



GENERAL COMMENTS

Students generally performed well on the 2007 National Politics examination. Most students achieved an appropriate balance between the short answer and extended response sections. Students handled the demands of the examination well, particularly in relation to time management and ensuring the paper was completed within the required time.

Section A was well done by most students. The first short answer question in each series of questions, Question a., asked students to define a piece of terminology. In order to receive the maximum two marks for each question, students needed to do more than write a one line statement. A brief explanation or example was also required in order to demonstrate complete understanding.

The second and third questions (Questions b. and c.) in Section A asked students to either describe or discuss two factors related to a specific aspect of the study design. Students needed to ensure that the two factors were clearly indicated, perhaps by the use of dot points or numbers. Students should endeavour to select two factors which are clearly different from each other to avoid the possibility of losing marks due to repetition. Some students overlooked the instruction to describe or discuss in these questions and merely stated or identified two factors. Without further elaboration, such answers received only two of the maximum four marks allocated to these questions.

Better students wrote concise and accurate answers in Section A which filled, but rarely exceeded, the lines provided on the examination paper. Some students used up valuable time by writing too much in Section A. Better students recognised that once the required information has been provided, there was little point in adding to it.

Sections B and C required students to write one extended response related to Unit 3 and one extended response related to Unit 4. There were few very short or under-developed extended responses. Most students wrote at least three pages, and many students were able to write four or more pages. In order to write extended responses of this length, some students may have devoted slightly more than half of the examination writing time to Sections B and C. This tactic is justified, provided that full answers are still given in Section A.

Sections B and C gave students an opportunity to use relevant evidence and examples to support their arguments. Doing so was one of the most significant ways in which students could boost their marks in these sections of the examination. The more successful students showed an awareness of political events and issues, particularly those that occurred during 2007. These students recognised the difficulty of receiving a high mark for an extended response by merely offering a set of general points. They demonstrated an ability to apply general material to specific situations by referring to notable events, identifying/discussing relevant issues and trends, and by naming and quoting prominent individuals.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Note: Student responses reproduced herein have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

For each question, an outline answer (or answers) is provided. In some cases the answer given is not the only answer that could have been awarded marks.

Section A – Short answer questions

Washington to Canberra

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	8	33	59	1.5

The separation of powers is designed to restrict government power within the political system of the United States of America. A system of 'checks and balances' is described in the US Constitution so that the executive, the legislative and the judicial branches each act as a check on the power of others. Each branch is separate from the others. Unlike Australia, where the executive is part of the legislative branch, in the US system the executive branch it is not part of the legislative branch and is determined by separate elections.

This question was generally well answered, although some students did not relate their responses to the US system of government. Better students named the President, the Congress and the Supreme Court as the three branches of the US government, and provided an example of a check or balance between them. Less successful students simply stated that

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the three branches of government are separate without providing any explanation of why this is considered to be important in the US system of government.

Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	31	10	27	12	20	1.8

A federal system of government:

- divides power between levels of government such as national, state and local governments
- reflects a desire for national unity combined with a desire to maintain state/regional governments
- usually involves significant funding arrangements between levels of government, meaning it can be difficult for state and local governments to act autonomously
- is a system in which the legislative branches of government can reflect the federal system, such as in Australia and the United States, in which the federal legislative branch is bi-cameral with the lower house representing the nation and the upper house representing the states and territories
- allows each state to have its own legislative, executive and judicial branch.

This question was poorly answered by many students. Many responses indicated that students were confused between a federal system of government and the Australian federal or Commonwealth government. These responses mentioned factors such as a bi-cameral system, the Prime Minister as head of government, or the role of elections. None of these is a characteristic of a federal system of government.

Following is an example of a good response. This student used numbers to identify the two characteristics described in their answer. This is quite acceptable.

1. In a federal system, power is divided between two levels of government, a federal or national government with responsibility for national issues like foreign affairs and national security, and smaller state or regional governments with responsibility for local issues like education, health and transport.

