

Political Studies GA 3: Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

In the 2001 Political Studies Examination the overall standard of answers was good. Responses to Section A the short-answer questions were generally of a higher standard than the essay responses in Section B. There was a significant number of students who clearly had a very good grasp of the subject matter covered in this course. However, many students wrote essays which were comparatively poor. Such essays were often too brief, failed to answer the question and did not present sufficiently detailed discussion of the major issues in the question. Students need more practice at analysing essay questions and writing essays within a timeframe similar to that in the November examination.

Many students did not select four short-answer questions and answered parts of or all of five questions. Students were clearly instructed to answer four questions and **only** four questions in part A. Some of the responses in the short answer questions were too long and detailed. Students need to be reminded that exceeding the suggested length of an answer will not necessarily mean more marks are awarded. Exceeding the suggested length of a short answer usually wastes time.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section A – Short-answer questions

Question 1 – The Australian Constitution

a. Identify two powers given to the High Court.

High Court powers include:

- hearing and determining appeals on cases determined in lower courts
- interpreting the Constitution (including determining if legislation is constitutional)
- trying treason cases
- resolving legal disputes involving treaties or affecting representatives of other countries
- resolving constitutional disputes
- resolving disputes between states.

This question was well answered with most students scoring full marks.

b. Briefly describe three sections of the Constitution, which deal with Commonwealth-State relations.

Sections dealing with Commonwealth State relations:

- Section 15: the filling of casual Senate vacancies
- Section 51: outlines policy areas for which the Commonwealth parliament can legislate
- Section 52: outlines areas where Commonwealth Parliament has exclusive powers
- Section 69: transfer of certain departments to the Commonwealth
- Section 85: transfer of property of State governments to the Commonwealth
- Section 89: payment to States before the imposition of uniform duties
- Section 90: exclusive Commonwealth powers over customs, excise duties, bounties
- Section 91: exceptions to Commonwealth powers to impose bounties
- Section 92: free trade between the States
- Section 93: payment to States of custom duties
- Section 95: custom duties of Western Australia
- Section 96: special purpose grants by the Commonwealth to the States
- Section 98: powers of Commonwealth to extend to navigation, shipping and railways of the States
- Section 105: taking over public debts from States
- Section 105A: agreements with respect to State debts
- Section 107: the power of state parliaments
- Section 109: if a State law is inconsistent with a Commonwealth, the Commonwealth law shall prevail
- Section 111: State may surrender territory to the Commonwealth
- Section 114: States may not impose tax on property belonging to the Commonwealth
- Section 121: admission of new states to the Commonwealth
- Section 123: alteration of territorial limits of States
- Section 128: changing the Constitution

Responses to this question demonstrated a very good knowledge of the various sections of the Constitution which deal with Commonwealth-State relations. Most students responded well by identifying and discussing three separate sections. Less successful responses failed to mention specific sections or mentioned sections but provided no discussion. Occasionally, students named three correct sections but provided incorrect information about those sections.

c. Evaluate the argument that the Australian system of government would operate more effectively if state and territory governments were abolished.

Students must evaluate this statement and not necessarily assume it is correct. 'Effective' is the key word – students' responses needed to recognise factors which would contribute to the Australian system of government operating better without the existence of state governments and discuss ways in which the Australian system of government would be adversely affected if state governments were abolished.

Arguments supporting the abolition of state governments suggested the following problems would be overcome:

- duplication of powers and therefore inefficiencies and wasteful use of resources
- lack of consistent national laws in critical areas such road use, environment and industrial relations
- lack of consistency in key policy areas, e.g. education
- political conflict between state and federal governments and between states
- governments passing on responsibilities and problems to other governments
- Senate malapportionment as Senate could not be a state's house.

Arguments supporting the maintenance of state government suggested they contribute to the system by:

- keeping governments more in touch with constituents concerns
- allowing governments to develop policies consistent with regional factors
- allowing for governments of wider political complexions – therefore more representative of political opinion
- providing constituents with easier access to decision makers
- creating opportunities for a development of a wider range of policy platforms and initiatives
- providing opportunities for greater accountability – state/federal governments can act as 'opposition'.

More successful answers to this question made reference to the history of federation. There were some very sound arguments presented both for and against the abolition of state and territory governments. Most students chose to focus on the duplication and efficiency argument. Many students argued that rural and regional Australia benefits from federalism. Many students assumed that if the state and territory governments were abolished then the federal government would do everything. There was little acknowledgement of the role of local or regional governments.

Question 2 – Parliament and the Executive

a. What is meant by the term 'frontbenchers'?

Frontbenchers are members of the House of Representatives or the Senate who are either ministers or shadow ministers.

