2024 VCE Australian Politics external assessment report

General comments

The 2024 VCE Australian Politics examination was the final examination based on the now concluded *VCE Australian and Global Politics Study Design Unit 3 and 4 2018–2024*.

For 2025, teachers and students should refer to [VCE Politics Study Design From 2025](Pages%20-%20VCE%20Politics). Sample materials will be published in early 2025.

This examination comprised two sections:

* Section A consisted of 14 short-answer and extended-answer questions ranging between two and seven marks in value, and drawing on all four areas of the study. Students were required to answer all questions; however, some students left questions unanswered.
* Section B comprised four essay questions relating to each area of study. Students were required to answer one essay question.

Students showed a strong interest in contemporary Australian and American political issues in their responses. They were required to discuss contemporary examples and case studies from the past 11 years. This instruction was written explicitly on the examination paper and was adhered to by most students, although some cited out-of-date examples from as far back as the Howard government.

Success on this examination paper required students to demonstrate a strong understanding of the key values and principles of liberal democracies, and the extent to which the institutions and processes of the Australian and US political systems uphold these values and principles. Students must ensure that in their studies they address the key knowledge and all of the key skills outlined in the study design.

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 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

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | Average |
| % | 8 | 24 | 68 | 1.6 |

This question required students to describe the role of the Speaker of the Australian House of Representatives, giving at least two specific functions. Presiding over, or chairing, sittings of the House of Representatives, the Speaker’s role includes:

* maintaining order in the chamber
* interpreting and applying the rules of parliamentary procedure as embodied in the standing orders
* deciding on points of order
* allocating the call to members wishing to speak.

The Speaker supervises rather than participates in proceedings. The Speaker does not vote, except when numbers are equal, in which case the Speaker may exercise a casting vote.

While most responses focused on the Speaker’s procedural role in the Chair, some also described the Speaker’s responsibility for:

* the administration of the House of Representatives and its immediate surroundings
* the Department of the House of Representatives
* the Department of Parliamentary Services (in conjunction with the President of the Senate).

Some responses also mentioned the role that the Speaker plays in representing the House in its relations with other parts of Parliament, other branches of government, and outside bodies and people, including other parliaments.

Question 2

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Average |
| % | 0.6 | 1 | 4 | 29 | 29 | 23 | 13 | 4.1 |

Students were required, firstly, to explain the separation of powers within the Australian system of government. Many responses correctly identified the separation of powers as the principle that there are three branches of government power in Australia: legislative, executive and judicial.

Acceptable explanations of this doctrine included:

* Australia’s liberty depends upon the three powers being invested in separate bodies.
* The division of powers between three branches provides for checks and balances in our system of government.
* The separation exists to ensure that no one branch of government has excessive power.
* The principle protects Australia against corruption and tyrannical rule.

Secondly, students needed to explain whether the separation of powers upholds democratic values and principles. To be awarded full marks, responses were expected to make evident the relationship between the separation of powers and two relevant values and principles, such as the rule of law, accountability, popular sovereignty and respect for minorities.

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

In Australia we lack a complete separation of powers as our executive, those who administer the law, is drawn from the legislative, who create the law. This means that members of the executive are also members of the legislative. Thus, in order to maintain a clear separation of power, the judicial is independent of the legislative and executive, which helps to ensure that no one person or group has complete control of all the law making powers. This separation certainly still upholds democratic values, such as accountability, through both an independent judiciary as well as review by the legislative to the executive the mechanisms such as question time. This review also ensure that minority voices are heard as the legislative represents all people through the electorates. Further, popular sovereignty, that people are voted in by the people, for the people, is clearly supported, as both the legislative and executive are voted in this manner.

Question 3

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | Average |
| % | 0.6 | 12 | 40 | 48 | 2.3 |

This question required students to identify three ways by which the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) upholds democratic values and principles. To attain full marks, responses needed not only to name any three roles and functions of the AEC but also to link those functions to specific values and principles.

Functions of the AEC and related democratic values include:

* maintaining and updating the electoral roll – participation, equality
* conducting elections and referendums – popular sovereignty, representation
* enforcing compulsory enrolment and compulsory voting – equality, popular sovereignty
* conducting redistributions of electoral boundaries – equality, one vote one value
* conducting electoral research and education – equality, participation
* registering parties and maintaining a register of political parties – equality, accountability
* providing funding and disclosure services – accountability, minority rights, equality, participation.