2. In a federal system, dual representation of the people by 2 levels of government ensures the federal and state governments can act as a check on the power of the other, ensuring the people of each state are protected from the 'national interest' when it would disadvantage a minority of states.

Question 1c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	0	2	18	22	57	3.4

Relevant factors included:

- the voluntary nature of voting in presidential elections
- the lack of an independent federal electoral commission makes it difficult to register to vote; the states run federal elections and processes vary from state to state
- resistance from the Republicans to make registration and voting more accessible as they believe it would benefit the Democrats
- apathy and disillusionment with the political process, especially amongst the marginalised or disenfranchised
- a lack of political diversity; it is effectively a two party system and in many places one party is dominant, which may reduce the incentive to vote
- the lack of party identification amongst many voters
- complex ballot papers which can include ballots for city and county officials
- the election being held on a working day (the first Tuesday after the first Monday of November).

This question was well answered by most students. Many referred to the voluntary nature of presidential elections in the United States of America, although some failed to then provide any meaningful discussion of this factor. It was expected that students would expand on each factor. For instance, reference could be made to the emphasis on individual rights and liberties in the US system, hence participation in presidential elections is considered a matter of personal choice. Statistical evidence of the low turn-out in presidential elections was also relevant. Voter turnout in the United States over the last 20 years has averaged around 50 per cent. Over the past 45 years, voter turnout has decreased by 10 per cent.

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Continuity and change

Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	25	14	61	1.4

An informal vote is one that is not valid. An informal vote is not counted as it has not been cast according to the instructions on the ballot paper. A voter may deliberately cast an informal vote by, for example, submitting an unmarked ballot paper. A voter who makes an error, such as submitting a ballot paper for the House of Representatives that does not place a number in every square, might unwittingly cast an informal vote.

It was disappointing to see that a significant number of students were unable to provide an accurate definition of a basic piece of Australian political terminology. Less successful students confused an informal vote with a conscience or free vote in parliament, while others described it as a donkey vote, and repeated the common misconception that a donkey vote and an informal vote are synonymous. Others neglected to mention the key point, that informal votes are not counted in deciding an election.

Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	13	6	20	14	47	2.8

Functions of Australian federal elections include:

- determining the government – the government is determined by the party/parties holding the majority of seats in the House of Representatives
- determining the legislative branch – members of the Federal Parliament (House of Representatives and the Senate) are determined
- providing an opportunity for citizens of voting age to participate in the democratic process
- determining representatives of the people and the states
- providing voters with the opportunity to scrutinise the policies and performance of the government, opposition and minor parties
- providing government with a mandate to implement policies.

Better responses described two of these different functions, while some less successful students repeated a single function. For instance, students did not receive full marks for stating that one function is to elect the House of Representatives and a second function is to elect the Australian Senate.

While this question seemed straightforward, too many students misinterpreted it. Rather than describing two functions of Australian federal elections, many students described two characteristics or processes of the federal electoral system. Hence, they referred to aspects such as role of the Australian Electoral Commission, the use of compulsory voting, or the operation of preferential and proportional voting. None of these is a function of elections.

Question 2c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	5	5	25	19	45	3.0

The House of Representatives fulfils democratic values through:

- representative government: the House of Representatives has 150 elected representatives, each of whom represents one electorate
- legislation: as the government has a majority in the House of Representatives the legislative function for which the government has an electoral mandate can be fulfilled
- responsibility and accountability of government: the House of Representatives provides an opportunity for the opposition to scrutinise the government through mechanisms, including question time. The House of Representatives is open to public scrutiny. The media and public are able to be present throughout sitting time
- scrutiny of government legislation: the House of Representatives provides a forum for the scrutiny of proposed legislation. Proposed legislation is debated and sent to various committees for further scrutiny.

