

## GENERAL COMMENTS

Students performed well on the 2014 Australian Politics examination. There was high awareness of relevant events and developments in Australian politics in 2014, and many students used this knowledge to build examples and evidence into their responses.

Each of the four questions in Section A was based on an extract linked to each Area of Study. Most students understood the general meaning of the extracts. Many students had examined the extracts carefully and used key points from them in their responses.

Some students wrote too much in Section A and left too little time to complete Section B. The time taken to write overly long responses in Section A inevitably reduced the time available to complete Section B. It was apparent that some students did not fully develop their essay responses in Section B.

A number of questions in Section A asked students to outline or describe two key factors, such as roles, differences or reasons. High-scoring responses devoted approximately half the answer to each of the two factors. Low-scoring responses were unbalanced; often, one factor was considered in excessive depth, while the discussion of the second factor was too brief. These answers often received three of the possible four marks for this style of question.

Most students were able to cite relevant examples to support their answers in Section A. Students were aware of the contemporary nature of this study and had good knowledge of recent Australian political issues, particularly in relation to domestic and foreign policies. These issues included the abolition of the carbon tax, paid parental leave, the proposal to introduce a co-payment for GP visits and other aspects of the 2014–15 Federal Budget – all of which were prominent in Australia in 2014.

Section B required students to write one essay. Each of the four possible topics related to a specific aspect of each Area of Study and required students to focus on that aspect. It was not expected that students would write everything they had learned about the Area of Study; in fact, some students interpreted the question too broadly and did not devote sufficient attention to the particular aspect under consideration. For example, Question 1 focused on the notion that an effective democracy will encourage a diverse range of views and opinions; this was not an invitation to write an essay containing a broad description of democracy. Similarly, Question 4 asked students to evaluate the extent of change in Australian foreign policy in recent years; this was not an invitation to write a complete essay on the major aims of foreign policy. High-scoring students recognised the focus of the essay question, did some careful planning and thought about how best to use their knowledge to answer the question asked. In many cases, that was very successful.

High-scoring responses in Section B displayed good writing skills and a clear structure. These established a primary argument or contention in the first paragraph and presented a series of supporting arguments. In many responses, these distinct arguments were divided into body paragraphs, followed by a short conclusion that drew the response together. Body paragraphs often commenced with a topic sentence, and developed more detail as the paragraph progressed. The most successful responses built depth and detail into their essays by the use of relevant, topical evidence taken from the many significant events that had occurred in Australian politics during the year, notably the difficulties faced by the Abbott government in getting many of its domestic policies through the Senate, the contributions to Australian politics by the Palmer United Party, and the Prime Minister's role in international affairs, notably the loss of MH17.

## SPECIFIC INFORMATION

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

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

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

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## Section A

### Question 1

#### 1a.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	9	91	0.9

B.

#### 1b.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	6	94	1

D.

This question assessed students' understanding of the concept of the formal vote. It also reinforced the distinction between a donkey vote and an informal vote. A voter who fills in every square correctly below the line on the Senate ballot paper with no thought may have cast a donkey vote, but has also cast a formal, valid vote.

#### 1c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	10	16	28	47	2.1

The key concept students explained in high-scoring responses to this question was the quota of votes needed to win a Senate place. Senator Ricky Muir received that quota (approximately 14.3%) of the formal Senate votes in Victoria. Although Senator Muir received a very low (less than 0.5%) primary vote, his party received the preferences of other candidates and parties under the proportional, group-ticket voting system used to elect the Senate. The highest-scoring students noted that many of these votes were 'accidental' because many voters who voted above the line voted for Muir indirectly via preference flows that those voters were probably unaware of. Some excellent responses explained the process of 'preference harvesting', which featured in the 2013 Senate election.

The following response demonstrated genuine awareness of the key issues involved.