Responses that outlined three different roles of the AEC in conducting elections only attained full marks if they linked these roles to three relevant democratic values and principles.

Question 4

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Average |
| % | 4 | 6 | 40 | 36 | 15 | 2.5 |

This question asked students to describe two ways that the High Court of Australia protects rights and freedoms, using examples. Responses that provided fewer than two relevant examples were ineligible to attain full marks.

Examples of ways the High Court protects rights and freedoms:

* As the highest court of appeal in Australia, the High Court allows citizens to challenge the decisions of lower courts – the Supreme Courts of the States and Territories, the Federal Court of Australia and the Family Court of Australia.
* The High Court interprets the text and structure of the Australian Constitution and in doing so has found implied rights in the text of the Constitution, such as the implied right to vote and the implied right to freedom of political communication.
* The High Court decides on cases of special federal significance including challenges to the constitutional validity of laws and the constitutional validity of ministerial decisions and actions.
* Through the common law, the High Court developed native title property rights of First Australians.

The following is an excerpt from a high-scoring response:

[…] the HCA can interpret the constitution to establish implied rights, which are those not expressly listed, but still exist through the intention of the constitution. For example, the last implied right to be established with the implied right to vote in the case of Roach v. Electoral Commissioner (2007), which interpreted the sections 7 and 24 of the constitution which gave the people the power to choose their representatives.

The following is an excerpt from a high-scoring response:

The High Court is able to remedy breaches of rights. For example, in November 2023 in the High Court case NZYQ vs. Immigration Minister, the High Court found the practice of indefinite detention of refugees who had already served their time for criminal offences, but couldn’t be deported, was unlawful, as punishment can only be enacted by the judiciary and not the executive, thus protecting the rights to a fair legal process.

Question 5a.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Average |
| % | 5 | 7 | 23 | 17 | 48 | 3.0 |

This question required students to explain two of the powers given to the President in the Constitution of the United States of America.

The powers that responses commonly identified were:

* the power to sign or veto legislation – bills passed by both houses of Congress must be signed into law by the President
* Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States – the President is the supreme military commander and is charged with the responsibility of protecting and defending the United States
* the power to make treaties – the President may negotiate treaties with foreign nations
* the appointment power – the President has constitutional power to nominate and appoint ambassadors, judges of the Supreme Court, ministers, consuls and various other officers of the United States
* the pardon power – the President has constitutional power to grant reprieves and pardons for federal offences, except in cases of impeachment
* the power to present proposed legislation to Congress – the constitutional power to recommend measures for the consideration of Congress includes the federal budget.

Most responses to this question scored well. Lower-scoring responses either failed to explain the powers they had identified, or suggested powers that the Constitution does not grant.

Question 5b.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | Average |
| % | 20 | 80 | 0.8 |

Students needed to identify one constraint on one of the powers that they had identified in their answer to Question 5a. Many responses gave inaccurate and unnecessary details, such as the size of majorities required in congressional votes. However, where a valid constraint had been identified, students were not penalised for inaccuracies that did not contradict the essence of the constraint.

Constraints most frequently identified were:

* the power of Congress to override a presidential veto
* the requirement for Senate confirmation of presidential appointments
* congressional powers to declare war and to grant or deny budgetary measures.

Question 6

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Average |
| % | 17 | 17 | 26 | 22 | 18 | 2.1 |

This question asked students to explain two effects of first-past-the-post (FPTP) voting in the United States of America. This voting formula, also known as plurality voting, is one in which the candidate who wins the most votes wins the election, regardless of whether they have a majority. Many responses confused plurality voting with the winner-takes-all nature of the Electoral College.