This question required students to demonstrate their knowledge of democratic values as well as the functions of the House of Representatives, making it one of the more challenging questions in Section A. Successful students often took an organised approach by selecting two key democratic values and then discussing how the House of Representatives fulfils each of these values.

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Most students coped well with this more demanding question. Many discussed the role of question time in holding the executive responsible for its actions, although few referred to the limited effectiveness of this in practice. Less successful students discussed the functions of parliament in general, rather than restricting their responses to the House of Representatives. Others misinterpreted the question and discussed the mechanism used to elect the House of Representatives, rather than the functions of the House itself.

People and policy

Question 3a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	12	30	58	1.5

Cabinet consists of the Prime Minister (who chairs the cabinet) and approximately 16 senior ministers, including the Treasurer and Minister for Foreign Affairs. It is the engine room of government. In cabinet, ministers introduce proposals for new Bills. Cabinet discusses these proposals and decides if they should proceed.

Most students gave effective responses to this question, providing an accurate definition and an additional comment that described the role of cabinet. Many included relevant examples of cabinet ministers. Weaker responses were unable to clearly distinguish between the cabinet and the ministry, while others stated that the Governor General is a member of the cabinet.

Question 3b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	13	9	22	19	37	2.6

The key ways in which state governments can influence Australian federal policy making include:

- undertaking cooperative relationships with the federal government. This can be achieved through formal bodies such as the Council of Australian Government (COAG)
- through Ministerial Councils where state and federal ministers responsible for the same portfolio areas meet to agree to undertake common legislative programs in a bid to make a single national policy
- refusing to sign agreements with the federal government
- taking action in the High Court to challenge to federal legislation
- mobilising public opinion in their states against federal government policy
- seeking the support of other states so that collective pressure can be exerted in the federal government.

Many students described two of the above factors and added examples such the Victorian government's refusal to participate in the Commonwealth's proposed policy regarding the Murray-Darling River basin in 2007, and the states' High Court challenge to the Commonwealth's WorkChoices workplace relations legislation in 2006.

Less successful students stated that the Senate is the states' house, and state governments have a significant influence over Senators and hence federal policy making. This demonstrates a somewhat confused understanding of the role of the Senate and the relationship between state governments and Senators.

This was one of the more challenging questions in Section A. It provided an excellent opportunity for students to use contemporary evidence and examples to illustrate their responses, and the better responses took advantage of that.

Question 3c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	2	3	20	15	61	3.3

Tactics used by interest groups to influence public opinion include:

- funding advertising campaigns to publicise their agendas, which may have particular impact during strategically important periods such as election campaigns
- taking direct action, such as public protests, marches or strikes, in a bid to draw attention to their agenda or grievances
- using the leaders of interest groups as experts on a particular policy and encouraging journalists to consult with these leaders over policy debates
- recruiting charismatic and/or high profile individuals as members or leaders in a bid to attract public attention
- joining with other groups with similar interests to present a united and more representative public face
- providing public support for one or other of the major political parties, particularly during elections.

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Many students elaborated on these points by citing relevant Australian examples, including the extensive media campaigns surrounding the Commonwealth government's industrial relations policies by interest groups such as the Australian Council of Trade Unions and the Business Coalition for Workplace Reform during 2007.

Some students thought that the question referred to public policy, rather than public opinion. This led to a discussion of the role of lobbyists, which is a tactic used to influence public policy making and implementation, but is less directly linked to influencing the opinion of the broader public. This demonstrates that even the more straightforward questions need to read very carefully to ensure that the question is addressed in the correct manner.

This was one of the more straightforward questions in Section A and most students had little difficulty in providing two tactics used by interest groups to influence public opinion.

Contemporary Australian foreign policy

Question 4a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	3	38	59	1.6

Foreign aid is assistance (in the form of finance, physical goods and human services) provided by one government to other governments, usually those of developing nations, to reduce poverty and political instability. Foreign aid is often focused on areas such as health, education, agriculture and rural development, infrastructure and governance. Australia's foreign aid program is managed by AusAID and is focused on the Asia-Pacific region, which is home to the greatest number of the world's poor. Australia commits about \$3.155 billion annually to foreign aid.

