

2020 VCE Australian Politics examination report

General comments

Examination responses revealed a high level of engagement by many students with events in Australian politics throughout 2020 itself and in recent years. A demonstrated awareness of current political affairs in conjunction with evidence of the detailed knowledge and skills set out in the study design remains the key to success in this subject.

In their preparation, students should take note of the range of instructional terms that might be used in examination questions. Terms such as 'outline', 'explain' and 'define' require a different type of response to questions using higher-order terms such as 'critically compare', 'discuss' or 'analyse'. Attention should be paid to these instructional terms during the year and practice questions should be completed with them clearly in mind.

Students should use the mark allocation and amount of space as an indication of the length of responses expected in Section A of the examination; it should be noted that questions worth 6–8 marks require a significantly detailed response and the inclusion of supporting evidence or examples. Federal political examples must be used, not state government ones, despite the plethora of examples that were evident from Victoria in 2020.

When using examples, students must ensure they are factually correct and relevant to the question. Confusing the names of government ministers or departments, incorrectly citing the names of the United States (US) chambers of congress or confusion over the relationship of the example to the response detracted from some responses. Students are reminded that examples, case studies and evidence should come from within the last 10 years. Questions relating to Area of Study 3 particularly require detailed examples and discussions of policy case studies and the elements that impact upon them. Students and teachers are encouraged to explore a range of relevant and detailed policy examples.

In Section B, essays were generally well structured and coherently written, and mostly of a suitable length. However, students are reminded to avoid pre-preparing an essay and attempting to use this to answer an unseen question. Discussion of detailed evidence and examples are crucial in an essay, as is a demonstrated understanding of some of the key concepts in the course, such as democracy. Essay responses must also address all areas of the question; this was particularly notable in relation to Question 4, where aspects of the question were ignored by some students.

Specific information

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what 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 resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

Section A

Question 1

Marks	0	1	Average
%	19	81	0.8

Some specific roles of a federal minister include:

- ministers are in charge of a government department
- ministers can answer questions in parliament or in Question Time
- ministers who are senior ministers attend Cabinet meetings and suggest policy ideas
- ministers are expected to adhere to both individual and collective ministerial responsibility.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	6	29	65	1.6

Some constitutional powers of the Governor-General include:

- representing the monarch/performing ceremonial role of the Head of State
- acting as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces
- giving royal assent to bills passed by parliament
- appointing the Prime Minister, Ministers, the Federal Executive Council and Judges of the High Court
- dismiss ministers including the Prime Minister (many students referred to the events of 1975 as evidence of this power. The reason for the dismissal should be concisely and accurately explained. Given this is a significant historical event and the only demonstration of this power, the 10-year time frame for examples was not enforced)
- dissolving/proroguing Parliament and issuing writs for elections.

Students were required to identify a constitutionally granted power of the governor-general and then briefly describe what this means in practice. Specific constitutional sections were not needed.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	5	38	57	1.5

Possible ways the rights and freedoms of Australians are protected include:

- in legislation made by the parliament
- through the democratic principle of the rule of law
- by the separation of powers, including an independent judiciary
- by explicit and implied rights in the constitution – those specifically referring to rights/freedoms (e.g. implied right to vote).

Students needed to correctly identify a way and then describe its operation for two marks.

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	10	15	24	28	16	7	2.5

- Public funding of Australian candidates/parties is given based on the number of first preference votes they receive in an election over 4 per cent of the primary vote. In 2020 this amount was set at \$2.82 per vote (see the AEC website for updates).
- This funding helps enhance democracy by increasing the range of candidates who can participate in elections and providing voters with greater choice. It also enhances political equality as without this funding only wealthy candidates/parties could run. On the other hand, these funds are allocated well after an election has been held and may not actually meet the costs candidates cover in a campaign, particularly Independents.
- Disclosure of electoral donations, which now must take place for donations of \$14 3000 or more (July 2020) is a key way in which democratic accountability and transparency is enhanced. Citizens can see which parties/candidates receive these donations – though not in real time, which is a key criticism of the system and weakens this accountability. Significantly, there is no limit to donations, only rules around disclosure. Additionally, as of 2019 all foreign donations above \$1000 are banned to help reduce political interference from overseas.
- Many students referred to the useful example of Clive Palmer in responses to this question, noting the democratic concern of him being able to donate over \$60 million from his personal wealth to his own party. This saw him achieve significant influence in the 2019 election as he was able to promote his own party and attack the ALP, reducing the ALP vote and possibly assisting the wins of Lib/National party candidates in key seats.

