

## GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2006 examination was the first for the new National Politics VCE Study Design 2006–2011.

Students were required to answer all questions in Section A. A series of three questions was given for each of the two areas of study in Unit 3: Washington to Canberra and Continuity and Change, and for each of the two areas of study in Unit 4: People and Policy and Contemporary Foreign Policy.

In general, Section A was well handled by most students. Question a., the first short-answer question in each series of questions, asked students to define a political term. Students are reminded of the need for accuracy and succinctness in these responses, as too many answers were vague and unclear. In questions b. and c. of the short-answer section, students are encouraged to clearly indicate two separate responses for each question. Many students did this effectively by using dot points or by numbering each response. Students are also reminded that if a question asks for two points, each point should be distinctly different from the other. On too many occasions students merely repeated their first point in a slightly different form. For example, that the Senate of the US is bigger than the Australian Senate; and that the Australian Senate is smaller than the US's Senate.

Although better students drew on current and relevant examples to reinforce their arguments, it appears that many less successful students were either unaware of current political issues or were reluctant to display their knowledge in the examination. Students should use the number of lines given as an indication of how long their response needs to be.

Sections B and C required students to select one extended response from a choice of two questions from Unit 3 and to select another extended response from a choice of two questions from Unit four.

While it was pleasing to note that students were able to demonstrate a good level of political knowledge, in general the standard of the extended responses was below expectation. Many were far too short; others were clearly pre-prepared and, as such, were largely irrelevant to the question. Despite the suggested time constraint of 30 minutes per extended response, students were expected to address the key issues surrounding the question and demonstrate the ability to evaluate and critically analyse in their responses. Better students were able to do this and were subsequently awarded higher marks. They were also able to write approximately four pages per extended response.

## SPECIFIC INFORMATION

### Section A – Short-answer questions

#### Washington to Canberra

##### Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	11	41	48	1.4

Impeachment is the formal mechanism for removing the President of the United States from office before the end of his term of office due to alleged misconduct or for bringing the office of President into disrepute. The House of Representatives may bring charges against the president. It also hears the charges and determines if there are grounds for impeachment. The Senate acts as the jury and can convict by a two-thirds majority vote. No president has been convicted, although President Andrew Johnson survived impeachment by one vote in the 1860s.

This question was generally well answered, although many students were unclear on one aspect of the process and did not receive full marks. Better students were able to identify the possible reasons for removing the president from office and the process by which he is removed.

Less successful students identified that impeachment involves the removal of the president, but were unable to indicate why or how this process occurs. Many simply stated that if Congress does not like the president it can remove him.

# 2006 Assessment Report



## Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	4	7	19	21	50	3.0

Differences between the executive branch of government in Australia and the executive branch of government in the US include the following.

- The executive branch in Australia (prime minister and ministers) comes from the legislative branch and is responsible to it. The party, or coalition of parties, that wins the majority of seats in the House of Representatives becomes government. Its leader becomes the prime minister and members of that party are selected (LNP) or elected (ALP) for ministerial positions. In the United States the executive branch (president and secretaries) are not members of the legislative branch (due to the concept of separation of powers).
- The President of the United States, unlike the Prime Minister of Australia, is elected through an election separate to the election for the legislative branch. This means that Americans have the opportunity to vote for the president, whereas in Australia electors can only vote for their member of the House of Representatives and for senators for their state or territory.
- The president can be removed from office by the Congress through impeachment. The Prime Minister of Australia can be removed from office by the Governor-General.
- In Australia ministers must be members of parliament, whereas in the United States the president can select his/her secretaries from Congress or the general public. If the president chooses a member of Congress, he/she must resign from Congress.
- In the United States the Senate must confirm the president's choice of secretaries (and other key officials), whereas in Australia there is no formal mechanism for ratifying the prime minister's choice, although the Governor-General could theoretically refuse to appoint a minister.
- In the United States the president can select a secretary who is not a member or supporter of his/her political party. In Australia ministers are members of the political party (or coalition party) of the government.
- The executive branch in the United States has a fixed four-year term, in Australia the executive's term is for a maximum of three years. The President of the United States cannot serve more than two terms (eight years), while the Prime Minister of Australia can serve for as long as his/her party (or coalition of parties) have the majority in the House of Representatives and the prime minister has the confidence of his/her party.
- There is no mention of the executive branch (with the exception of the Governor-General) in the Australian Constitution whereas there is in the United States.
- The president acts as the head of state and head of government, whereas the Prime Minister of Australia only acts as the head of government.