This was generally well answered although some students used the term only in relation to government ministers.

b. Briefly describe three parliamentary roles of backbenchers.

Parliamentary roles of backbenchers include:

- participation in legislative debates, question time, adjournment debates, matters of public importance etc.
- representing the interests of their constituents
- voting on bills (divisions), no confidence motions
- introducing private members bills
- participating in parliamentary committees
- participating in party room discussion
- participating in selection of leadership and ministry
- supporting their political party.

This question was well answered. Three roles were clearly described and examples were provided in the better responses. There was some duplication of responses, for example debate and discuss legislation and scrutinise legislation given as two separate points.

c. Evaluate the effectiveness of the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Answers had to reflect an understanding of the role of the speaker and the restraints/opportunities imposed on the office by Standing Orders and the method of determining the speakership.

Students should discuss effectiveness in terms of the keys roles of the speaker:

- maintaining Standing Orders
- maintaining an atmosphere for effective debate
- imposing discipline on members.

Students should recognise that the effectiveness of the speaker in undertaking these roles is questionable due to:

- the lack of independence from party politics – speaker still attends party meeting, is a member of the government
- in practice, the speaker can only be removed by the government
- speaker's abilities and experience, e.g. Sinclair
- method of selection – speaker elected by majority in House of Representatives (the government) so it is difficult for the speaker to have support of the opposition
- constraints imposed by Standing Orders, e.g. length of question time, action over relevance, executive dominance

- setting of parliamentary agenda by the government
- adversary nature of parliament.

This question was generally well done. Students demonstrated a good knowledge of the speaker's roles, duties and responsibilities. The most frequent weakness was the failure to concentrate on the issue of the speaker's effectiveness. Many students gave details about what the speaker's roles are rather than how effective the speaker is or can be.

Question 3 – Voting and elections

a. Distinguish between a 'donkey vote' and an informal vote.

A donkey vote is a formal vote completed in accordance with electoral law and so is a valid vote. It is a vote in which preferences are allocated in numerical order (1-2-3-4-5) by an elector who is uninterested and so votes straight down the ballot paper.

An informal vote is a ballot paper which has not been completed in accordance with electoral law and is therefore declared invalid.

Most answers established the distinction very well. Some students did not mention that a donkey vote is a valid vote and an informal vote is not counted.

b. Briefly describe three functions of an election.

Functions of elections include:

- representative function – mechanism which allows citizens the opportunity to choose one or more persons to represent their interests in a variety of forums including parliament
- participatory function – elections are a fundamental mechanism for allowing and encouraging citizens to participate in the political decision-making process
- to determine government
- to deliver the elected government a mandate/legitimacy
- present and formalise party policy platforms.

This question was well handled by most students although, some struggled to find a third function.

c. Evaluate the argument that by-elections have little significance in the Australian political system.

Responses need to demonstrate an understanding that the significance of by-elections can be dependent on circumstances including:

- timing
- size of government majority
- nature of the seat – marginal/safe
- quality of the candidates
- circumstances requiring the by-election.

By-elections are of considerable significance when governments have small legislative majorities. Loss of the seat could diminish a government majority or have the greatest possible impact by resulting in a change of government or deadlocked parliament. By-elections are also significant close to general elections as they can provide a litmus test of electoral opinion (e.g. Ryan). Often, by-elections see swings against governments as electors use them to send messages to government. In situations where governments have a large majority, are riding high in the opinion polls and a by-election is held in a safe seat the opposition has been known not to stand candidates. In such situations by-elections have little significance. Students may use examples from federal and state elections.

The two federal by-elections in 2001 helped students to come to grips with this question. Many students made reference to Aston and Ryan and were able to clearly evaluate the significance of by-elections and the many factors that can contribute to a by-election being significant. Some students did not understand that by-elections are not used to fill casual Senate vacancies. A minority of students clearly had no idea what a by-election is.

Question 4 – Political parties and pressure groups

a. What is meant by the term pre-selection?

The act of selection and endorsement of a candidate by a political party to contest a parliamentary or local government election.

This question was generally very well answered.

b. Briefly describe three differences between political parties and pressure groups.

Differences between political parties and pressure groups include:

- political parties seek to achieve their aims by forming government; a pressure group seeks to achieve its aims by influencing government or the bureaucracy
- political parties regularly contests elections; pressure groups do not
- pressure groups exist to promote a cause or protect an interest; political parties usually offer a range of policies on a number of issues (the Greens and the National Party have platforms that include policies wider than the issues with which they are clearly identified)
- pressure groups employ different tactics to political parties such as direct action and strikes

- pressure groups do not necessarily have formal membership structures and procedures whereas political parties are required by law to have such structures and procedures
- political parties necessarily aim to attain majority or close to majority support to win elections and form government; pressure groups can attain their aims without attaining majority or near majority support.