This proved to be a challenging question for some students, while others demonstrated a detailed knowledge of Australia's electoral funding rules. Students needed to analyse either the public funding aspect of the AEC's electoral funding rules, the rules around disclosure of donations, or both. An analysis of either of these aspects needed to include a description of the rule(s), specific examples of the relevant rules and a linking of these to the idea of democracy and how its core principles underpin Australian elections. High-scoring responses did this coherently; lower scoring responses were too general and often brief.

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

Australia's electoral funding rules are only somewhat successful in upholding the democratic operation of Australian elections.

Through the system of electoral funding political parties receive a proportional amount of funding according to the number of votes they receive, if they are successful in obtaining over a certain percentage of the vote. However, the system of electoral funding disproportionately favours the two major parties (Liberal and Labor) as they receive millions in funding while small parties such as the Animal Justice Party only receive around \$150,000.

Additionally electoral funding rules favour candidates who are able to raise funds themselves as electoral funding is only paid after election day. For example, Zali Steggall raised \$1.1 million for her fight against incumbent MP Tony Abbott and was duly elected, while other candidates such as Oliver Yates who were unable to raise such funds would be unable to compete with the spending of major parties and thus have less of a chance of being elected.

While the distribution of electoral funding is successful in upholding the democratic operation of Australian elections, the timing of the payment of this funding renders it only somewhat successful.

Question 5a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	9	57	34	1.3

The US Constitution establishes an independent judiciary by clearly separating the three branches of government from each other (the legislative branch, the executive branch and the judicial branch). The judicial branch (the US Supreme Court) operates independently from the other branches and is part of a complex system of checks and balances to protect its separation and role.

Students could also have answered that appointments to the US Supreme Court are made by the executive branch (the President) but approved by the legislative branch (the Senate), ensuring judicial independence due to their non-election, guaranteed salary and tenure for life.

Question 5b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	6	13	39	42	2.2

For this question an explanation of the US-specific term 'checks and balances' was required: for example, 'Checks and balances refers to the powers held by each branch of the three separated powers in the USA and how they can hold each other branch to account to prevent an abuse of power'.

Good examples were used by many students, including the process of appointing Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court in late 2020 and, similarly, the process of appointing Brett Kavanaugh in 2018. Other examples referred to the process of President Trump's ultimately unsuccessful impeachment in 2019/2020 and to the power of the Presidential veto and its overturning experienced by President Obama in 2016 with the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act.

Question 6a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	8	12	27	53	2.2

Political equality refers to the notion that the votes of all eligible voters must be treated equally in value (one vote one value) and that all eligible voters must have fair access to the process of voting itself.

Examples of how the US electoral system does not demonstrate the value of political equality include:

- the nature of the electoral college; in its ignoring of the popular vote and in the weighting it gives to lower-populated states over higher-populated ones
- elections being run by states, not an overriding federal electoral body, leads to inconsistency in registration and voting processes and the drawing of electoral boundaries
- voluntary voting can contribute to voter suppression and to an under-representative result and mandate
- the malapportionment evident in the US Senate, where lower-populated states have two senators, just as the higher-populated states do.

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

One way in which the electoral system of the United States of America is inconsistent with the value of political equality is through the unbalanced number of constituents in House districts. While the size of a district of a House of Representatives is about 725 000, due to the requirement that at least all states have one representative, the vote of someone in Wyoming (with a population of around 500 000) is worth more than that of someone in California (with a population of over 40 million).

Question 6b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	14	16	32	29	9	2.0

The process of the presidential primaries in the US electoral system involves the following:

- Primary elections (which could take place as caucuses) occur in a presidential election year from February – June.
- They are held state by state among candidates all seeking the nomination of their party to contest the election for the presidency in November. As the elections continue, candidates who are unsuccessful often drop out.
- Winners of the popular vote in each state primary are then represented by state delegates who pledge to vote for them at their party convention.
- The party candidate who wins the greatest number of votes from delegates at the Party Convention in the middle of the year (which is usually evident in advance) becomes the party nominee to contest the presidential election in November.