Most students were able to answer this question successfully. They clearly identified two differences by numbering them separately and were able to briefly explain each. Less successful students were confused about what the executive branch of government actually is in the US, Australia or both.

## Question 1c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	15	9	25	20	32	2.4

Differences between the Senate of the United States and the Australian Senate include the following.

- The Senate of the United States has the power to confirm presidential appointments, including secretaries (the equivalent of Australian government ministers), high officials and ambassadors. The Australian Senate does not have this power.
- The Senate of the United States has the power to remove a president through its roles in the impeachment process. The Senate acts as a jury in the impeachment process and can convict the president by a two-thirds majority vote.
- The President of the Senate is not an elected senator but is the Vice President of the United States. The President of the Australian Senate is an elected senator chosen for the position by the government.
- The Senate of the United States has the authority to ratify all treaties by a two-thirds majority vote. The Australian Senate does not have this power.
- Each state in the United States has two senators, in Australia each state has 12 senators and each territory has two senators.

# 2006 Assessment Report



- In the US each senator must be at least 30 years old, must have been a citizen of the United States for at least nine years, and must be (at the time of the election) an inhabitant of the state they seek to represent. In Australia senators must be Australian citizens, at least 18 years old, an Australian citizen and an elector entitled to vote or a person qualified to become an elector.
- Proportional representation is used to elect the Australian Senate so there is a greater possibility of minor parties gaining senate representation in the Australia Senate compared to the United States Senate, which is elected through simple majority voting.

This question was generally well answered, although a number of students repeated their answer in the second part of this question and were not awarded full marks. More successful students clearly articulated two differences between the Australian and American Senates and explained each briefly. Less successful students were confused about the role of each senate, the terms for each and the powers of senators.

## Continuity and change

### Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	25	19	56	1.3

The term 'universal suffrage' refers to the right to vote for all adult citizens with minor exceptions. In Australia suffrage (the right to vote in political elections) is extended to all citizens 18 years and over except:

- people who, by reason of being of unsound mind, are incapable of understanding the nature and significance of enrolment and voting
- people who have been convicted of treason and not pardoned
- prisoners serving full time sentences (2006).

The only non-citizens entitled to vote are British subjects who were on a Commonwealth Electoral Roll on January 1984, at which time the eligibility requirements were altered.

This question was generally well answered and few students struggled with their response. Less successful students thought that universal suffrage related to anyone in the world who is suffering.

### Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	5	7	21	21	46	3.0

Changes that have been made to the Australian federal electoral system since Federation include the following.

- In 1911 enrolment became compulsory.
- Compulsory voting was introduced in 1924.
- Proportional representation for the Senate was introduced in 1948.
- In 1962 Aboriginal voters were given, without exceptions, the right to enrol and vote.
- In 1973 the voting age was reduced from 21 to 18.
- In 1984 an independent body to oversee elections, The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), was established.
- In 1984 enrolment and voting for Aboriginal people became compulsory.
- Changes to Senate ballot paper in 1984 allowed above (group voting) and below the line voting, using a list system to determine the vote of those voting above the line.
- Franchise qualification became Australian citizenship with the exception of British citizens who had been on the electoral roll before 1984.
- From 1984 political parties were required to register with the AEC and had to publicly disclose election donations.
- In 1984 public funding of election campaigns was introduced.
- The political party was included on the House of Representatives ballot paper.
- Provisional enrolment for 17 year olds was introduced in 1984.
- Pre polling, mobile ballot boxes and postal voting were introduced.

# 2006 Assessment Report



- A registered party must have at least 500 members. Fifty signatures of eligible voters are required for an independent candidate.
- Electronic scrutiny of Senate votes was introduced in 1998.
- Various 2006 changes, including close of enrolment dates and changes relating to those citizens serving prison terms etc.

Most students coped very well with this question; however, a number of vague responses were given, such as ‘allowing women to vote’ or ‘allowing Aborigines to vote’. As this question asked students to describe the changes, it was expected that they would do more than merely list them by writing less than one line per change.

### Question 2c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	12	7	23	18	42	2.7

Arguments to support the view that the Australian Senate should be abolished include the following.