*Ricky Muir, a candidate from the Motoring Enthusiast Party [MEP], was the beneficiary of preference harvesting deals by the major and minor parties allowing his micro-party to gain a seat. Although just receiving a small percentage of primary votes, parties who had fulfilled their quota on group ticket counts could manipulate their preferences in order to prevent the other major [eg: Liberal] or prominent minor [eg: Greens] from obtaining a seat by passing preferences to micro parties unlikely to achieve a quota purely in primary votes, in this case, the MEP's candidate, Ricky Muir.*

#### 1d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	6	5	24	26	39	2.9

The current Australian Senate electoral system may strengthen Australian democracy in the following ways.

- It adds to the degree of representation of minority views and so it more accurately reflects Australia's increasing social diversity.
- Minor parties/independents with the balance of power in the Senate may prevent the executive dominating the government process.
- Minor parties/independents have pressured the government into compromises that have improved legislation, such as the changes to the Abbott government's Direct Action policy forced by the Palmer United Party senators in 2014.
- It is an easy system to use, so reduces the informal vote.

A common weakness of some responses was to confuse constitutional requirements of the Senate with aspects of the electoral system. For example, each state having equal Senate representation is not a feature of the proportional system used to elect the Senate.

A number of weaker students misinterpreted the question and outlined possible reforms to the Senate voting system so as to strengthen democracy. The question asked students to outline aspects of the Senate voting system as it operated in the 2013 election, not how it might be reformed in the future.

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1e.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	6	6	14	21	25	20	8	3.5

Ways in which the preferential voting system used to elect the House of Representatives fulfils democratic values include the following.

- The most favoured, or least unpopular, candidate wins each of the 150 electorates. As no candidate is declared the winner until they receive an absolute majority (50%+1) of the votes, this overcomes the possibility that the winning candidate may be preferred by a minority of voters, a situation which can result when a 'first past the post' voting system is used. It allows minor parties and independents to play a role through the distribution of their preferences. Although it is rare for these candidates to win a seat in the House of Representatives, their preference flows can definitely influence the final outcome. High-scoring students highlighted how this feature helps fulfil the democratic value of respect for the view of minorities.

This question clearly lent itself to students using recent evidence from Australian politics, and many students drew on their knowledge of the 2013 Federal election, citing the outcome of specific House of Representatives electorates with which they were familiar.

A common weakness of some responses was to discuss broad aspects of the Australian voting system, rather than those specifically related to the preferential system used to elect the House of Representatives; students did not receive marks for discussing aspects such as the secret ballot and compulsory voting.

## Question 2

2a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	13	31	56	1.5

The key differences between the terms 'head of state' and 'head of government' as they are used in the Australian political system include the following.

- The Australian head of government (the prime minister) is an elected position, whereas the Australian head of state (the Queen, represented in Australia by the Governor-General) is non-elected.
- The head of state is a more ceremonial position than the head of government, who exercises the real political power and is in charge of the everyday running of the nation.

A weakness of some responses was to simply state that the head of state is the Queen, while the head of government is the prime minister. That statement was accurate but did not provide a key difference between the two roles.

2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	4	9	29	58	2.4

This question was answered successfully by most students, who displayed awareness of an appropriate recent example, such as Julia Gillard or Tony Abbott.

As prime minister, Julia Gillard encountered difficulties in introducing several major policy reform measures. The most notable example related to climate change policy, which involved a long and complex process in which Gillard had to negotiate numerous obstacles and sources of resistance. Other Gillard government examples included the mining tax, education funding and asylum seeker policy.

Many students outlined recent difficulties faced by the Abbott government, including the abolition of the carbon and mining taxes; getting key aspects of the 2014–15 Federal Budget through the Senate; widespread public resistance and opposition to aspects of the Budget, including Newstart recipients having to apply for 40 jobs per month and a six-month waiting period to receive the benefit; the deregulation of university fees; the GP co-payment; and the Paid Parental Leave Scheme.

The following excerpt used an appropriate example of a controversial policy reform proposed by the Abbott government in 2014.