This question was generally well answered. Less successful students did not clarify that foreign aid refers to official government assistance, rather than the activities of non-government organisations such as World Vision or the Red Cross.

Question 4b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	4	2	12	17	64	3.4

Objectives of contemporary Australian foreign policy include:

- strengthening Australia's economic and trade interests by building relationships and cooperation internationally
- maintaining Australia's national security
- promoting regional and international peace and stability
- acting as a good global citizen to promote the values of liberal democracy and human rights internationally.

Most students were well prepared for this question, and successfully described two objectives of contemporary Australian foreign policy.

Each of the objectives above required students to provide some meaningful description, such as evidence of how Australia has used its contemporary foreign policy in pursuit of the objective. Less successful students produced very general responses. Often they identified two relevant objectives but did not then describe them. Hence, a response which stated that an objective of contemporary Australian foreign policy is to 'promote the Australian economy' without providing a short description of how this might be achieved via the use of institutions such as APEC or the free trade agreements the US or Thailand received less than full marks for this question.

Question 4c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	9	9	27	21	34	2.6

Some of the most significant constraints on the policy-making power of the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs include:

- alliances and treaties to which Australia is a signatory or member
- the actions and views of other nations and their leaders
- the actions of the United Nations and other bodies and agencies such as APEC, ASEAN, the IMF and the WTO
- significant public opinion against a foreign policy
- pressure from backbenchers in response to pressures from their constituents



- the actions of other ministers and the impact of decisions in other, related policy areas, such as treasury, trade and immigration
- a lack of financial support from the Treasurer
- a lack of support from the Senate if a foreign policy requires legislation (it rarely does)
- a lack of support from the bureaucracy, particularly DFAT, which may try to modify the position of the Minister
- the Prime Minister and cabinet can overrule decisions of the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

This question was more challenging, yet most students recognised that there are constraints on the policy-making power of the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs. Following is an example of a good response to this question.

There are several constraints on the policy making powers of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, currently Alexander Downer. One constraint is the agenda of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. The formulation of policy by the minister is dependent on co-operation and approval by the Prime Minister and other members of Cabinet. If the Foreign Minister has a policy the Prime Minister does not approve of, it will not go ahead. Another constraint is the budget and the economic viability of the proposed policy. The Minister for Foreign Affairs is restricted to formulating policy which fits within the budget and is affordable. This is representative of the fact that the Minister for Foreign Affairs must often liaise with other departments, including Treasury.

Section B – Extended response questions

Question chosen	None	1	2
%	1	57	42

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	1	1	1	2	1	3	4	3	5	5	9	13	13	12	10	7	6	2	1	13.0

Unit 3 – Democracy in the making

Question 1

This was a popular question and most students tackled it in an appropriate manner. Students understood the nature of constraints or limitations on the power of the President and the Prime Minister. The most significant difference between the more successful and less successful responses was the level of knowledge students were able to provide. While some students discussed at least five major constraints on both the President and the Prime Minister, others had difficulty presenting more than two such constraints.

There were several distinct aspects to this question. The more successful students recognised this and adopted an organised and structured approach in their responses. Firstly, students needed to appreciate the contentious nature of the proposition which formed the basis of the question. Secondly, students were required to demonstrate knowledge of the constraints on the power of both the President of the United States and the Australian Prime Minister. Finally, students needed to reach a conclusion based on the evidence they presented.

Students could take various positions on this question. It was possible to argue that there are fewer constraints on the power of the President of the United States than there are on the Australian Prime Minister, or vice versa, or that the constraints are similar and constraints on both the President and the Prime Minister depend on particular circumstances. Students needed to recognise that both leaders are not all powerful and are constrained by certain factors, even to the point where both the President and the Prime Minister can be dismissed in certain situations.