- It no longer adequately fulfils its original role as a states’ house. Students argued that party discipline means that senators vote along party lines rather than in the interests of the electors in the state they represent.
- Australian states are not equally represented in the Senate. Each of the states has 12 senators. This means that NSW, with a population of over five million, has the same representation as Tasmania, which has a population of less than 500,000.
- The Senate is too large. Section 24 in the Constitution means that the size of Senate has to be as close as ‘practicable’ to half the size of the House of Representatives.
- When the government of the day dominates the Senate then it acts as little more than a rubber stamp and fails to adequately scrutinise proposed legislation.
- The situation can exist where a minor party or independent holds the balance of power in the Senate. This puts significant power in the hands of a small minority of senators and can make it difficult for the government to pass its legislative program.
- The situation can exist where there is a hostile Senate which is dominated by the opposition and minor parties. This means that the government’s legislative program may be obstructed.

A number of students wrote very good responses to this question. They identified potential problems with the Australian Senate and offered sound reasons for its abolition, drawing on current examples to reinforce their arguments. Less successful students were unable to offer reasons for the Senate’s abolition. They were also unable to relate their arguments to current political issues.

### People and policy

#### Question 3a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	12	22	66	1.6

The bureaucracy is the administrative arm of government responsible for advising and carrying out government policy. Often referred to as the public service, it consists of ministerial departments with public servants responsible for giving advice to ministers and implementing government decisions and legislation.

Few students had any problems with this question.

#### Question 3b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	4	6	17	24	50	3.1

Factors that could limit the federal government’s power to make domestic policy include:

- constitutional limits due to the division of powers between the states and the Commonwealth contained in sections 51 and 52 of the Constitution
- opposition of state governments; for example, the current debate about a national curriculum
- failure of the governing party or parties to win a majority in the Senate empowers minor parties and means the government may have to negotiate policy; for example, the GST

# 2006 Assessment Report



- a lack of administrative capacity to deliver policy programs
- an ineffectual minister
- the influence of public opinion (which can play a more significant role close to an election); for example, the Howard Government abandoned plans to privatise the Snowy Mountains Hydro Electricity Scheme
- the influence of powerful and broad-based interest groups (pressure groups) on the major parties; for example, business interests, trade unions and, in the case of the Liberal Party, the influence of its National Party coalition partner
- concerted media campaigns
- backbenchers; for example, backbenchers threatening to cross the floor over the mandatory detention policy led to the Howard Government abandoning changes to that policy
- private member Bills; for example, the embryonic stem cell debate
- international events which impact domestic policy-making areas such as economic policy and immigration
- in theory, the Governor-General can refuse to give Royal Assent to proposed legislation.

The standard of some responses to this question was disappointing. More successful students clearly articulated two separate factors, demonstrated how these factors limited government policy making and gave a contemporary example to reinforce their comments. Less successful students were far too general in their responses and offered no contemporary examples to reinforce their comments.

### Question 3c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	7	10	30	21	33	2.6

Roles of ministers in the federal policy making process include:

- attending meetings of Cabinet (if they are senior ministers) or the full ministry (if they are junior ministers) to participate in the collective decision-making of the government
- responsibility for the conduct of the ministerial departments for which they hold portfolio responsibility
- providing advice on policy matters to Cabinet and/or the full ministry and making collective decisions on policy
- introducing Bills to the parliament (including the second reading) when a Bill is necessary as part of the policy-making process
- overseeing regulations where the minister has regulatory power (such as in the management of the Immigration portfolio)
- answering questions about the portfolio area (for example, during question time) and the ministerial department for which the minister is responsible, which serves to make the minister the appropriate public spokesperson on the policy area
- participating in Ministerial Council meetings with state ministers responsible for the same portfolio areas in attempt to make coordinated national policy on matters that might otherwise be the concern of the states.

Less successful students misinterpreted this question, instead stating the portfolios of various ministers; for example, the Treasurer deals with economic policy, the Defence Minister deals with issues relating to Australia's armed forces, etc.

### Contemporary foreign policy

#### Question 4a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	14	29	57	1.4

Nation states as members of the international community have a responsibility, both regionally and globally, to cooperate with and assist other nation states and international organisations. Global citizenship can manifest itself in a range of ways, including trade links, accepting refugees from other countries, providing foreign aid and economic assistance, particularly to less economically-developed countries, and signing treaties or protocols on environmental protection or anti-terrorism.

This question was generally well answered. Less successful students were too general in their responses, perhaps confusing global citizenship with globalisation.

# 2006 Assessment Report



## Question 4b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	11	7	20	19	42	2.7

Regional issues that impact on Australian foreign policy include:

- North Korea's nuclear testing 2006
- tension between India and Pakistan
- unrest and instability in the South Pacific, East Timor, West Papua (the Free Papua Movement and refugees) and PNG
- instability in Thailand (the 2006 military coup)
- terrorist groups in Indonesia, the Philippines and Pakistan
- free trade agreements with Malaysia, New Zealand and Thailand
- China and India's desire for stronger trade links with Australia (for example, uranium)
- Australia's membership of APEC and desire to join ASEAN
- drug trafficking, people smuggling
- human rights issues in China.