*Tony Abbott found it difficult to make amendments to the Racial Discrimination Act. He proposed to repeal Section 18C and insert new terminology which protected freedom of speech. The repeals were controversial because it was seen as the*

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*government promoting racism, especially after George Brandis' comment that everyone has the right to be bigots. Abbott found strong opposition from ethnic groups, the ALP and the Australian public who were markedly against the changes ...*

This high-scoring response was based on the earlier period of the Gillard government.

*Julia Gillard found it difficult to make the case for the carbon tax. Her statement, there will be no carbon tax under my government prior to achieving a minority government in 2010 ensured this policy would always be controversial. The nature of her minority government meant she had to make concessions the Greens in order to gain the prime ministership, the key concession was the carbon tax. The trust Gillard lost with the electorate due to the carbon tax policy contributed to her downfall prior to the 2013 election in which Labor opted to go with Rudd to the polls.*

2c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	4	6	14	21	56	3.2

Most students drew on their knowledge of the political system of the United States to answer this question. Key differences between the powers of the Australian Prime Minister and the US President include the following.

- The Australian Prime Minister has effective control over when elections are called. The US President must face election on a set day every four years, and can only serve for a maximum of two four-year terms.
- The Australian Prime Minister is limited to members of the current parliament when selecting the Ministry/Cabinet. The US President can appoint anyone they want (subject to Congressional veto) to positions in their Cabinet.
- The Australian Prime Minister is a member of the legislative branch, so is able to more directly influence the passage of legislation. The US President is completely separate from the Congress, and must use indirect methods to ensure legislation is passed.
- The US President can use Executive Orders; the Australian Prime Minister cannot.
- The US President has a veto power over legislation; the Australian Prime Minister does not.
- The US President is the commander-in-chief of the military; the Australian Prime Minister is not.

The following is excerpt is from a high-scoring response.

*The Australian prime minister is the head of government and an active member of parliament giving them the power to set the policy agenda and discuss and debate with other members. The American President is also the head of government but is kept separate from the Congress meaning he does not have the power to freely set the policy agenda or debate with Congress members though he is able to veto legislation ... The American President is the head of Cabinet which grants him the power to appoint his Cabinet members The PM is also able to do this but they must choose from elected members of parliament. The President has the power to choose freely from the American people ...*

2d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	5	4	10	13	32	27	8	3.8

The Australian head of government, the prime minister, is appointed by an indirect method. The leader of the political party that is able to command a majority in the House of Representatives becomes the Australian Prime Minister. In this sense, Australians do not directly choose their head of government. Every four years, registered US voters can vote in an election to select their President. This generally involves a simple choice between the candidate of the two major parties, the Republicans and the Democrats. The candidate who receives the majority of the electoral college votes becomes the President. Unlike in Australia, American citizens can also exercise some influence over the candidates who run in the Presidential election via primary elections. It can be argued that the US method is superior as it allows all eligible US citizens a say in who is their head of government. In Australia, this matter is determined not by voters but by the elected members of a political party.

It was not expected that students would provide a detailed explanation of the respective methods of appointing the heads of government. Many students wrote overly detailed descriptions of the methods, which left little opportunity to address the key element of the question: evaluating the two methods and reaching a conclusion.

Many students argued that, on balance, the US method is more democratic because it allows US voters to have a direct say in who occupies the most powerful position in their nation. A major flaw in the Australian method of appointment is that citizens can find their prime minister has been replaced without them having any say in the matter, as occurred in both 2010 and 2013.

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## Question 3

### 3a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	3	8	88	1.9

An 'independent member of parliament' is a member of parliament who does not belong to any political party. Cathy McGowan and Andrew Wilkie are both independent members of the current House of Representatives.

A number of students stated incorrectly that independents do not belong to a **major** party, and suggested that senators belonging to minor parties such as the Palmer United Party are independents.

The following response contains the required information.