This question presented few if any problems to well prepared students with most choosing three distinct differences and exploring each one with a brief discussion.

c. Evaluate the argument that pressure groups cannot be successful unless the government is sympathetic to its views.

Answers should recognise that:

- sympathy from the government is important but the capacity of a pressure group to influence government is dependent on many factors (financial resources, leadership, organisational abilities, public support, media coverage, strength of membership) not simply government support
- government sympathy does not ensure pressure group success as governments may make concessions to groups they are not sympathetic with for economic and political reasons
- electoral pressures may mean governments cannot bow to the demands of pressure groups even if governments are sympathetic
- pressure groups can be successful without government support through court decisions or influencing public opinion
- links, both formal and informal, such as those between trade unions and the Labor Party, business and the Liberal Party provide pressure groups with powerful means to influence government decision-making processes.

This question was well handled with better students able to state that while not essential, government support could be very useful indeed. Many excellent and relevant examples were used. More successful responses stated that success depends on the aims of a particular group and that it is possible to be successful without government support. Less successful students assumed that success means getting the government to legislate directly in favour of a pressure group.

Question 5 – Foreign policy

a. What is meant by the term ‘globalisation’?

‘Globalisation’ is the increasing international convergence and interdependence of national economies, markets, distribution systems, capital, labour and technology. Mention could be made of e-commerce, communication and transport technologies, GATT as reasons for this convergence.

This was a difficult term to define easily; however, students who chose this topic had a reasonable measure of success. Students clearly had an idea of globalisation but found it difficult to define. Student responses made reference to general notions of breaking down barriers, fewer trade barriers, a ‘smaller world’, freer economies and more connections between countries. Less successful responses referred to globalisation only in terms of multinational companies such as Nike and McDonalds. A few students used the question as an opportunity to criticise multi-nationals and to condemn S11 protests.

b. Briefly describe three ways in which Australian governments have supported the United Nations.

Australian governments have supported the United Nations through:

- a financial commitment to the UN through annual subscription
- the desire to be a member of the Security Council
- support for and involvement in UN agencies such as UNHCR, UNESCO
- support for and involvement in UN peacekeeping forces, e.g. UNIFET
- being a signatory to UN treaties, e.g. the ban on mining in Antarctica.

Most students listed or numbered and then described three separate and clear examples of support Australian governments have given the United Nations. More successful responses made excellent use of examples such as East Timor, Somalia, UNSCOM. Some students gave very vague and non-specific responses such as ‘giving aid’ or peacekeeping without attempting to add to their answer. Some incorrect answers were given, for example ANZUS and APEC were cited as UN bodies. Some students misread the question and discussed support Australia has given the United States rather than the United Nations.

c. Evaluate the argument that the Government does not give sufficient consideration to human rights issues in the formulation of Foreign Policy.

Answers should:

- consider the key aims of foreign policy and the priority of human rights within the context of these aims
- acknowledge that defence of human rights is not a major priority as foreign policy is dominated by economic and security considerations
- acknowledge the extent to which economics has dominated foreign policy
- include examples to reinforce that importance of economic issues, e.g. enthusiasm for the GATT/WTO, the establishment of APEC and the pursuit of treaties such as Timor Gap

- discuss the impact of economic aims on human rights issues – the dilemma of maintaining strong trade relationships whilst criticising trade partners for their human rights records
- describe Australia’s relationships with major trading partners and nations in the region whose human rights records leave much to be desired, e.g. Indonesia, People’s Republic of China, Burma, Malaysia.

There were some very successful responses to this question. More successful answers recognised the dilemma of the government as it attempts to be electorally successful and balance this need with its obligations in the area of human rights. Some very successful responses dealt with a broad range of material and delivered a solid critique of government policy. For example, they discussed and evaluated whether Australia is prepared to put human rights ahead of trade with China or remaining on good terms with Indonesia. Less successful students were vague and their responses did not address the question and provided few if any relevant examples, or focused almost exclusively on the recent refugee crisis and the Tampa to the exclusion of all other considerations.

Section B – Essay questions

Question 1 – The Australian Constitution

‘The High Court has assumed a more political role than was intended by the Constitution.’ To what extent do you agree?

Answers should reflect an understanding of the role of the High Court in terms of Constitutional intent and ways in which it has operated with reference to key judgments. The answer should take a position on the question – students can argue that the Court has always been political, that it has become more political or that it has never been ‘political’ in the party sense but rather has made ‘judicial’ decisions.