Some students' responses to this question were disappointing. Less successful students were far too general in their responses, citing issues such as terrorism, but making no link to Australia's region and giving no examples to reinforce their comments.

## Question 4c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	5	5	21	19	51	3.1

An embassy (called a High Commission in Commonwealth countries) is the main representative office of a country in the capital city of another country, usually headed by an Ambassador (in Commonwealth countries called the High Commissioner). Australian embassies carry out the following roles:

- establishing and maintaining Australian government representation overseas
- providing the government with information and advice about events and issues in the country
- protecting the interests of Australian citizens travelling or living overseas
- developing stronger links between Australia and the embassy's host country
- providing country-specific trade or travel advice, and direct assistance to Australian citizens where necessary
- issuing passports and visas
- providing services to Australians who are hospitalised or imprisoned in other countries
- advising and assisting citizens (and their families) who have committed offences
- coordinating evacuations from high-risk areas
- assisting and coordinating aid efforts when disasters such as the tsunami occur
- hosting events for dignitaries.

While this question caught a number of students by surprise, it was generally well answered, reflecting most students' ability to work through a question using their knowledge and logic. Less successful students were far too general in their responses and were unable to elaborate with examples. For example, some merely wrote 'assisting Australians' as their response, with no further detail offered.

## Section B – Extended response questions

### Unit 3 – Democracy in the making

Question chosen	0	1	2
%	1	70	29

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	2	0	1	1	1	2	2	3	4	4	7	7	11	12	12	10	9	5	4	2	1	12.2



### Question 1

This question required students firstly to demonstrate a sound understanding of democratic values and secondly to apply these values to the electoral systems of the United States of America and of Australia.

Many students argued that the Australian federal electoral system upholds democratic values to a greater extent than the United States of America's system. The Australian electoral system upholds key democratic values such as majority rule, accessible voting, freedom to contest and participation to a greater extent than the American political system. Better students recognised that in both systems a number of democratic values are upheld including universal suffrage, secret ballot and frequent elections.

Some students concluded that United States of America's federal election system upholds democratic values to a greater extent than the Australian system, but this was a more difficult case to make.

Students approached this question by outlining areas where each system upholds democratic values to a greater extent than the other system. Below are some examples of the different areas discussed.

#### Majority rule

- In both systems the government can be elected without a majority of the popular vote. Eleven presidents of the United States have been elected without a majority, most recently George W Bush in 2000. Five elections since 1945 have delivered Australian governments which, on the House of Representatives two-party-preferred vote, have not represented the majority of voters. Nevertheless, in Australia, where voting (registering and turning up to the polling station) is compulsory, the average voter turnout is 95 per cent so the government will have close to or more than 50 per cent of the vote, whereas in the United States, where there is non-compulsory registration and voting, the average voter turnout is 52 per cent. This means the United States government may have a mandate from only about 25 per cent of citizens.

#### Freedom

- In both Australia and the United States there are restrictions on who can contest the election. In Australia a deposit of \$350 for the House of Representatives and \$700 for the Senate is a barrier for some potential candidates. Anyone 'earning profit under the Crown' cannot be a candidate, so all public servants (even those on leave) cannot stand unless they resign, also those with dual nationality or who are bankrupt cannot be candidates. The United States Constitution imposes restrictions on who can be president or a member of Congress; for example, age, place of birth and length of residence in the US. In the United States the president is limited to two terms and cannot contest a third election. There is no such restriction in Australia. Students argued that compulsory voting and registration limits freedom of choice. They also recognised the consequence in terms of majority rule, yet clarified that in Australia it is not strictly compulsory to vote, rather to enrol and attend.

#### Equality

- It is a breach of the value of equality of all citizens that the President of the United States must be born in the United States. In Australia there is an independent electoral commission (AEC) responsible for running the election. In the United States state governments manage federal elections; however, there is little consistency in the terms on ballot papers or voting methods and the system provides opportunities for states to manipulate the voting to suit particular candidates (as some suggest happened in Florida when George W Bush won the majority of votes in a state where electoral irregularities occurred and the President's brother was Governor). Presidential and congressional elections in the US are on set days for fixed terms (the presidential election occurs every four years on the first Tuesday after the first Monday of November), whereas in Australia the government determines the election date as the prime minister may call on the Governor-General to dissolve parliament and call an early election. This means the Australian government has a planning advantage over the opposition as they can call an election when the political climate suits.