Effects of plurality voting include the following:

* FPTP is simple, quick and easy to count, therefore it is easy to produce a winner.
* A candidate can win with less than an absolute majority of the vote, meaning a significant portion of the electorate is not represented by their preferred candidate.
* FPTP tends to favour larger political parties, leading to two-party dominance. This happens because smaller parties struggle to win seats, as voting for them is often seen as ‘wasted’.
* Third-party candidates can act as spoilers, splitting the vote and potentially changing the outcome of an election.
* It is difficult for minor parties and independents to gain representation, so minority rights are arguably less well protected.
* Voters often engage in strategic voting, choosing the ‘lesser of two evils’ rather than their preferred candidate, to avoid ‘wasting’ their vote on a candidate unlikely to win.
* FPTP can contribute to polarisation of the electorate, as parties focus on appealing to their base rather than seeking broader consensus.
* FPTP can exacerbate the effects of gerrymandering, where electoral district boundaries are manipulated to favour one party, which can lead to disproportionate representation in congresses.

Question 7

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Average |
| % | 0 | 6 | 12 | 20 | 24 | 17 | 21 | 3.9 |

For this question, students needed to analyse three ways in which the Constitution of the United States of America protects the rights and freedoms of individuals and minorities. Many responses demonstrated an ability to identify and discuss components of the US Constitution that protect rights and freedoms of individuals and minorities, including:

* the US Bill of Rights – the first ten amendments to the US Constitution
* the 13th Amendment, which codifies the abolition of slavery
* the 14th Amendment, which provides that all people have equal protection before the law
* the separation of powers
* federalism – the constitutional division of powers between the federal and state governments
* the process for constitutional change.

Many responses lacked an analytical dimension. Students and teachers are reminded of the [VCAA glossary of command terms](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/exams/GlossaryofCommandTerms.docx). This indicates that to analyse, students should:

* identify components and the significance of the relationship between them
* draw out and relate implications
* determine logic and reasonableness of information.

Question 8

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Average |
| % | 4 | 9 | 17 | 40 | 31 | 2.8 |

Students were asked to discuss one way that the Opposition, minor parties and independents can affect the government’s domestic policy formulation in Australia. This question allowed many students to display their knowledge of domestic policy that the government has recently introduced to parliament and the influence that non-government members of parliament (MPs) have had on the government’s legislative goals.

Types of influence discussed in responses included:

* voting against, and therefore blocking, legislation
* negotiating amendments to legislation
* horse-trading voting support for unrelated deals or new bills
* referring bills to parliamentary committees for scrutiny and further inquiry or stakeholder consultation
* using question time to scrutinise the policy
* using the media to highlight the policy issue.

Examples of domestic policies that were discussed in responses included:

* the Albanese government’s climate change bills legislating Australia’s emissions reduction target of 43 per cent and net zero emissions by 2050
* the creation of the Housing Australia Future Fund
* the establishment of the National Anti-Corruption Commission
* the government’s policy to make prescription medicines cheaper.

Numerous responses also discussed ways in which non-government MPs influenced the Morrison government’s legislation of income tax cuts after the 2019 election.

Question 9

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Average |
| % | 7 | 8 | 24 | 28 | 15 | 10 | 8 | 3.0 |

This question asked students to explain the roles played by the Prime Minister and other key ministers in the formulation of a contemporary domestic policy that students had studied this year.

Domestic policies that students had studied included:

* the referendum for an Indigenous Voice to Parliament
* Robodebt
* the Housing Australia Future Fund
* JobKeeper.

Many responses demonstrated insufficient depth of knowledge. Lower-scoring responses did not name key individuals or describe with specific detail the roles played by these individuals in steering the policy through Cabinet and parliament or advocating publicly for the policy. Rather than drawing on knowledge, as specified in the question, many responses were based on supposition, using modal verbs to present assumptions about what key individuals would have done in the policy process.

Question 10

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Average |
| % | 0 | 10 | 36 | 38 | 16 | 2.6 |

Students were required to analyse one way that either interest groups or the media can influence domestic policy-making in Australia. Many responses unnecessarily provided more than one way of influencing policy. Higher-scoring responses included contemporary examples of actual influence that the media or interest groups have had on domestic policy formulation.

The following is an excerpt from a high-scoring response:

The Autism Advisory Group help to represent individuals with autism who participate in the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), thus meeting the definition of an interest group, seeking to influence policy construction and decisions without seeking election themselves. The Autism Advisory Group maintained a strong, representative voice amidst Bill Shorten’s 2024 reforms of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, ensuring the needs of their constituents were still facilitated.