Answers should demonstrate:

- an understanding of the roles of the High Court as laid down in the Constitution
- an understanding of the term ‘political’ and that it may be inevitable that the institution that interprets the Constitution must be political
- an understanding that the word ‘more’ suggests the Court has increased its political role and a discussion of this contention
- that even early after 1903 there were controversial decisions (e.g. the Engineers’ Case of 1920) which was seen by some as ‘political’
- an understanding of key decisions which can be interpreted as ‘political’ in that they have had an impact on the operation of the Australian political system. (examples include Franklin Dam, Mabo and Wik)
- acknowledgment that not only decisions can be pointers to the High Court assuming a more political role but that appointments to the High Court are political as they are made by governments (e.g. Murphy, Callinan, Barwick, ‘stacking the bench’)
- an understanding that statements made by judges can be seen to be ‘political’ (e.g. Kirby, Deane)
- a discussion of whether the High Court is now rewriting rather than interpreting the Constitution.

Students who chose to respond to this question demonstrated a very good grasp of the role of the High Court. Successful essays gave a brief historical overview of the role of the High Court and used this as a basis for discussing the changing role of the court, and showed a genuine understanding of the meaning of the term ‘political role’ and recognised that this is a very contentious matter in Australian politics. Some students argued that a political High Court was what the Constitutional framers intended and others that it had clearly become more activist and political than intended. Less successful responses did not grasp the idea of a political role and instead listed a series of High Court cases and failed to relate these to the question. Some students with a very detailed knowledge of the High Court and its significant decisions failed to relate their discussion to the proposition presented in the question.

Question 2

‘The Governors-General have little importance or influence on Australian politics, and therefore there is no need for the position of head of state.’ To what extent do you agree?

Answers should reflect an understanding of the Constitutional role of the Governor-General and knowledge about how the role has been performed. Students should use this understanding to reflect upon the need for the position of head of state. Students were not to turn this essay into a discussion of the republic issue.

Answers should:

- address both parts of the questions – the importance/influence of Governor-Generals and the extent to which the position of head of state is necessary
- consider the role of the Governor-General and the potential for the exercise of influence
- analyse the extent to which the roles of the Governor-General have allowed for the exercise of influence using examples such as McKinley and the double-dissolution of 1975, Kerr and the dismissal of Whitlam and statements made by Deane about indigenous issues
- acknowledge that the appointments of the Governor-General has often been political and controversial (e.g. Casey, Hasluck, Hayden)
- discuss the motivation of political appointments

- acknowledge that importance or influence does not have to be delivered through the exercise of Constitutional power, the prestige associated with the office can be used to promote issues and the nation internationally
- use the discussion of the importance/influence of the Governor-General to reflect upon the need to maintain the position of head of state as is or suggest that changes be made to the position (e.g. in the context of a republic, election/selection, removal of power to dismiss governments and give assent to legislation) in order for it to be worth maintaining
- consider the importance of the role as defined by the Constitution in maintaining the stability/integrity of the Australian political system
- consider the need for a constitutional umpire
- consider who or what institutions would undertake the roles if the position was abolished.

Students who attempted this question had a good knowledge of the various constitutional and ceremonial roles of the Governor-General and made reference to relevant sections of the constitution. There were some very good arguments presented that it does not matter whether or not the Governor-General has immense or little power, the position of head of state is not warranted. Many students who responded to this question concentrated too much on the events of 1975 and the Republican debate. A common weakness was that the second part of the question was often ignored or only received scant attention.

Question 3 – Parliament and the executive

'The Australian parliament has important functions to fulfil. However, in practice few of these functions are performed effectively.' Discuss.

Answers should address both parts of the question, the functions of parliament and the extent to which they are performed effectively. A judgment needs to be made concerning the extent to which the functions are performed effectively.

Answers should provide:

Description of the important functions of the House of Representatives:

- legislative
- representative
- determines government
- maintains accountability.

Description of the important functions of the Senate:

- review legislation
- act as States' house.

Extent to which functions of the House of Representatives are performed effectively:

- outcome of legislative process (with the exception of private members bills) as a foregone conclusion
- limited time for legislative debate – average of 7 hours spent on each piece of legislation, sits on average 70 days per year
- government has mechanisms to end or impose time limits on debate
- government sets agenda
- questions time often ineffective in maintaining accountability but media can run with the issue
- debate on narrow party lines – essentially Coalition and ALP
- system used to elect members of the House of Representatives means little opportunity for representation which reflects a range of opinions
- acknowledge that committees can be effective to maintain accountability
- effectively forms government – essentially a contest between Coalition and ALP – no minor parties to complicate the process.