#### Representation and participation

- Both federal electoral systems used to determine the government (in the US, first past the post and the electoral college, and in Australia, preferential voting) mean elections are essentially between two parties. Therefore, it could be argued that governments in both countries are not representative of a broad range of citizens – less so



in the United States where the government may be elected by about 25 per cent of the population. Students made the point that in the United States voters have the opportunity to vote for the legislative branch, for who they want as the candidate to represent their party (in the primaries) and for the president, whereas in Australia the party with the majority in the House of Representatives elects its leader without any popular vote. In Australia each state elects 12 senators using proportional representation, giving minor parties the opportunity to win Senate seats, whereas in the United States only two Senators are elected from each state and they are likely to be Democrats or Republicans.

This was a popular question and was reasonably well handled. Better students had a clear understanding of what democratic values are and were able to evaluate the extent to which certain aspects of each country's electoral system upholds these values. They drew sound conclusions and looked at the positive and negative aspects of each country's voting systems in terms of democratic values.

However, a large percentage of students demonstrated little understanding of what democratic values actually are. Less successful students merely looked at the differences between the two countries' voting systems, raising points such as Australia's compulsory voting and the US's optional voting. While this is clearly relevant, the less successful students' inability to relate this to democratic values such as participation and majority rule saw them gain only mediocre marks.

Teachers should look at The Victorian Association of Social Studies Teachers Ethos Papers from July 1992 'Liberal Democratic Values and the Australian Political System' by Professor Hugh Emy. Despite being written some time ago, it offers students and teachers an excellent summary of what liberal democratic values actually are. This is widely available from VASST and all 2007 National Politics students should read it carefully.

### Question 2

In answering this essay question students needed to refer to one or more of the following key political structures or institutions and present evidence to support the argument that it is in need of change:

- the Constitution
- the electoral system
- parliament
- the executive
- federalism.

The question required students to discuss the need and merit of change. Better students demonstrated an understanding of the difficulties associated with change, such as electoral receptiveness, and any forces promoting or resisting a particular change.

A variety of responses were produced. Some students focussed on one of the key political structures or institutions in the Australian federal political system; others chose to focus on more than one. Some students argued that there is no need for change, citing strengths and discussing why these strengths mean that the Australian political system is not in need of change.

### The Constitution

Constitutional reform has been discussed in Australia for a number of years. When arguing about the need for change, students mentioned that the Constitution:

- is an outdated document
- is difficult to understand as it is expressed in legalistic, 19th century language
- needs to be interpreted by the High Court
- is difficult to change – only eight of 44 proposals have been successful
- does not express basic democratic values, rights and freedoms
- needs a Bill of Rights to guarantee basic democratic rights
- makes no reference to the prime minister, Cabinet, local government, political parties or electoral systems
- relies too heavily on conventions
- gives too much power to the Governor-General
- states that the Australian head of state is a British monarch.





The Constitution cannot be changed without a successful referendum outcome and this is very difficult to achieve. Australians have a history of voting 'no' to referendum proposals. There are a number of reasons for this, including conservatism of voters, confusion, apathy and a lack of bipartisanship.

Some students argued that the Constitution should be rewritten so that it reflects certain desired changes. Others argued that Australia should cease being a Constitutional Monarchy and become a Republic. Better students were able to diagnose problems in the Constitution and evaluate the merits of proposed change, stating, for example, that while a Bill of Rights may be warranted, it would be difficult to reach consensus on, write and implement. Alternatively, some students argued that the Constitution is a stable document that has served Australia's needs well and therefore does not need to be changed.

## **Electoral System**

Better students argued that to a significant extent the Australian electoral system delivers democratic outcomes, therefore minimal change is required. As elections determine government, provide a mandate for government to carry out policies and are the foremost mechanism for political participation, they must as far as possible uphold critical democratic values such as majority rule, representation, 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. The Australian federal electoral system upholds a number of democratic values including universal suffrage, secret ballot, choice of candidates, frequent elections, accessible voting and freedom of speech.

The better students considered issues with suggested changes, such as the following.