The examples of the Democratic Primaries in 2020 (in which Joe Biden prevailed over Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren) or the Republican Primaries in 2016 (in which Donald Trump prevailed over a number of more traditional Republican candidates) were used by many students.

Ideally, students should have outlined four main stages in the US presidential primary process. Some high-scoring responses demonstrated an excellent awareness of the process, which had in fact taken place during 2020 and so provided timely evidence; some low-scoring responses were far too general or factually incorrect (for example, primaries are actual elections, not only debates).

Question 7

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	10	5	10	12	13	18	19	10	4	4.2

In critically comparing the impact of political parties on the legislative branches of both countries, students were required to analyse and evaluate the similarities and differences between the two systems.

Similarities include:

- Parties set the legislative agenda.
- Parties can use their numbers to block legislation, particularly in the Senates.
- Both nation's legislatures are dominated by two major parties that broadly represent both conservative and more progressive ideas in their policies and ideas (e.g. Liberal/Republicans, ALP/Democrats).
- Parties nominate the presiding officers.
- Parties pre-select the candidates who ultimately end up in the legislative branches.

Differences include:

- Minor parties are more prevalent in the Australian legislature (especially the Senate) and can play a key role in passing, blocking, amending and scrutinising legislation.
- In the Australian legislature, the party with a majority of seats in the House forms the government (executive branch), whereas in the US the party of the executive branch may be different to the majority party in the House.
- In the US, parties accept a looser party discipline from their members when voting in the legislature compared to Australia's stricter expectations.

This question had the highest mark allocation in Section A. It was therefore required that students write a substantial answer. ‘Critically compare’ means students should analyse and evaluate similarities and differences. Students and teachers are encouraged to practise these types of questions during the year in order to develop their skills in responding. These questions are marked holistically and could be thought of as a ‘mini essay’. Students needed to show overall that they understood political parties do have some impact on both the US and Australian legislatures in similar and different ways, whether positive or negative.

The following is an extract from a high-scoring response.

Political parties in the US, through a lack of strict party discipline, as seen in Australia, make for an arguably more representative legislative branch for the US than that of Australia. In this way, traditionally, members of the Congress are more affiliated with their districts than with their party, meaning that in divisions they are more likely to vote according to conscience rather than party ideology. For example despite it being a major electoral promise for Trump in 2017, the Congress failed to pass the repeal of Obamacare due to three Republican members (members of his own party) voting against the repeal..... On the other hand Australian political parties are generally constrained by party discipline, making for a less representative...branch.

Question 8a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	4	21	41	35	2.1

Students should be able to explain how the various elements outlined in the study design can influence the formulation of domestic policy. Rather than only listing the element and giving a brief example of where it was relevant to a recent domestic policy, students needed to briefly explain the way in which their chosen element had an influence on the specific policy example. For instance, interest groups such as Seniors Australia could lobby, which means directly approach and meet with government ministers, in order to convey in person the strength of their members on matters to do with the aged care budget. Or international factors such as the closing of international borders during the early stages of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which led to the Australian government also closing its borders and imposing strict quarantine rules internally in response to global expectations and reactions.

Question 8b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	13	9	19	26	21	14	2.7

This was a complex question, which demonstrated that many students did not understand what the ‘electoral mandate’ is. This is a key concept in the course that students must grapple with. The electoral mandate is the permission or authority a government has to formulate and implement policies because it has been legitimately elected by the people.

A mandate can be seen as ‘specific’ (e.g. the Abbott government was elected in 2013 with a clear mandate to specifically implement the policy of ‘scrapping the carbon tax’ because they said during the campaign they would do this if elected) or ‘general’ (e.g. because they have been elected to government, they can manage issues that arise, such as the Morrison government having a general mandate to respond to the COVID-19 crisis because they were elected to government legitimately in 2019).