Extent to which functions of the Senate are performed effectively:

- rarely does the Senate act as a States' house; even seating reflects Senate is a parties' house
- can act as a House of Review/maintain accountability when government does not have control due to proportional representation
- when government has control, Senate acts as a 'rubber stamp'
- more time taken over consideration of legislation than in House of Representatives
- can gridlock the legislative process and agenda of a government which has a mandate to deliver its policy platform – can block supply
- acknowledge that committees can be effective to maintain accountability
- in some ways question time is more effective than in House of Representatives in carrying out functions – longer sittings, longer question time, supplementary questions but few ministers in Senate, less media attention so less of a 'theatre'.

This was a straightforward question. Any students who had a good knowledge of the functions of parliament, methodically explored these and then attempted to tackle the question of effectiveness. More successful students

were able to use current examples to illustrate the points they made. Frequent reference was made to executive domination, restrictions on the speaker and party solidarity. Some students ignored the Senate completely and confined all of their comments to the House of Representatives. Some students had a problem with balance in this essay, spent doing too much time exploring one aspect of parliament such as accountability and Question Time and as a result ignoring other important functions.

Question 4

‘Cabinet dominates the ministry and the parliament.’ To what extent do you agree?

Answers should contend that to a significant extent cabinet ministers dominate the executive and parliament as cabinet is the ‘engine room’ of government.

Answers should acknowledge that:

- cabinet ministers have the most important portfolios – treasury, finance, foreign affairs, industrial relations
- cabinet dominates government decision making
- Prime Minister chairs cabinet and gives it authority
- there are few formal constraints on cabinet decision making (cabinet deliberations secret but there are leaks) despite the fact that Executive Council gives legal form to cabinet decisions
- the convention that cabinet decisions are binding on all ministers – solidarity convention – entrenches cabinet domination of executive
- cabinet determines legislative agenda
- cabinet is the most public face of the government– media focus on cabinet and Prime Minister
- cabinet undertakes crisis control
- cabinet makes the major day-day decisions
- outer ministry is accountable to cabinet
- cabinet has greater access to crucial sources of information
- cabinet has greater access to resources and staff
- creation of super ministries has cemented the power of cabinet
- cabinet is the most public face of parliament, at question time most questions are directed to members of cabinet
- cabinet controls parliamentary business including developing tactics to limit the effectiveness of the opposition
- parliament sits on average 70 days per year whereas cabinet meets weekly throughout the year, in addition there are cabinet committees meetings
- despite the importance of cabinet it does not make all decisions – acknowledge importance of Prime Minister and that many decisions are made by ministers within their own departments
- there are some checks on the dominance of cabinet – party room, media, opposition, question time, grievance debates, pressure from the public service, electoral pressure.

This was not a popular question. Students who attempted this question demonstrated a good knowledge of how cabinet operates and why it is so powerful. Successful responses discussed how parliament relates to cabinet and why cabinet dominates parliament. More successful responses dealt with the ministry and then parliament. Some essays gave too much emphasis to the cabinet treating the question as one on the role and power of cabinet rather than cabinet’s relations with the ministry and parliament. The cabinet ministry part of the question was often overlooked. Some students failed to mention the Senate can provide a hindrance to cabinet domination of parliament.

Question 5 – Voting and elections

In what ways do the preferential and proportional voting systems allow minor parties and minority interests to exercise influence in the Australian political system?

Responses should discuss the ways in which the preferential and proportional voting systems allow minor parties and minority interests to exercise influence in the Australian political system. Students could make a comparison in terms of which system provides the greatest opportunities for the exercise of such influence but it is not a requirement of the question.

Ways that the preferential voting system allows minor parties and minority interests to exercise influence:

- allocation of minor party’s preferences vital in marginal seats and as Queensland, WA and Ryan elections showed important in safe seats – so can influence election results
- minor parties allocation of preferences can effect electorate perceptions (e.g. One Nation and their association with the National Party)
- preferences from major parties can affect electorate perceptions of minor parties – One Nation, Greens
- influence can be exercised through preference deals, major parties agree to adopt a minor party agenda
- minor parties can exercise influence through how to vote cards
- considerable influence can be delivered to parties that have concentrated support (e.g. National Party, One Nation). Nineteen ninety-eight election, the National Party gained about 5% of the House of Representatives vote winning 16 seats, the Democrats also gained about 5%. One Nation got over 8% and did not win any seats.

In the case of the National Party the system has allowed it to be a partner in government, hold key ministries and Deputy Prime Ministership

- allows for minority parties and interests to pressure governments and opposition during campaign – stand high profile candidates to attract media attention and preferences, publish candidate ratings on issues (e.g. Right to Life)
- if minor parties win seats they can have an impact in government's legislative agenda (e.g. independents in Victoria)
- minority interests as represented by pressure groups who can endorse or withdraw support for parties and or policies and so influence voters
- significant support for minor parties or voting patterns of a particular group of voters send messages to government leading to change in policy (e.g. rural voters).