- Due mainly to vote wastage, five elections since 1945 have delivered 'bogus majority' governments which, on the House of Representatives two-party-preferred vote, have not represented the majority of voters. Proportional representation could overcome this issue.
- The preferential system and proportional representation do not always deliver one vote one value. Malapportionment is a feature of the Senate system as electorates (states and territories) do not have the same number of voters but each state gets the same number of senators, as does each territory. Therefore, a Tasmanian Senate vote is worth 12 times a NSW vote. Tasmania voters are further advantaged as the Constitution guarantees Tasmania five House of Representatives seats irrespective of 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 per cent variation. The problem could be overcome with Constitutional change so that states have Senate seats in proportion to their population and Tasmania is not guaranteed five House of Representatives seats.
- Minority representation is limited in the preferential single member electorate system. Independents and minor parties without concentrated support have difficulty winning seats. In addition, up to 50 per cent of the electorate is unrepresented as only one candidate is elected. This problem could be overcome with the introduction of proportional representation for the House of Representatives.
- The National Party has the advantage of concentrated majorities. The National Party gains between five and 10 per cent of the House of Representatives vote, yet wins at least 12 seats; the Democrats gain about five per cent of the vote and do not win any seats. Proportional representation for electing the House of Representatives would overcome this problem, but may not guarantee stable government.
- The Senate ballot paper disadvantages independents who do not form a group. This could be overcome by including independents above the line, but this would make the ballot paper more cumbersome than it is already.
- 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; in marginal seats this could be a key percentage of the vote. A round ballot paper or the printing of different combinations of ballot paper could overcome this problem.
- The government determines the election date and sets the closing date for candidate nominations from between 14 and 27 days. This gives unfair planning advantage to the government. Fixed term elections could be introduced, although this would require constitutional change to section 28.
- A deposit of \$350 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 citizenship cannot stand for election. Changes could be made to remove these restrictions.

- Compulsory voting could be seen as an infringement of freedom; however, there is no compulsion to vote – the compulsion is to register and attend the polling booth. The compulsion to enrol and attend the polling station could be removed or the compulsion to enrol maintained but not the compulsion to attend the polling station. ‘E voting’ was discussed by some students.
- The Australian government recently acted to close the electoral rolls a week after the election was called; this disenfranchised a number of voters, especially young voters who had not provisionally enrolled.
- Many electoral processes are determined legislatively, so governments can introduce legislation to suit them.

### Parliament

Students needed to consider the function of the Australian parliament (House of Representatives and/or the Senate) and discuss areas where these functions are not being fulfilled and possible changes to the system. Better students discussed the need for change in terms of the extent to which functions such as forming government, representation, debating, reviewing, passing legislation, scrutinizing government and maintaining government accountability are upheld. They also suggested changes to improve the functioning of the parliament but recognised that change is difficult due to the entrenched party system.

Better students discussed that:

- parliamentary procedure is often little more than a formality, especially in the House of Representatives where the government has a majority
- since most parliamentarians are members of political parties they are expected to follow the party line; crossing the floor is rare
- the fact that the government has a majority in the House of Representatives limits debate and scrutiny from the opposition and the outcome of debate is a foregone conclusion
- the government controls parliamentary standing orders, as the speaker and president are members of the government
- the gag and guillotine are used by the government to limit and stifle debate
- the Senate does not carry out its intended functions as it rarely acts as a states’ house
- if the government has a Senate majority it may not act as a house of review, and if the government does not have a majority the Senate can be obstructionist and minor parties and independents wield disproportionate power
- an average of only four hours’ debate is undertaken per Bill and parliament sits an average of 70 days per year
- a small quorum is required for parliament to operate; most of the time members are not in the chamber except when they are rostered. Even when there is not a quorum, parliamentary proceedings continue as often no one draws the attention of the speaker to the fact that there is not a quorum
- most parliamentarians attend question time but often for only for entertainment value
- question time is ineffective. Government backbenchers ask Dorothy Dix questions designed for ministers to score political points. Opposition questions are treated summarily or turned back on the opposition. Asking a question does not guarantee an answer. There is no time limit on questions and answers. Supplementary questions can be asked in the House of Representatives and the Senate but only at the discretion of the speaker and the president.

Proposed changes included:

- having an independent speaker and president (for example, respected judges) or introduce a policy, as in the United Kingdom, whereby the speaker, once appointed, does not take any part in his/her party’s activities, including party meetings
- imposing a time limit on questions and answers during question time
- avoiding Dorothy Dix questions by not allowing members of the government to ask questions during question time
- extending the length of question time in the House of Representatives to at least one hour as is the case in the Senate
- enforcing 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

# 2006 Assessment Report



- extending the number of sitting days to provide more time for the consideration of Bills
- constitutional change so that each state has Senate representation according to its population, therefore making the Senate a more representative chamber
- making committee findings binding.