The following constraints were considered most relevant in answering the question.

- The Australian constitution makes no reference to the Prime Minister and vests executive power to the Governor General, whereas the American Constitution vests executive power in the President. In reality, the Prime Minister and cabinet exercise real executive power.
- The President is elected by the population and hence has a stronger mandate than a Prime Minister, who is the leader of their political party. Prime Ministers are constrained by their parliamentary party upon whose support they rely to remain Prime Minister.
- The President has a four-year fixed term. No President has ever been dismissed, although some have been subject to impeachment proceedings. An Australian Prime Minister has a shorter term and can be replaced by their parliamentary party or dismissed by the Governor General.
- The Prime Minister and government have power only if they control the House of Representatives; a by-election or member(s) crossing the floor could mean a change of government. The President does not face this possibility.



- Presidents cannot serve more than two terms; however, there is no such constitutional constraint on the Prime Minister.
- The Prime Minister is usually assured of getting Bills through the House of Representatives but not the Senate, as many Australian governments face a 'hostile' Senate. This can mean the government may call a double dissolution in order to dissolve the deadlock.
- The President cannot call for a double dissolution in the hope of getting control of the Congress. Presidents have to hope that Congressional elections will result in their party getting control of Congress.
- Presidents can struggle to achieve their legislative agenda if the Congress is not controlled by their party, but Presidents have the power of veto which is difficult for Congress to overturn.
- Prime Ministers can choose their ministry but only from members of parliament, and can be constrained by party factions. Presidents can choose the cabinet from anyone outside Congress, which provides greater opportunity to select 'talent'. Nevertheless, significant Presidential appointments, such as Secretaries, Ambassadors and Supreme Court justices, must be approved by the Senate. This is not the case in Australia.
- The President faces more constraints than the Prime Minister in terms of foreign policy.
- The US Congressional committee is more powerful than Australian Parliamentary committees, which may constrain the power of the President.
- The Bill of Rights and Supreme Court can constrain Presidential power.
- The High Court can constrain the Prime Minister, but over a narrower range of issues.
- In the US there is weaker party discipline, which can constrain the President.
- Both the President and the Prime Minister must work within the confines of a federal system.

Many students were well prepared for this question. While this was commendable, some responses lacked subtlety and read as a list of pre-prepared, general points. These responses often tended to deal with the President and the Prime Minister separately, with little attempt to compare and contrast them. The best responses blended or integrated the constraints on both the President and the Prime Minister throughout their response. They also sought to differentiate their responses by using specific and detailed evidence and examples. For instance, some students discussed the use of the Presidential veto by President George W. Bush, or the power of Congressional committees to limit the power of the President. Awareness of such material is a valuable way of adding sophistication to extended responses. Other successful students displayed superior understanding and knowledge of each political system, such as the role of Australian Senate as a constraint on the power of an Australian Prime Minister.

Less successful responses did not mention enough relevant constraints, were often restricted to the most predictable factors and were too general. Such responses tended to focus on the impeachment process in the United States and the power of the Governor General in Australia without appreciating that these constraints are rarely exercised in comparison with factors such as the impact of the legislative branch of government and the influence of political parties. They also lacked specific evidence and examples.

Question 2

This question presented difficulties for many students. The rather narrow focus of the question meant that many students who lacked a detailed knowledge of the process and history of Australian referendums were restricted in the length and sophistication of their responses.

In terms of change to the wording of the Australian Constitution, clearly there was little alternative but for students to agree strongly with the proposition that constitutional change has been difficult to achieve. The better responses provided an explanation of Section 128 of the Australian Constitution and then illustrated this by discussing a range of proposals which have been put forward under this section. While some students had extensive knowledge of these proposals, and were able to cite accurate evidence on the history of Australian referendums, others were clearly lacking such knowledge. It was disappointing that too many students were unclear about the purpose of the successful 1967 referendum concerning indigenous Australians. Others offered rather confused and simplistic interpretations of the 1999 referendum concerning an Australian republic. Other than stating that the referendum failed to meet the requirements of Section 128, many students were unaware of the reasons the Australian Constitution remained unchanged following this referendum.