The influence of an electoral mandate can be large when a government is able to formulate and/or implement policies they campaigned on; for example, the Morrison government’s promised tax cuts during the 2019 election were a key priority for them in government, pursued despite hurdles such as their lack of control of the Senate and budgetary complications, because the government could argue their mandate made it important for them to deliver.

A mandate can be complicated by numbers in either chamber, changing circumstances nationally or internationally, deals with minor parties and the electoral cycle. The often referred to example is the Gillard government saying during the 2010 election campaign that the ALP would not introduce a 'carbon tax' and then doing so after elected. This demonstrates how a mandate might not be given to a specific policy but changing political circumstances (e.g. forming a minority government) necessitates a political shift to a different policy formulation.

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

Electoral mandate refers to the authority given by the people to the government to govern and implement its policy platform. An electoral mandate is particularly strong in allowing the government to argue for their policy where in formulating the policy in parliament they are able to state that they had promised reform to the people and should therefore be able to grant it. For example the Coalition government's formulation of the 3 stage tax cuts of \$1.58 billion was passed without much complaint from the opposition as this had been a major electoral promise for them. On the other hand in changing circumstances, the influence of electoral mandate can be seen to not be as strong. For example, despite their promise to bring Australia's economy back to surplus, the 2020 pandemic has made Australia have to reprioritise by creating wage subsidy schemes such as jobkeeper to combat the economic effects of Covid19. Therefore generally an electoral mandate is able to play as a strong tool for the government to argue their policy platform, however in changing circumstances they may have to disregard this in order to deal with the issue at hand.

Question 9a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	6	19	26	26	22	2.4

High-scoring responses to this question demonstrated a clear understanding of the role of ministerial advisers in policy formulation as being centred on giving political advice to their minister or at least advice that might reflect favourably on the minister. Ministerial advisers might be involved in research, speech writing and acting as a gatekeeper in relation to who actually gets to speak to the minister on policy/portfolio matters. Specific examples of ministerial advisers, such as those involved in the National Energy Guarantee with Malcom Turnbull, were excellent. Many answers made mention of Peta Credlin's role as an adviser (ultimately Chief of Staff) to Tony Abbott. Some students clearly mistook ministerial advisers for bureaucrats or members of the public service. A clear distinction needs to be made between these roles.

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

The influence of Ministerial Advisers has increased in the last 40 years. Ministerial Advisers are employed by MPs to advise MPs on the political implications of policy decisions. This advice often rivals the 'frank and fearless' advice of the apolitical public service meaning that Ministers might choose advice that would advance their career rather than be the best decision for the country. Peta Credlin was often considered a barrier for Tony Abbott to his department heads. Ministerial advisers are also hard to hold accountable meaning they can make and give advice without any consequence.

Question 9b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	4	7	12	21	31	14	10	3.5

This question was allocated six marks and required an in-depth discussion and the use of relevant evidence. Students needed to explain the overall role of the Opposition (to scrutinise the government and to provide alternate choices in policy and for elections) and its influence in relation to the formulation of either domestic or foreign policy, the choice of which should have been made clear in the first sentence of the response. The

influence of the Opposition can be large when policy issues, domestic or foreign, are contentious and attract media attention, when numbers in either House are close or reversed (e.g. a hostile Senate), when there are effective Shadow Ministers and when there is a bipartisan desire to cooperate. The influence of the Opposition is less when the government's majority is large, when policy is dealt with in confidence and when policy matters do not require parliamentary approval. Some students made good use of the JobKeeper and JobSeeker policy formulation examples in 2020, for which the Opposition suggested some changes, and of various foreign policy matters where bipartisanship is the norm.

The following is an extract from a high-scoring response.

In domestic policy the opposition is able to scrutinise and hold the government accountable for their policy action, influencing their policy platform. In this way through methods of accountability such as Question Time the opposition can expose government action and influence them to take policy action. For example after the issues involving the Commonwealth Bank in 2017–2018 through Question Time the opposition informed the government to establish a royal commission into the banking sector ... On the other hand, however, the Opposition's influence on domestic policy can be diminished where the government is able to gain the support of the crossbench. For example through negotiations with Centre Alliance, the government was able to pass the legislation that changed University fees in 2020 ...