## **Executive**

Under the Constitution, the executive power of the Commonwealth shall be vested in the Queen and exercisable by the Governor-General. The Governor-General is appointed by the Queen on the advice of the prime minister. The prime minister and the Cabinet are also considered to be part of the executive. All three of these aspects of the executive could have been explored from the point of view of the need for change.

Clearly the position of Governor-General allows the greatest scope for discussion about the need for change. Students discussed the following aspects of the role of the Governor-General to support the argument that there is a need for change.

- The Constitution gives enormous power to the Governor-General.
- The Governor-General can withhold royal assent and block the legislative program of a democratically elected government.
- It is possible for the Governor-General (an unelected official) to dismiss a democratically elected government, as occurred in 1975.
- Significant powers, known as reserve powers, rest with the Governor-General. These are not defined and are considered to be used when a Governor-General acts contrary to the advice of the prime minister.

When discussing the aspects above, students argued that:

- the position of Governor-General should be abolished and replaced with an elected or appointed Australian head of state. The issue of replacing the Governor-General with a president and establishing a republic was often discussed
- as the prime minister and Cabinet are conventions, it is desirable that their roles and constraints should be clearly articulated and incorporated into the Constitution. Mechanisms are needed to ensure that neither the prime minister nor the Cabinet can become too powerful
- the position of prime minister is an important one and should be elected by a majority of a national vote
- the quality of the executive would be improved if, as in the US system, members of the executive are chosen from outside the parliament. This would allow for a greater pool of knowledge and expertise to be drawn upon.

## **Federalism**

The federal system in Australia consists of one federal government, six state governments and two territory governments. Each government has certain exclusive powers and others are shared. Many aspects of the federal system have changed quite significantly since federation and these changes are not reflected in the Constitution.

Students discussed the following aspects of the federal system to argue for the need for change.

- It is desirable to have cooperative federalism and there are many examples of this (for example, gun laws after the Port Arthur massacre); however, disputes between Canberra and the states are commonplace. It is expected that in any power sharing relationship there will be tensions and there is considerable tension between Canberra and the states over financial matters. The federal government allocates funds to states and the states argue that this is unsatisfactory and inadequate as the states have many expensive responsibilities, such as health and education. Disputes and tensions also arise because the government in power in Canberra may be of a different political party to those of the states.
- There are too many governments in Australia. It can be argued that Australia is over-governed and that there is considerable duplication in terms of areas of responsibility and resources (for example, the federal and state departments of health and education). Students raised the question of whether or not Australia needs state governments at all, and suggested abolishing them and establishing a unitary system of government.
- Since federation there has been a considerable growth in Commonwealth power. This has been largely due to High Court decisions which have favoured the Commonwealth. It was argued that too much power is centralised in Canberra and that this would be better in the hands of the states.

# 2006 Assessment Report



This question was generally well answered. Students who focussed on one political institution were able to discuss the merits of change in more detail and were generally rewarded with higher marks. However, some students discussed more than one political institution, for example the constitution and voting systems, to good effect.

More successful students clearly articulated the need for change and then assessed the merits of proposed changes and their likelihood of occurring. In discussing proposed change, some students concluded that some changes may in fact create a new set of problems for the Australian political system, and decided that our current system is preferable to some proposals (for example, our current system of federalism may be preferable to abolishing state governments; common law may be preferable to a Bill of Rights and preferential voting to elect the House of Representatives may be preferable to proportional voting).

Less successful students were only able to discuss changes superficially. There was little effort made to diagnose why changes are needed and little evaluation of the merits of each proposed change. A number of students merely gave a descriptive narrative of changes to Australia's political institutions since federation (for example, changes to the electoral systems since 1901).

## Section C – Extended response

### Unit 4 – The challenge of power

Question chosen	0	1	2
%	1	34	65

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	2	0	1	2	2	3	3	3	5	5	7	7	12	11	11	11	7	3	4	1	1	<b>11.8</b>

### Question 3

In a democratic system in which elections play the central role in deciding which party or parties shall form a government, public opinion will always play a significant role in the policy-making process. This is because governments will always be answerable to the electors for the policy decisions they have made, while oppositions will seek to win a mandate to pursue policies they would like to enact if elected to government. The public's opinion may also be influential on governments in between elections given the increasingly significant role played in the political debate by public opinion polls in national newspapers and other media.

Better students raised the following issues.