Ways that the proportional voting system allows minor parties and minority interests to exercise influence:

- system provides minor parties and minority interests with a better chance of parliamentary representation than the preferential system and representation and can result in influence
- as the Liberal party and the ALP gain a similar percentage of the national vote their numbers in the Senate are usually similar so a government is never assured of controlling the Senate and minor parties can gain the balance of power, e.g. Democrats; gives them considerable power if they have the support of the opposition
- balance of power delivers considerable influence on legislative agenda
- a greater number of views can be represented in the Senate - parties that have been represented in the Senate and not the House of Representatives include the DLP, the Australian Democrats, the NDP and Greens
- preferences from minor parties (or grouped candidates) can determine which major party get the 'last' Senate place if they have close to a quota for that position
- does not disadvantage minor parties with 'unconcentrated' support – provides Democrats with similar representation to National Party
- creates incentive for double dissolution which advantages minor parties as the quota is reduced from 14% to 7% – minor parties can threaten government with double dissolution.

This was one of the most popular questions, and there was a huge range of responses in terms of quality. There were excellent essays which clearly explained the two voting systems and the ways in which they enable minor parties and minority interests to exercise influence. Many, however, were disappointing. This essay was more demanding than students perceived it to be and it attracted many less successful responses. Many answers were built around a general discussion of the two voting systems and lengthy descriptions about how the voting systems function. This was not a comparison of the two voting systems in a broad sense nor was it a question about general strengths and weaknesses. There was evidence that more responses to this question were prepared. Students cannot expect to do well if they ignore the basic issues in the question.

Question 6

'There is little doubt that economic issues above any other issues determine how the electorate votes in Australia.' To what extent do you agree?

Answers should acknowledge that economic issues are of critical importance and that on many occasions elections are fought on economic issues.

Answers should discuss:

- the distinction between long-term (sociological factors – party identification) and short-term factors – issues including the economy, leadership, party image, campaigns, minor parties
- the change in patterns of traditional party support means short-term factors determine election results
- the importance of marginal and rural seats where economic issues have significant impact
- recent elections which have been fought over economic issues – GST, petrol prices, competition policy, Business Activity Statement (BAS).
- the importance of leadership – under Hawke and Keating there was not a great deal of difference between ALP and the Coalition in terms of economic policy hence other factors, especially leadership, were important in determining how the electorate voted, despite Victoria having the lowest level of unemployment of all the states, budget surplus etc. Kennett lost – leadership key factor
- the fact that the government is advantaged if economic indicators are strong
- government performance especially economic performance is an important determinant of voting behaviour – the hip pocket nerve (polling in Ryan by-election rated GST, petrol prices as key issues; issues such as race, the republic hardly rated)
- that despite the critical position of economic factors, they must be seen in context of other factors including leadership, party image, minor parties, opposition performance, issues – the environment, indigenous issues, foreign policy (rarely important).

This was not a very popular question despite the proximity of the examination to the 2001 federal election. There were some outstanding responses to this question but on the whole this question attracted weaker students. More

successful responses demonstrated a good knowledge of economic issues and the ability to compare economic factors with other issues in a number of elections. Less successful responses were largely commentaries on recent international events and their impact on the 2001 election rather than a discussion of the issues raised by the question. Many students looked only briefly at economic issues and used their essay to list almost every factor which can contribute to an election outcome.

Question 7 – Political parties and pressure groups

‘The problem with pressure groups in a democratic system is that some pressure groups are more powerful than others.’ To what extent do you agree?

This question should be answered through recognition that some pressure groups are more powerful than others and this may or may not be a problem in terms of democracy but are the inevitable consequence of a complex society.

Answers should:

- discuss pluralist theory which assumes pressure groups are more or less equal in their capacity to influence government as pluralist theory regards power in democratic societies as ‘dispersed’ rather than ‘concentrated’
- acknowledge that freedom of speech and freedom of association are fundamental rights in a democratic system and so there is no basis to object to their presence
- discuss why some groups are more powerful
- discuss whether the fact some groups are more powerful constitutes a threat to democracy – the powerful groups may represent a significant section of public opinion or important economic interests, e.g. labour, land and capital
- discuss the fact that tactics used by pressure groups to assert power can pose a threat to democracy (e.g. violence, making secret deals)
- discuss that if the power of a pressure group is due to its public support this would not constitute a problem for democracy as this power reflects the will of the people
- acknowledge that if pressure groups are powerful or consistently more powerful than the pressure groups that counter their power, this could pose a problem for democracy; if governments are more influenced by such powerful pressure groups than by the will of the people expressed at elections
- acknowledge that difference in power between pressure groups facilitates continuing inequalities and discrimination, which threatens the democratic rights of disadvantaged groups
- acknowledge that there are many factors which determine how powerful a pressure group is and that over time the power of pressure groups change and groups develop to counter their power.