Question 10

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	10	30	61	1.5

A clear explanation of one way in which Australia's economic and trade interests are pursued, as a key element of Australian foreign policy, was required by this question as well as an accurate example of this. This could include Free Trade Agreements (such as CHAFTA), multilateral forums (such as the WTO) and pursuing favourable investment and trade opportunities, especially in our region, such as the recent signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

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

Australia's economic and trade interests are pursued through multilateral forums through which Australia collaborates with more than 2 other states to establish trade agreements that encourage economic growth benefits for all the states involved. This is seen through APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) which is a trade agreement between 20+ states including Australia in the Asia Pacific region to encourage free trade.

Question 11

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	7	2	5	26	60	3.3

Bilateral doctrines of foreign policy refer to Australia pursuing actions or formal agreements between Australia and one other nation (two parties in total) on a specific goal to benefit the two nations involved, such as the Australia Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (Free Trade Deal) or the Lombok Defence Treaty between Australia and Indonesia.

Multilateral doctrines of foreign policy refer to Australia pursuing actions or formal agreements between three or more nations on a shared broader regional, international or multilateral goal: for example, Australia belonging to the G20, the United Nations (UN) or the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

Question 12

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	10	5	13	23	28	17	5	3.2

Students needed to show an understanding of what bipartisanship means in relation to Australian foreign policy and how much it is evident in recent times, and discuss at least one example to support their overall view. The inclusion of a contemporary example was a key component of the question missed by some students. Reference to the stimulus provided was acceptable – indeed the material should have prompted students' thoughts – but was not essential.

To a large extent foreign policy is usually bipartisan – that is, agreed upon by both major parties – as it is generally accepted that Australia's national interest is shared by both major parties, so overall foreign policy priorities remain the same no matter who is in government. For example, issues such as sending the military to combat ISIS in Syria and to Iraq under the War on Terror, support for the US alliance, and opposition to China's expansion in the South China Sea have had bipartisan agreement.

However, other issues in recent times that are more globally divisive, such as Australia's commitment to climate change measures under the Paris Agreement and slight nuances on how to respond to China's trade tensions, have had different approaches.

The following is an extract from a high-scoring response.

Australia's foreign policy is bipartisan as the nature of foreign policy is more transient, reactive, and unpredictable especially compared to [domestic] policy. This makes it politically disadvantageous for the opposition to comment on the government's actions, yet most of the time, the policy platforms between the 2 parties are rarely drastically different; thus the opposition often agrees with the government. This was seen in 2020 where in response to Prime Minister Scott Morrison's demand for a global inquiry into China's mishandling of the Covid-19 pandemic, both Foreign Minister Linda Reynolds and Shadow Minister Penny Wong agreed that Australia should maintain non-aggressive relations with China by not provoking them. Australian foreign policy can also be partisan as there can be certain decision making of the government in non-pressured circumstances that therefore can be scrutinised by the opposition. This was seen in 2020 where the government's purchase of 12 French made navy ships was scrutinized by the Labor opposition as irresponsible spending...

Section B

Students and teachers are reminded of the importance of regular essay writing practice during the year and as a key revision focus prior to the exam.

The following essay writing conventions should be followed for essays in Australian Politics: a clearly structured introduction, development of a coherent argument that addresses the question fully, use of focused paragraphs, incorporation of evidence and examples, and a brief conclusion. Students should also avoid using the first person in a formal essay. Essays should be of a reasonable length, as can be written in 35-40 minutes; the inclusion of at least three to four paragraphs in response to the question allows students to demonstrate the breadth and depth of their knowledge in a detailed way. Shorter responses – for example, of only two paragraphs – do not allow for the criteria to be fully addressed.

Students and teachers should familiarise themselves with the following criteria for assessing the essay and understand the essay is marked holistically out of 20:

- development of a coherent and relevant argument that addresses the specific demands of the question
- demonstration of political knowledge that is accurate and appropriate for the essay question
- accurate use of key political terms and concepts
- use of contemporary examples and case studies to support explanations, points of view and arguments.