*An independent member of parliament in Australian politics is a member elected to either the House of Representatives or the Senate who does not belong to any political party, thus is not bound by party discipline ...*

### 3b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	3	9	26	22	40	2.9

McGowan could use her role to influence domestic policy in a number of ways, such as:

- direct questions to the government during parliamentary Question Time
- join a parliamentary committee investigating a particular policy issue of concern to her
- vote in parliamentary divisions; this would be particularly effective if she held the balance of power in the House of Representatives
- make speeches during the Second Reading legislation debates
- introduce a Private Member's Bill
- negotiate and 'horse trade' with the government to support government legislation in return for specific benefits for her electorate
- present petitions from her constituents to parliament.

This question did not require any specific knowledge of the Independent MP Cathy McGowan. The extract states clearly that McGowan is an independent, and with that knowledge, students could respond successfully.

Some low-scoring responses suggested that an independent could exert influence by crossing the floor in parliament; however, as a crossbencher, an independent cannot do this.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

*The member for Indi can influence domestic policy by voting against Bills in the lower house. Whilst her vote may not change the outcome of the Bill, by Ms McGowan voting against a Bill she has shown the government her discontent with a Bill.*

*She can also influence policy by introducing a Private Member's Bill into the parliament. The Bill may capture public opinion thus putting pressure on other members of the House of Representatives members to support the Bill.*

### 3c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	3	4	11	17	40	24	3.6

In answering this question, many students displayed their knowledge and understanding of the role of independents in the Australian parliament. The effectiveness of independent MPs largely depends on the 'numbers' or make-up of the chamber of parliament to which they belong (Senate or House of Representatives) and the strongest responses to the question based their evaluation on that key consideration.

During 2010–13, the Gillard government was in a minority and relied on several independents to retain power. This gave those independents (Tony Windsor, Rob Oakeshott and Andrew Wilkie) considerable influence in the formulation of domestic policy, particularly climate change policy. Similarly, independent Senators (for example, Nick Xenophon) can also wield significant power if they hold the balance of power.

If, like Cathy McGowan, an independent does not hold the balance of power, they are unlikely to wield much influence because the government does not rely on their vote to pass legislation. Yet, as a high-profile independent, McGowan

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may be able to win considerable benefits for her electorate of Indi. On the other hand, the government might be reluctant to reward McGowan and so boost her chances of retaining the seat in 2016.

The following response is a successful evaluation of the effectiveness of independent members of parliament.

*Independent members of parliament usually do not have much influence on domestic policy. Currently, the Abbott government holds a majority in the House of Representatives which means that independent MPs will not have much success in introducing a Bill unless they have the support of the government as they hold the majority required to pass a Bill. On the other hand, independents can be influential in the formulation of domestic policy under a minority government. In order for the Labor government under Gillard to keep the confidence of the House, Labor needed the support of independents such as Andrew Wilkie who was then able to further his ideals about gambling reforms. Usually, independents have little influence but under a minority government they can dictate certain aspects of domestic policy.*

3d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	5	9	22	41	24	2.7

The focus of this question was on the implementation stage of domestic policy, rather than its formulation. While there is some overlap between these two stages, implementation relates to the policy being put into operation. In most cases, that occurs after the policy has been passed by parliament. Hence, students who explained difficulties in getting policy through parliament, particularly the Senate, did not receive full marks.

High-scoring responses avoided a discussion of policy formulation and instead explained difficulties that are likely to be encountered in putting a legislated policy into effect. Most high-scoring responses used specific examples to illustrate these difficulties. These examples included:

- campaigns by interest groups, such as protests against the East West Link in Melbourne
- cost/finance problems, such as the National Broadband Network cost blowout and delays
- lack of cooperation of key stakeholders, such as lack of support by the states in education policy
- unanticipated problems, such as falling mineral prices leading to the Rudd/Gillard government's mining tax not raising much revenue
- incompetence/inefficiency by bureaucracy, such as the Rudd government's roof insulation scheme
- the policy might be challenged in the High Court; for example, aspects of the Gillard and Abbott government's asylum seeker policy have been successfully challenged.

