essay questions

Question chosen	None	1	2	3	4
%	1	43	13	11	32

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	1	0	0	0	1	3	2	4	4	4	4	5	10	12	13	9	10	8	5	3	2	13

Assessment of each essay in Section B was based on the criteria published by the VCAA.

High-scoring essays displayed accurate knowledge and understanding of political institutions and processes. This knowledge was then analysed and evaluated to develop a coherent argument or point of view. The more successful responses made extensive use of accurate terms and concepts and relevant contemporary evidence. The less successful responses were often short, underdeveloped essays that displayed limited understanding of the underlying issues and little awareness of contemporary or recent events in Australian politics.

### Question 1

There are nine key values and principles of democracy listed in the study design, and most students based their essays on several of these, including

- popular sovereignty
- majority rule
- respect for minority views
- government accountability
- protection of democratic rights and freedoms
- the rule of law.

Many students introduced these values in their introduction and then devoted a section of their essay to an evaluation of how effectively the Australian political system achieves each of them. Students with the most successful responses employed skills of critical analysis by recognising that Australian democracy is not without its flaws and shortcomings. These students did not rely on personal opinions or assertions here, but drew on material studied in Outcome 1, specifically the challenges facing democracy in Australia, including the disproportionate degree of power exercised by some individuals and organisations in Australia. These students were able to use specific evidence and examples, including the role of Clive Palmer in the 2013 election, to support their arguments.

Students with strong responses also made good use of recent political events to demonstrate both the strengths and weaknesses of the Australian democratic system. For example, in relation to the rule of law, some students discussed the successful High Court challenge to key aspects of the Gillard government’s asylum-seeker policy to demonstrate that, in a strong democracy, the government itself is not above the law.

Similarly, the Gillard minority government (2010–2013) was also used to illustrate that the principle of majority rule is not always achieved in Australia. The proportional electoral system does allow minority views to be represented in the Senate. However, better students demonstrated their knowledge of the 2013 election results by highlighting the election of several senators on a primary vote that was quite low, implying that while the Australian system allows this to occur, it may be a flaw in the current mode of election and so subject to possible reform in the future.

Students with less successful responses limited their discussion to more general points, such as the high level of participation in Australia achieved by compulsory voting and the possibility of the Senate failing to pass government legislation. These points, while valid, did not reflect the level of knowledge and awareness of contemporary Australian politics that characterised the responses that were awarded grades at the upper end of the scale.

### Question 2

Students interpreted this question in a variety of ways. Many discussed the idea that an effective legislative branch should reflect the society it represents in terms of the composition of the legislature. In other words, it should contain a cross-section of the broader population in terms of gender, ethnicity and so on. Most students argued that an effective legislative branch should include such a cross-section. This interpretation required good knowledge of the make-up of the Australian parliament and that of another system, such as the US. A comparatively small number of students had





that knowledge and were able to provide details, such as the proportion of the Australian parliament that is female, indigenous or of Asian descent. In this context, some students referred to the recent election of Nova Peris to the Senate. This discussion then shifted to another system, often the US. Students with better responses demonstrated knowledge of the proportion of the US Congress that is female or the proportion of notable minority groups, such as African Americans.

A second successful interpretation of the question focused less on the composition of the legislative branch and more on the issues it deals with. These responses interpreted the phrase 'reflect the society that it represents' to relate to the views of society rather than the composition of society. This interpretation opened up a range of interesting examples to consider. In relation to the Australian Parliament, many students discussed the matter of same-sex marriage and argued that parliament's failure to alter the Marriage Act shows it does not reflect the views of broader Australian society. Other recent Australian examples that were used in this way included the asylum-seeker policy and the introduction and promised abolition of a price on carbon.

Many students also highlighted the significance of party discipline in Australia, where the ability of individual members of parliament to express and reflect the views of their constituents and society more broadly is restricted. The ability of minor parties to gain places in the Australian Parliament, particularly the Senate, was highlighted by some students. Some also argued that the power exercised by the Greens and independents during the Gillard minority government may not have truly reflected the wishes of the broader Australian community.

Some successful responses demonstrated excellent knowledge of contemporary events in the US Congress. Some discussed the 2013 'shutdown' of the US government, which was brought about by the refusal of the US Congress to pass key legislation on government spending programs. It was argued that such an action, largely caused by the influence of the Tea Party within the Republican Party, was clearly out of step with the views of the wider US society. Other students discussed the failure of the US Congress to restrict American citizens' access to guns in light of the high rate of gun-related crime in the US. This example was less successful as it is possible that reluctance to amend gun laws is, in fact, an accurate reflection of the views of a majority of US citizens. These students needed to remember that the US Congress represents US society, not Australian society, which has different views in relation to the issue of gun ownership.