The highest scoring essays clearly addressed the topic, using relevant arguments and including detailed evidence and contemporary examples that demonstrated a critical awareness of recent political events. Such essays also drew upon the accurate use of key political terms and a broad demonstration of political knowledge. Low-scoring responses were characterised by brevity, repetition and unsubstantiated generalisations. These essays also failed to include examples or case studies and inaccurately used key terms. Evidence of prepared essays was unfortunately sometimes apparent. Practice in dealing with unexpected and complex questions will assist students to develop skills in responding to unfamiliar material under examination conditions.

Question chosen	0	1	2	3	4
%	2	50	29	9	11

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	0	1	0	1	4	5	3	3	10	11	13	15	9	11	5	4	1	1	12.6

Question 1

This was a popular choice of topic for students.

The essay allowed students to explore the value and lived experience of participation in the Australian political process as a whole entity. It was important that this breadth of understanding of the political system was explored, not just the electoral system on which some students solely focused. Higher scoring essays discussed the importance of participation as a key democratic value and how effective and active participation in the political system strengthened Australian democracy. Such a discussion in the introductions of some essays ensured the rest of the response was not just a list of examples of participation, which some responses were, and rather gave a measured account of the strength of participation as a core value in Australian democracy.

Overall, there is a range of ways citizens can participate in Australia (voting, joining a party, running as an independent or party candidate at an election, joining an interest group, protesting, speaking out in the media, taking a test case to court, lobbying an MP etc.). On the other hand, participation can be diminished in circumstances where a person cannot access any of the above, is prevented from access or there is a lack of knowledge or education about the political system. Additionally, Parliament and its proceedings are open to the people but cannot be engaged in with from outside.

Higher scoring essays covered at least some of the above and made use of relevant examples from within the last 10 years.

The following is an extract from a body paragraph in a high-scoring response.

It is true that due to the nature of the Australian political system the participation of citizens is somewhat limited. Both major parties have closed pre-selection processes which are only open to eligible members of their party, which means that not all citizens are able to participate in the pre-selection of a candidate for their electorate. For example, Jim Molan was pre-selected to an 'un-winnable' fourth spot in the NSW Liberal Senate ticket by less than 10% of NSW Liberal party membership, but went on to receive over 150,000 first preference votes in the election, the highest number of votes for an individual candidate in history. However some parties such as the Greens allow all party members to vote in pre-selections, somewhat increasing the ability for citizens to participate ...

The following is an introduction from a high-scoring response.

While there are some limits on the opportunities for citizens to participate in the political process, for the most part citizens are very able to become involved in the Australian political process. Citizen can choose to stand for election themselves as a candidate for a party- by obtaining endorsement from a registered political party- or as an independent ... for example Zali Steggal stood as an independent candidate in the electorate of Warringah and was successful in defeating the incumbent MP Tony Abbott ...

Question 2

This was the second-most popular essay choice for students, and overall there were many well written essays in response to the question. Essays demonstrating effective use of contemporary examples from recent American politics, and the accurate use of political knowledge and incorporation of relevant key terms, demonstrated a high level of understanding of Area of Study 2.

Students needed to identify the constraints that exist on the power of the President and then consider to what extent these are actually effective. A brief outline of the role of the President and the extent of their power was a useful way of addressing the topic to begin with before outlining some key constraints and discussing their effectiveness.

Constraints such as impeachment, the two-term limit, a hostile Congress, midterm elections, the role of the Supreme Court and the overall framework of checks and balances in the US system were the most commonly discussed. High-scoring essays then addressed how each of these constraints could be overcome or matched in some circumstances by presidential or executive branch powers.

Evidence from the term in office of President Trump was well used by many students. Lower scoring essays sometimes used this evidence in a superficial or too general way. The development of a coherent argument in relation to the question is an essential essay criterion; students need to ensure they do this rather than only list examples or refer broadly to recent political events.

The following is an introduction from a high-scoring response.

To a great extent are the powers of the President of the United States of America effectively constrained. They are limited by constitutional and structural constraints as well as the power of individuals to use their vote and enforce accountability. A constitutional constraint on the president's power is the ability for congress to impeach the president if they feel that they are unfit or have committed a illegal act that undermines the sanctity of the office they're supposed to uphold.

The following are extracts from another high-scoring response.