Low-scoring students placed their focus entirely on the policy formulation stage; explanations of the difficulties faced by the Abbott government in making changes to the *Racial Discrimination Act* or reforming the Paid Parental Leave Scheme were not appropriate, as these policies had not reached the implementation stage.

## Question 4

4a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	2	6	36	56	2.5

To receive full marks for this question, students needed to provide several pieces of information. A bilateral alliance is a formal agreement or arrangement between two nations designed to achieve a specific objective. This objective often relates to the security, defence or trade relations of the two nations involved.

4b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	10	15	30	23	22	2.3

The extract made it clear the region referred to in the question is the Asia-Pacific. This does not include the Middle East or Europe. Australia and the United States are affected by a series of regional issues, including the following.

- Security and defence: Australia and the United States are affected by the growing influence of China in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Terrorism: both nations are keen to prevent the spread of terrorism, both within the region and terrorism in their own territories.
- Trade liberalisation: Australia and the US are keen to promote the benefits of free trade throughout the region, such as through the Trans-Pacific Partnership.
- Ongoing tensions between China and Taiwan: these tensions are of concern to both the US and Australia.
- Territorial claims to islands in the South China Sea between China and Japan and other nations.

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- Improved governance and democracy in the South Pacific (for example, in Fiji): both Australia and the US are keen to see this.
- The potential of North Korea to cause conflict in northeast Asia: both Australia and the US are wary of this issue.

Some weaker responses did not confine the issues affecting Australia and the United States to the Asia-Pacific region; students who outlined issues such as the Ebola outbreak in west Africa or the international response to the Islamic State in Iraq missed out on marks as these issues are too removed from the region.

#### 4c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	7	8	22	33	29	2.7

The executive branch of the Australian government may influence the formulation of Australian foreign policy in several important ways, including:

- setting the agenda and leading the discussions of the National Security Committee of Cabinet
- attending international meetings and conferences, such as Prime Minister Abbott attending and playing a prominent role at the G20 meeting in Brisbane in 2014
- through the personal values and preferences of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister. For example, as prime minister and foreign minister, Kevin Rudd adopted a multilateral approach to foreign policy, while Prime Minister Abbott has declared that Australian foreign policy should be 'more Jakarta, less Geneva'.
- by leading Australia's response to international events and crises; for example, Prime Minister Abbott's response to the MH17 disaster in 2014.

Most students successfully explained two of these influences.

#### 4d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	11	7	18	21	42	2.8

Key instruments of contemporary foreign policy that have been used to address the challenge of maintaining security within our region include the following.

- military and intelligence-gathering facilities; for example, Australia has given the US permission to establish a military base and maintain US troops and forces in the Northern Territory
- joint training operations with regional neighbours such as Indonesia
- Australian peace-keeping forces sent to maintain order in regional hot spots such as East Timor and the Solomons
- directing the bulk of the Australian foreign aid program to the Asia-Pacific. A significant objective of the program is to maintain stability in the region
- efforts to promote trade and economic development in the region via APEC and bilateral free trade agreements in the belief that growing economic prosperity and cooperation will enhance stability and reduce the threat of terrorism or civil unrest.

Most students demonstrated their knowledge of contemporary Australian foreign policy by discussing two of these instruments. While specific examples were not required, the highest-scoring responses employed them effectively.

## Section B

Question chosen	none	1	2	3	4
%	0	14	33	22	30

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

### Question 1

Students were able to approach this question in a number of ways. Some students focused on the Australian electoral system and discussed the effectiveness of the system in encouraging diversity of views and opinions. These responses discussed the elements of the electoral and voting systems that allow this diversity of views, including the proportional system used to elect the Senate and preferential voting in the House of Representatives. The fact that Australia has

compulsory voting was certainly worth mentioning in this context, but some students devoted too much of their essay to this matter.