There were some excellent essays which explored the concept of power, elitism and pluralism. On the whole students demonstrated an impressive knowledge of the factors which can make some pressure groups more powerful than others. More successful essays had plenty of examples of pressure group activity and students made specific links to democracy. Less successful responses ignored the idea that pressure groups can be a problem for a democratic system and failed to cite sufficient examples of pressure group activity.

Question 8

‘The Australian Labor Party and the Liberal Party are becoming increasingly similar in their policies and philosophies.’ To what extent do you agree?

This question required consideration of broad philosophies and key policy areas. The statement suggested the two parties were more different than they are now. Some familiarity with historical differences was expected. Students can agree or disagree with the statement or suggest that it is true in some ways and untrue in others.

Answers should consider:

Philosophies

- Liberal Party always has and still does emphasise values that endorse private enterprise, individualism, freedom – it has focused attention on the family as the basic social unit and appealed mainly to the middle-class
- Labor Party has emphasised the importance of equality, fairness, security, welfare, collectivist rather than individualist values – either it has focused attention on improving wages and working conditions, and has appealed mainly to the working-class
- under Hawke and Keating there was a convergence of the two parties in terms of economic policy, with the ALP becoming more like the Liberal Party in basic philosophy by its adoption in the 1980s of economic rationalism
- there is also a common perception that both parties represent elite groups in society and neither represent the interests of non-elite groups.

Policies

- Economic policy – recently both parties have placed greater emphasis on free-market forces and privatisation. Similar policies have included deregulation and privatisation, enterprise bargaining rather than centralised wage fixing. Both parties have reduced government spending and are committed to balancing budgets and reducing deficits. On economic issues, a case can easily be made that the major parties have become increasingly similar.

- Welfare policy – The Labor Party once favoured the extension of welfare provisions and argued that these should be financed out of consolidated revenue. The Liberal Party was always more critical of the welfare state and prefers welfare schemes financed by ‘contributory’ arrangements. Both parties have become less supportive of the welfare state. The Labor Party has introduced ‘targeted’ welfare provisions, some of which are contributory, such as Medicare. The Liberal Party has shown its determination to wind back welfare by introducing ‘work for the dole’.
- Health policy – The Liberal Party long opposed a universal health care system; the Hawke Labor Government introduced Medicare. The Liberal Party introduced measures to increase the proportion of people relying on private health cover; the Labor Party in opposition has opposed the propping up of private health funds and the weakening of the public health system.
- Education policy – The Liberal Party introduced measures to support private schools; the Labor Party has opposed the drift of funding from the public sector. The Labor Governments of Hawke and Keating were more generous with their funding of the tertiary sector than the Liberal Party.
- Social issues – The Liberal Party is more conservative: it upholds the traditional nuclear family, whereas the Labor Party is more tolerant of women’s rights and homosexual rights. Recent Labor Governments have lent greater support to indigenous rights than the Howard Government. Labor is more supportive of multiculturalism than the Liberal Party especially under Howard.
- Foreign policy and immigration policy – few significant differences.

This was not a popular question. More successful responses discussed both policies and philosophies separately and specifically and were able to cite plenty of evidence drawing on up to date material from the 2001 election. More successful responses gave reasons to explain why the parties have become increasingly similar; for example, they linked the need for parties to adopt similar policies to broader changes in Australian society such as the decline of the working class. Less successful responses gave too much historical material and little if any explanation of the reasons for merging the two main parties’ philosophy. Some students ignored part of the question and only discussed policies or concentrated on one major party.

Question 9 – Australian foreign policy

Regional security issues and relations with the United States still remain the focus of Australian foreign policy. To what extent do you agree?

This question should be answered through consideration of the key priorities of Australian foreign policy. Answers should acknowledge the importance of regional security issues and relations with the United States but also acknowledge the importance of a range of bilateral relationships and other priorities such as promoting economic interests. Students could agree, disagree or agree that one is a focus and the other less of a focus.