Within the American political system there are constitutional checks and balances between the three branches of government that underpin the separation of powers in order to ensure the president doesn't abuse their power. In this way, the legislature plays a strong role in constraining the powers of the president through tis absolute separation from the executive. In this way in 2019-2020 the House Committee on Intelligence made an inquiry into Trump's coercion with Russia during the 2016 election which led to the Democrat dominated House of Representatives to impeach him ...

Despite this, however, the ability of the President to make judicial appointments undermines the principle of the separation of powers, and grants them power over the judiciary. This has been particularly evident after the death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg where Trump was able to nominate conservative justice Amy Coney Barret, making the composition of the Supreme Court conservative dominated ...

Question 3

This topic required students to address both the formulation and implementation of domestic policy and to discuss the difficulties faced by governments in carrying out this role. It is essential that students are able to differentiate between the formulation and implementation stages of domestic policy. This topic invited students to explore the many difficulties or challenges that exist in both steps

Higher scoring essays discussed several recent examples of domestic policy: for example, economic and public health responses to the COVID-19 crisis such as JobKeeper and JobSeeker; recent energy policy initiatives such as the National Energy Guarantee (NEG); the Morrison government tax cuts of 2019; and the introduction of same-sex marriage. Many students identified some of the difficulties that were encountered by the federal government in both formulating and implementing such policies. Difficulties such as budget restraints, control of parliamentary numbers, public opinion, the media, federal/state relationships, the Senate and the role of the high court were some examples used. The essay then also required students to explore the powers open to the federal government to counter some of these problems.

High-scoring essays used a wide range of policy examples such as those listed above and included detail relevant to these.

Given the amended study design for Australian Politics in 2020, students were not required to write in detail on one specific domestic policy case study. This requirement was in place for 2020 only, and both students and teachers should ensure they are familiar with the details for this area of study in the original study design.

The following is an introduction to a high-scoring response.

The government efficiency and effectiveness of the formulation and implementation of domestic policy and based upon the composition of parliament and the competency of the public service. Many difficulties arise when formulating policy including minority government and a hostile Senate. But when bi-partisan support is given these issues are irrelevant. Implementation of policy can be difficult for a range of reasons like budget issues, ambitious timeframes and disunity between state and federal government.

Question 4

This essay required students to address several components; however, many students ignored key parts of the topic or attempted to rewrite pre-prepared foreign policy essays.

Students needed to consider the overall formulation process of Australian foreign policy and the factors involved in this, specifically the role of the executive and bureaucracy. They needed to consider if these two factors were too heavily influential in the process or if other factors had as much influence, and if not, why not. This analysis needed to be discussed with reference to one of the key challenges listed. These challenges are outlined in the study design, and in 2020 at least ONE of these had to be studied. (NB refer to original study design for 2021.)

In general, it is important for students to demonstrate an understanding of why the challenges presented to be studied are challenging or problematic for the overall aims of Australian foreign policy. This was lacking in many responses. For example, climate change and environmental issues pose a challenge to Australia's reputation as a good global citizen due to our lack of co-operation with many international targets; lack of action on climate change in our regions could also pose a threat to our long-term national security if nations in the Pacific region face instability in government due to the effects of climate change on their economies and livelihoods. The threat of global terrorism poses a challenge to Australia's foreign policy objective of protecting national security and impacts the alliances and security arrangements Australia makes with other nations and what that requires of the government.

In the context of this question, students also needed to demonstrate how various factors, such as the executive, bureaucracy, interest groups, international events and more might contribute to the forming of policies devised to address the specific challenges, and which ones have the heaviest influence.

For example, a student could argue that the bureaucracy and executive are too heavily influential in forming policies to address the challenge of climate change as a foreign policy issue in Australia and that other factors, such as elections and public opinion, should play a greater role.

The following is an extract from an introduction to a high-scoring response.

The influence of the executive and bureaucracy in the formulation of foreign policy is exacerbated by the constitutional arrangements that give little power to the legislature on international issues and the lack of voter attention that global policy receives in elections. Due to the Prime Minister's relatively unconstrained powers on foreign policy and his heading of the Cabinet's National Security Committee, he plays the most important and influential role on international decisions. Additionally ministers whose departments extend globally also have large powers regarding foreign policy that only increases the influence of the executive ...