Section 128 of the Australian Constitution outlines the requirements for a successful referendum. Following are some of the reasons for the low success rate of Australian referendum proposals that were discussed.

- The proposal must be passed by both houses of parliament and put to a vote by the people.
- The 'double-majority' rule requires that, in order to be successful, a referendum must have a majority of voters nationally and a majority of voters in a majority of states voting in support of the proposal. While this



requirement seems stringent, it could be noted that even if the requirement was a simple national majority, only five more referendums would have been successful. Very few students demonstrated an awareness of this.

- The government and opposition are usually divided on referendum proposals, resulting in a lack of bipartisan support. Generally, this vital explanation did not receive enough attention from students.
- There is often a lack of support from the states, which reject any proposal that is seen as handing more power to the federal government.
- The legalistic wording of the proposal and voter confusion which can promote an, ‘if in doubt, vote no’ attitude.
- Vigorous campaigning from those in favour of and those opposed to the proposal can contribute to voter confusion.
- Voters are often conservative and/or apathetic and may take the view that ‘if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it’.
- Federal governments are reluctant to propose constitutional change as it is expensive and difficult.

While some students wrote very successful responses based on these points, others recognised the narrowness of the question and interpreted the question more broadly. These students argued correctly that change to the Australian Constitution goes beyond the formal requirements of Section 128, and analysed the role of the judiciary, in particular the High Court of Australia, in effecting constitutional change. These students discussed the significance of notable High Court decisions in altering the way the Australian Constitution is interpreted and applied. Other students discussed cooperative federalism, the take-over of states’ powers by the Commonwealth and the ceding of state powers to the Commonwealth as ways in which Australian constitutional arrangements have changed.

Section C – Extended response questions

Question chosen	None	1	2
%	1	29	70

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	2	1	1	1	2	2	3	4	5	4	8	7	10	12	9	9	9	5	5	1	1	12.1

Unit 4 – The challenge of power

Question 1

In analysing a federal domestic policy, it was expected students would do more than merely describe it. The analysis needed to involve aspects such as:

- identification of the main forces promoting the policy. This includes prominent individuals, interest groups, the media, social movements and public opinion
- an explanation of the motivations (including political, social and economic) of the main forces promoting the policy
- the role of political forces, particularly the level of bipartisan support for the policy
- a description of the controversial aspects of the policy.

Successful students selected a contemporary federal domestic policy or policy issue and both described and analysed it in detail. Rather than simply writing everything they knew about the policy, these students processed their knowledge and applied it to the question. Industrial relations policy was selected by many students, which met the requirement that the policy was subject to public debate. It was pleasing that most students clearly understood the meaning of a ‘contemporary’ federal domestic policy, as most students demonstrated an awareness of policy issues which had occurred during 2007 rather than relying on less recent, less topical and, hence, less relevant policy issues. Better students linked their selected policy to the fact that a federal election was held in 2007, and analysed some of the political and electoral implications of the policy. This was particularly evident in responses based on industrial relations policy.

Indigenous policy also formed the basis on many successful responses, particularly the Commonwealth government’s intervention in the Northern Territory’s indigenous communities in 2007. While this policy was largely bipartisan, it certainly attracted considerable criticism and public debate from a wide range of sources. The more successful responses were able to nominate particular interest groups and individuals who played a prominent role in the policy during 2007.

Less successful students provided a general overview of policy but were unable to sustain their response with the detailed knowledge required by the question. Too many students fell into the trap of providing a descriptive narrative,



rather than an analysis, of a federal domestic policy that has been subject to public debate. Less successful answers provided an adequate description of a policy, but lacked the depth of analysis required.