Other high-scoring responses discussed important democratic principles such as freedom of speech, freedom of association and assembly, and the right to vote. The highest-scoring responses that took this approach tended to be less positive about Australian democracy, noting that, in fact, Australia does not provide many entrenched, constitutional protections of such basic rights. Some excellent responses demonstrated awareness and understanding of the free speech argument that emerged in early 2014 concerning the Attorney-General's comment that Australians have, or should have, the right to be bigots. That argument was directly related to the question and goes to the heart of the issues raised by it.

The following excerpt contained much specific contemporary material which, when discussed in further detail later in the essay, took the answer far beyond the rather general discussion seen in many student responses of less merit.

*Australia has generally been able to respect others' political views such as with Pauline Hanson's efforts in the past, to Clive Palmer and the Palmer United Party. Australians are also unlikely to be restrained if they peacefully protest their political opinions. This corresponds to everyone's right to free media, assembly, religion and speech which is vital. The ABC may be government funded but is not afraid to hold the government accountable. Print media through the domination of News Corp has a less diverse representation. Freedom of religion recently has been a talking point as to how much of a religion can be limited. Banning the hijab, a common garment for women who believe in Islam, could be seen as a restriction on this right of religion.*

The following excerpt also presents a contemporary example, which lifted the essay.

*Most notably, the new Tasmanian Senator Jacquie Lambie has been seen as a breath of fresh air into the Australian parliament. Although sometimes her ideas and comments have been taken lightly among some voters, among others she is what the people have wanted to see in parliament for years. Her diverse range of political views and opinions has displayed the effectiveness of democracy in Australia.*

While the question was not merely an invitation to discuss current affairs of Australian politics and did require a theoretical underpinning, such as a discussion of the electoral system or basic rights and freedoms, the examples mentioned in these two excerpts bring general theoretical 'textbook' ideas to life by applying them to contemporary events in Australian politics. Students were rewarded for demonstrating that ability.

## Question 2

This question allowed students to display their knowledge of the protection of democratic rights and freedom in Australia in comparison with another system they had studied. Most students chose the United States. Many students had extensive knowledge, although their essays tended towards a 'list' format, featuring comments regarding the separation of powers, responsible government, compulsory voting, express and implied rights in the Australian and US Constitutions, and the US Bill of Rights. These responses often had a rather mechanical feel, with little awareness of some of the more contemporary and lively debates that characterise the question.

Many students argued that the US protects democratic rights and freedoms better than Australia does because Australia does not have a Bill of Rights or even a statutory Charter – one of very few democratic countries not to do so. However, some students argued that despite these apparent shortcomings, Australia does a better job of protecting democratic rights and freedoms of its citizens than the US does. This is achieved via a combination of common law rights enforced by the courts as well as specific statutes such as the *Racial Discrimination Act* and the *Equal Opportunity Act*.

A small number of students took their analysis to a higher level by incorporating contemporary rights issues and debates into their essays. An example was the free speech debate in Australia as it evolved throughout 2014. Students explained that the Abbott government, and principally its Attorney-General, Senator George Brandis, believed that in Australia the balance of democratic rights was skewed too far in favour of protection of groups from discrimination and too far away from basic individual rights such as freedom of speech. To that end, Senator Brandis had sought to amend the *Racial Discrimination Act* with a view to reinforcing and extending Australians' freedom of speech. However, as these students noted, significant parts of the Australian community did not see the right to free speech as the Attorney-General did.