Answers should include:

- discussion of the key elements of contemporary Australian foreign policy and the change in focus of the policy over the past 30 years – fortress Australia to regional cooperation
- discussion of the key elements of Australian foreign policy could be discussed with reference to the 1997 White Paper on Foreign, Strategic and Trade Policy
- some historical background describing the nature of security concerns and Australia’s response to them – great and powerful friends, ANZUS, Vietnam
- recognition that the end of the Cold War has seen changes in Australia’s international relationships
- recognition that foreign policy is less eurocentric and security is not seen simply in defence terms but in a range of responses including trade and foreign aid with special focus on the Asia Pacific region
- discussion of changes in Australia’s relationship with United States (e.g. differences over trade: in 1997 Australia abstained from supporting a US backed United Nations resolution criticising China’s human rights record, Downer has said ‘gone are the days when Australia just does what Washington and London want us to do’)
- discussion of ways in which the relationship with the United States has remained strong (e.g. support of US in Gulf War, APEC)
- discussion of regional security issues (e.g. instability in the region, non military threats such as the clandestine arms trade and the narcotics trade)
- recognition that security relies on military alliances, strategic partnerships, treaties and non-military initiatives such as the provision of foreign aid
- discussion of new defence relationships (e.g. joint military exercises with Indonesia and expanded defence co-operation with Japan)
- discussion of importance of economic priorities – have they in addition to regional security become the focus of Australia’s foreign policy. The merging of Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade highlights the importance of foreign policy as a tool for the promotion of Australia’s economic and security interests.

This was a very popular question. There were some outstanding responses to this question where students demonstrated an excellent knowledge of foreign policy and particularly regional security issues and Australia’s

relationship with the United States. Successful responses to this question were well balanced treating both parts of the question with similar emphasis. Students were clearly well prepared for this question. More successful responses highlighted our changing relationship with the nations of Asia and gave specific examples. They stressed the importance of trade and the economy to security issues. Less successful responses placed too much emphasis on historical factors, did not give equal emphasis to both parts of the question and made little or no attempt to draw a conclusion about whether or not the two issues in the question are the focus of Australian foreign policy.

Question 10

Discuss the key elements that affect the formulation and implementation of Australian foreign policy.

This question should be answered through consideration of the elements (factors) which affect **both** the formulation and implementation of contemporary Australian foreign policy. There was no expectation that students should spend equal time on the two parts of the question, indeed it was likely that students would spend more time discussing formulation.

Discussion of elements which affect the formulation of foreign policy should include:

- recognition that formulation of foreign policy is different to domestic policy – in contrast to domestic policy, foreign policy in the main, does not directly affect the electorate. As a consequence there are fewer influences on the development and implementation of foreign policy as compared to domestic policy. Factors such as parliament, public opinion and the backbench play a relatively limited role. Foreign policy, even more so than domestic policy is primarily the domain of the executive
- role of the Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Minister for Trade and Cabinet (e.g. the particular interest of Prime Ministers have helped shape foreign policy). Keating gave priority to Australia's relations with Asia, Hawke was a strong supporter of Israel and resisted the establishment of Palestinian representation in Canberra. Fraser had a strong interest in moving southern Africa towards black majority rule, Evans and Downer have given priority to regional relationships
- role and influence of the bureaucracy is significant. The government relies heavily on the expertise of Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in policy making. Often bureaucracy is the only source of information regarding foreign policy
- role of parliament – often has little influence over foreign policy formation due to its specialised nature and the fact that much of foreign policy does not need to be legitimised through legislation
- recognition that backbenchers rarely pressure governments over foreign policy as they face little pressure from their constituencies
- importance of external events – end of the Cold War, turmoil in Indonesia
- public opinion, media and pressure groups – relatively minimal role as foreign policy rarely has a direct impact on the lives of citizens and the bipartisanship that exists means that foreign policy is largely removed from the front pages.

Discussion of elements which affect implementation should include:

- recognition that much of foreign policy is implemented overseas by embassy and consulate staff so their expertise impacts on the implementation of foreign policy.
- abilities and priorities of responsible ministers including the Prime Minister
- international events, e.g. instability in Indonesia, human rights abuses in China and Burma affect implementation, trade sanctions, natural disasters make it more difficult to implement policy
- actions of or to Australian citizens/groups overseas or domestically (e.g. bans by trade unions, drug trafficking, kidnapping in Cambodia)
- domestic politics (e.g. public opposition to Australia's involvement in Vietnam, Pauline Hanson's pronouncements were well publicised in Asia and affected our ability to promote our image as a good international citizen)
- domestic economic issues – state of the economy affects implementation of foreign policy (e.g. recession may lead to reduction in foreign aid program, closing consulates and embassies)
- degree of support from other nations and organisations for Australian initiatives (e.g. Timor).

There were some outstanding essays on this topic demonstrating a detailed knowledge of how foreign policy works. There was some confusion as to exactly what 'key elements' referred to. Most students focused on internal and external influences on Australian foreign policy and explored these areas fully. Many students had difficulty distinguishing between formulation and implementation, with many ignoring the notion of implementation altogether. There were clearly some pre-prepared answers given to this question, which included irrelevant material such as a lengthy discussion on Australia as a global citizen.