Students with weaker responses based a large part of their discussion on the concept of compulsory voting. They argued that as Australians are compelled to participate in the election of the legislative branch, this then makes the Australian Parliament more closely reflect the society it represents than the US Congress. While a valid point, it warranted a brief paragraph at most, not the extended discussion some students devoted to it.

### Question 3

'The significance of elections and electoral mandate' is one of the six key knowledge points listed in Unit 4, Outcome 1 of the study design as an influence on public policy. Hence, students were expected to show awareness and knowledge of the concept of a 'mandate'.

The term 'mandate' is used in two different (but related) ways in Australian politics.

- In a general sense, a mandate is the permission to govern granted to a government by voters at the most recent election. In this broad sense it implies that, once elected in a fair and democratic manner, the government is free to govern as it sees fit (subject to constitutional and parliamentary limits) until the next election.
- A narrower sense of mandate involves the government outlining a set of specific policy proposals during an election campaign and allowing voters to consider these, and then vote accordingly. Once elected, the government has been given the authority or direction of voters to put these policy proposals into effect. It is expected to introduce these proposals.

While it was not expected that students would define the key term 'mandate' in these ways, they needed to demonstrate an understanding of it either by discussing the definition of the term or the context.

In relation to the first meaning of the term 'mandate', some students argued that as the Gillard government did not hold a majority in the lower house following the 2010 election, it had, at best, a very weak mandate to formulate any new policy.

Most students focused on the second meaning of the term and discussed specific areas of public policy, notably carbon pricing and asylum seekers. Students with better responses recognised the often impractical nature of this type of mandate, noting that a party running for office is unable to anticipate and provide a policy on every issue that will arise



during their term of government. In this vein, it was argued that Julia Gillard was unable to anticipate the circumstances of a hung parliament that she confronted after the 2010 election. Other responses highlighted the lack of a specific mandate by the Gillard government to introduce a carbon tax and argued it made the policy less than fully legitimate in the eyes of many Australians.

Climate change policy was also the basis for relevant comments about the mandate given to the Abbott government in the 2013 election. Students with better responses showed awareness of the dilemma facing the Labor Opposition and the Greens in respecting that mandate and allowing the Abbott government's pledge to abolish the carbon tax to be passed by the Senate. In this context, some students argued that a mandate was not always the most legitimate basis on which to introduce new public policy, suggesting instead that factors such as global influences and expert opinions should sometimes override the views of the broader public as reflected in an election result.

The question invited students to weigh up the mandate against other policy influences they were aware of, including the parliament, the executive, the bureaucracy and the judiciary. Many successful responses adopted that approach.

A mature conclusion reached by students with some excellent responses was that while a specific mandate may be the most legitimate basis for policy making, it is not the only one and it is unfair to argue that governments that do not have a specific mandate cannot make legitimate policy. When an urgent issue arises to which the government must respond, the public rarely asks whether the government has a mandate to act in that specific policy area.

#### **Question 4**

There is a range of key challenges facing contemporary Australian foreign policy and most students constructed a response based on several of them. The challenges most frequently discussed were people smuggling and asylum seekers, climate change and other environmental issues, and the threat of global terrorism.

Students with the most successful responses provided a brief explanation of the challenge presented by these issues and then outlined Australia's recent foreign policy response to each of them. This second aspect required knowledge of the key instruments of Australian foreign policy, including foreign aid and emergency assistance, participation in multilateral bodies such as the UN, the G20 and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and peacekeeping operations.

While it was pleasing that many students had good knowledge of the significance of key global events for Australian foreign policy, some students did not structure this knowledge very effectively. For instance, some students discussed recent events in Syria. While relevant, in some responses this evidence lost much of its impact because it was not analysed within the context of being a *challenge* facing contemporary Australian foreign policy. Syria, in itself, is not a challenge. The challenge, from Australia's viewpoint, is formulating a foreign policy response and what actions we take in relation to this complex matter.

A more successful example was the role Australia has played in Afghanistan in direct response to the threat of global terrorism.

Some students displayed excellent knowledge of contemporary foreign policy by noting that Australia's response to the challenge of climate change continues to evolve. While the Rudd and Gillard governments were actively involved in multilateral forums and agreements, such as ratifying the Kyoto Protocol, the Abbott government is more focused on unilateral policy, such as Direct Action.

Many students also displayed excellent knowledge of recent Australian policies on the challenge presented by people seeking asylum in Australia, particularly those arriving by boat.

Some weaker students substituted the key word 'challenges' with 'objectives' in the question. These responses often included a list of prepared points that did not really answer the question. They were too general and lacked the detailed knowledge of contemporary foreign policy demonstrated by the better responses.