- Policy debates are an important part of the political debate and may figure prominently in election campaigns.
- The Australian parties spend a great deal of time debating policies and constructing policy manifestos that are presented to the public during election campaigns.
- The electoral system is seen as an important clearing-house for policy decisions and policy proposals, with parties who wish to form governments seeking to obtain a mandate to pursue their policy ideas.
- Because Australia has compulsory voting, electors are required to participate in policy debates whether they want to or not. The overarching presence of compulsion in the electoral process may encourage voters to be more aware of the policy debate than they might be if voting were not compulsory.
- Because of compulsory voting, the policy debate has a high level of news value to the press (or news media). The press are also sensitive to the importance of public opinion on the political process and are the drivers of the opinion polling culture in Australian politics. The widespread use of opinion polls by major media organisations serves to reinforce the sensitivity of politicians to public opinion as well.
- Public opinion as marshalled and/or mobilised by interest groups may also have an influence in a pluralist system (like Australia) where interest group activity is viewed as a legitimate input to the decision-making process.
- The link between representation and policy-making ensures that public opinion has a significant role to play in policy-making. This counters some of the ways in which policy-making may be somewhat removed from public influence, including the use of regulations rather than parliamentary legislation to make policy changes, and where governments consult with sectional interest groups away from public scrutiny.

# 2006 Assessment Report



This question was only reasonably well completed by students and tended to evoke the poorer responses or tempt less well-prepared students. Better students noted there are other factors which can play a greater role in domestic policy making, such as the input of the prime minister, members of the Cabinet, government backbenchers, the opposition and minor parties, and the media. The extent to which public opinion plays a role can depend on the policy area, the length of time until an election and the level of public interest. These students cited examples of situations where public opinion did not support government policy, yet the government enacted the policy into law (for example, the introduction of the GST, industrial relations and the privatisation of Telstra). Less successful students discussed public opinion in superficial terms with little or no evidence to reinforce their comments. They also cited Australian involvement in Iraq as one of their examples, which is not relevant to this topic as this topic clearly refers to domestic policy, not foreign policy. Less successful students talked in a very general way about public opinion and failed to analyse the more specific manifestations of public opinion; that is, the ballot box, interests groups, polling and the concept of representative democracy. Some students failed to mention one policy example and others made limited use of contemporary domestic policy examples.

## Question 4

Most students agreed with the statement given in the question, although many students qualified their stance by stating that, while security is clearly a key objective of Australian foreign policy, it is not the only objective. Better students defined national security.

Better students discussed the concept of national security and how the world has changed since 11 September 2001. The 2001 and 2004 Australian federal elections were determined more by security issues than in previous years, and the subsequent world terrorism, such as the London bombings of 2005, have only highlighted the government's desire to enhance national security.

Better students also mentioned that although Australia has justified its military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq as part of the fight against terrorism, it is this very involvement which could increase the chance of Australia becoming a terrorist target in the future. Australia remains a staunch supporter of the United States of America and of American foreign policy globally.

The Australian government has increased its anti-terrorism measures considerably since 2001 (for example, in airports and ports) and its defence budget has also increased to accommodate the costs of sending more troops to conflict areas. The need for national security is always important, yet better students argued that this importance is at times heightened by regional and global events. The London bombings and subsequent threats to Australia from Al Qaeda have seen many Australians realise that the terrorist threat is real and serious.

Nevertheless, to say that national security is the sole objective of Australian foreign policy, and that it comes at the expense of other areas of foreign policy such as trade and global citizenship, would be incorrect. Students also mentioned that Australia finds a good balance between these areas in its foreign policy. Trade has increased in the South-East Asia region, especially with India and China, and a free trade agreement with China is on the cards in the future.

Economic interests could be seen as having a dominant focus over the past 20 years, especially regionally. The emphasis on free trade and support for the WTO are important benchmarks. One of the arguments for Australia not signing the Kyoto Treaty was its potential economic impact. Better students indicated the importance of economics from a domestic perspective as well as arguing that economic considerations dominate over humanitarian considerations.

Students also argued that while the promotion of Australia's security and trade interests is important, occasionally human rights do matter. For example, Australia's actions in East Timor were to a significant extent based on protecting self-determination for the Timorese people, even in the face of potential damage to Australia's economic and political relationship with Indonesia. Another example was Australia's generous financial and humanitarian response to the 2004 tsunami.

This question was well answered by most students, who were able to evaluate the role security plays in Australian foreign policy. Better answers drew on the impact of trade and economic policy, regionalism and global citizenship as paths to achieving greater security beyond military options. Students drew on contemporary evidence well when

# 2006 Assessment Report



responding to this question. Less successful students merely discussed the ways in which Australia has entered wars. They were superficial in their understanding of the topic and did not discuss trade and global citizenship in any detail.