A second fundamental error common to some responses was to discuss more than one policy. As the study design specifies that students should critically analyse a selected domestic policy issue, it was expected that students who chose this question would have adequate depth of knowledge to concentrate on a single policy issue rather than discuss two or more separate policies. Students who took this approach were unable to develop the depth or detail required to produce a comprehensive response to the question.

These errors highlight the importance of planning prior to writing a response. A quick dot point plan is likely to reveal any limitations in knowledge and allow students the opportunity to either think more deeply about their chosen question or give serious consideration to selecting the alternative question on this section on the examination.

Question 2

This question provided students with an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of contemporary Australian foreign policy within the Asia-Pacific region. Many students selected this question and some very successful responses were written; however, others did not evaluate the key challenges facing Australia's relations with its near neighbours in the manner required by the question. Less successful students merely described some recent Australian foreign policy events or incidents in relation to the Asia-Pacific region. These were often discussed in a series of paragraphs with little attempt to integrate or prioritise them in any meaningful way.

There were many key challenges students could evaluate, including:

- Australia's foreign policy response to regional instability; for example, in Indonesia, Fiji and the Philippines
- civil unrest and the associated risk of 'failed states' in the region, including the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and East Timor
- the obligation and responsibilities of Australia as a developed nation to act as a leader in the region and provide assistance and foreign aid to less developed nations
- the actions and views of regional leaders and opinion makers, including those who resist establishing democratic systems of government
- perceptions that Australian foreign policy is too 'heavy-handed' and interventionist, particularly in relation to Papua New Guinea and the south Pacific
- cultural differences between Australia, which can be regarded as an outpost of western values, and other nations of the Asia-Pacific region
- pressure on Australia to act as a good regional citizen by accepting refugees
- pressure on Australia to grant greater numbers of visas, allowing workers from near neighbours to earn income in Australia
- the threat of terrorism and the failure of some regional nations to address terrorist activity
- controlling the activities of people smugglers and the appropriate processing of asylum seekers by Australia
- the promotion of Australia's trade and economic interests in the Asia-Pacific region
- Australia's close relations with the US and involvement in the Iraq conflict, which could be construed negatively by its regional neighbours
- actions of Australian citizens abroad; for example, citizens caught drug trafficking in neighbouring countries.

Successful students highlighted the difficult nature of Australian foreign policy in relation to the region by analysing a range of the above challenges. Most students discussed a number of distinct challenges, although less successful responses were limited to one or two. The threat of terrorism and the implications of the 2002 Bali bombing formed the basis of many students' analysis of Australia's relations with Indonesia. Similarly, the events surrounding Australia's intervention in East Timor in 1999 were mentioned by many students. Although these examples were appropriate, students need to keep abreast of more contemporary aspects of Australia's relations with its near neighbours rather than relying on less recent events.

Many students referred to Australia's often difficult relations within the south Pacific region, particularly Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Fiji. However, many of these responses were general and lacked accurate and up-to-date knowledge. Some responses tended to be descriptive narratives of Australia's recent foreign policy in the region, with little attention given to the key challenges involved. Better responses were organised around a series of key challenges, such as countering the threat of terrorism, the risk of 'failed states' on Australia's doorstep and improving the quality of governance in the region, rather than merely discussing Australia's relations with a series of near

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neighbours. While detailed references to specific near neighbours was necessary, this was best done within the context of the key challenges faced by Australian foreign policy.

Many students seemed unclear as to what constitutes Australia's 'near' neighbours. While some brief references to China and India were accepted, extended discussions of Australia's growing trade relationships with these more distant parts of Asia were not considered to be directly relevant to the question. Similarly, discussion of Australia's close relations with the United States was warranted only if it was linked or related to Australia's relations with the more immediate region. Some students referred to the so-called 'arc of instability' to Australia's north and east, and limited their response to key challenges to emerge from that region, which was a successful approach.