## Question 3

This question allowed students to demonstrate their knowledge of the policy-making process via one or more specific contemporary policy issues. High-scoring responses needed to reach a judgment as to the significance of the executive when compared with other possible influences likely to influence domestic policy, such as parliament, the Opposition



and minor parties, interest groups, the judiciary, the media and expert opinion. The most successful responses recognised that the extent of executive influence varies considerably. In some policy issues, the executive has been the most significant influence, while in others, the executive lost its dominant policy-making role in the face of other factors and policy players. For example, the Gillard government (2010–13) was not really dominant in relation to a number of policy issues such as carbon pricing, the mining tax and asylum seeker policy. In all these cases, the government was required to compromise, reach agreements and modify its proposals in order to formulate its policy. However, in other policy areas, such as disability insurance and the introduction of paid parental leave, the Gillard government was more dominant and far more influential.

The following excerpt from a student response made this point clearly.

*The Gillard government signature policy of the national disability insurance scheme was organised and formulated by the executive branch of government. Prime Minister Julia Gillard and the Cabinet presided over its formulation, obtaining advice from individuals, the bureaucracy, advocacy groups, and conducting research to effectively ensure the policy was formulated correctly. This key contemporary domestic policy issue demonstrates the significant power and influence held by the executive in relation to the introduction and formulation of domestic policy.*

Many students drew on policy issues advanced by the Abbott government, highlighting the obstacles, challenges and difficulties the executive faced in formulating many of its policies since its election in 2013. For example, Prime Minister Abbott and his ministry found it difficult to formulate their climate change policy (Direct Action) in 2014 and were required to make concessions to crossbench senators in order to have this policy pass the Australian parliament. In a similar vein, the 2014–15 Federal Budget contained numerous policies that the executive, led by Prime Minister Abbott, was not able to formulate as it would have preferred. Some excellent responses discussed the lack of success by the Abbott government in amending the *Racial Discrimination Act*. In the face of strong opposition from a range of stakeholders, the executive effectively abandoned this policy proposal in 2014.

Conversely, the executive of the Abbott government was more influential in some policy areas, notably its asylum seeker policy (Operation Sovereign Borders), although even this was subject to some amendment following judicial review by the High Court.

#### Question 4

Students took a range of approaches to this question. Many agreed that Australian foreign policy has not changed significantly in recent years and argued that the nature of foreign policy means that, unlike many domestic policy areas, foreign policy is largely bipartisan and not prone to pronounced changes of direction over a relatively short time frame. These students also argued correctly that Australian national interests do not change significantly over a few years or with a change of government. Contemporary evidence was used to bolster that view, including the Australian alliance with the United States; Australia's pursuit of improved access to export markets via free trade agreements with other nations; and Australia's desire to be seen as a good global citizen. Specific aspects of the Abbott government's foreign policy were cited to illustrate these points, such as the signing of free trade agreements with Japan, China and South Korea; Australia's support for efforts to tackle the Islamic State in the Middle East; and Foreign Minister Julie Bishop's condemnation of the downing of flight MH17 in the Security Council of the United Nations. All these events occurred in 2014. This question did not specify a particular geographic region such as the Asia-Pacific, and evidence from further afield was acceptable.

Other students argued that there have been some notable changes in Australian foreign policy in recent years. Some students suggested that the reactive nature of much foreign policy means that changes in foreign policy are inevitable. For example, some of these students argued that the MH17 air disaster in July 2014 led to Australia adopting a more critical attitude towards Russia than might otherwise have been the case. Similarly, the significant changes to Australia's foreign aid program in 2014 can be viewed as a reaction to worsening budget conditions and marked a significant change in Australian foreign policy.

A third successful approach was to analyse possible changes to Australian foreign policy priorities with the change of government in 2013. Using this approach, some students argued that the changes to Australia's foreign aid program reflected a change in the emphasis of foreign policy from the Rudd/Gillard governments to the Abbott government. In bolstering that line of argument, some students made good use of Tony Abbott's comment from late 2013 that Australian foreign policy should be 'more Jakarta, less Geneva'. Students used that quote to argue that the Abbott government had taken a less global, internationalist view of Australian foreign policy than was evident when Kevin Rudd was Australian foreign minister.