The following is an excerpt from a high-scoring response:

The media do not play a direct role in the formulation of domestic policy in Australia, but rather influence it in their role as either champions of government policy or a de facto opposition. The media through investigative reporting, can expose specific areas where policy is either required or where policy needs to be improved. For example, in a 2016 Four Corners exposé entitled “Australia’s shame”, they highlighted the atrocities occurring in the Northern Territory detention centres. This led to the establishment of the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the NT, whose further affected government policy.

Question 11

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | Average |
| % | 10 | 10 | 32 | 49 | 2.2 |

Using a contemporary example, students were asked to explain how the term ‘bipartisan’ applies to Australian foreign policy. Bipartisan is one of the key terms and concepts listed in the [VCE Australian Politics study design](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/australianpolitics/Pages/Index.aspx), and describes situations where measures have the support of both major parties. Most responses demonstrated knowledge of the nature of Australian foreign policy by recognising that it is usually bipartisan. Responses that linked their explanation of the term to a relevant contemporary example were able to attain full marks. The bipartisan support of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and Coalition for the AUKUS trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America was a frequently presented example.

Question 12

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | Average |
| % | 3 | 18 | 47 | 32 | 2.1 |

This question asked students to describe using a contemporary example how one foreign policy instrument has been used by an Australian Government to promote Australia as a good global citizen. High-scoring responses clearly demonstrated how Australia promotes itself as a good global citizen – that is, a nation that lives up to the expectations of the international community. Instruments of Australian foreign policy that were described included:

* foreign aid
* humanitarian and emergency assistance
* peacekeeping and military involvement
* alliances and engagement in multilateral organisations and agreements.

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

The foreign policy instrument of humanitarian assistance has promoted Australia as a good global citizen. Good global citizen refers to making foreign policy which considers other nations and their membership of the international community. The humanitarian assistance of 10,000 temporary humanitarian visas to Ukrainian people as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine promoted Australia as a good global citizen. This is because providing such assistance can be seen as the morally correct thing to do. Thus providing humanitarian assistance to actors in need, Australia improves its status in the international community whilst doing the morally correct thing, promoting us as a good global citizen.

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

One foreign policy instrument is Bilateral and Multilateral doctrines which have promoted Australia as a good global citizen. The Paris climate agreement which Australia entered in 2015 demonstrated how Australians were aligned with the global perspective to combat climate change thus illustrating how we are a good global citizen as we agreed to cut our own emissions.

Question 13

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | Average |
| % | 15 | 26 | 45 | 14 | 1.5 |

Using a contemporary example, students were required to explain how economic conditions affect Australian foreign policy formulation. Many students chose to discuss the global economic contraction experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and global supply chain disruptions such as those caused by the Russia–Ukraine conflict. Domestic fiscal challenges were among other economic conditions discussed. It was important that students were able to show a link between particular economic conditions and an example of government foreign policy formulation.

While numerous responses mentioned China’s imposition of hefty tariffs on a range of Australian products in 2020 – including barley, timber, beef, wine and lobsters – many mistakenly noted that this prompted the Australian Government to negotiate a free trade agreement with China.

Question 14

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Average |
| % | 4 | 5 | 14 | 18 | 22 | 18 | 16 | 3 | 3.7 |

This question required students to analyse how a recent Australian Government has responded to any two key challenges facing contemporary Australian foreign policy. This was a question for which knowledge of the study design was important.

The study design lists key challenges to Australian foreign policy and required students to study and be able to evaluate two of the following:

* global and regional conflicts
* humanitarian crises and natural disasters
* the threat of global terrorism
* climate change and environmental issues
* the economic development of the region
* refugees, people-smuggling and trafficking in persons**.**

Many responses analysed government responses to challenges other than the key challenges identified in the study design. Marks were awarded to the extent that there was overlap between the analysis and the key challenges in the study design. For example, many responses analysed government responses to the rise of China, which was relevant to the key challenges of global and regional conflicts and/or the economic development of the region.

The following is an excerpt from a high-scoring response:

One key challenge is that of global conflicts, such as the war in Ukraine, which a combined effort from both Albanese and Morrison governments has successfully responded to. By utilising multiple foreign policy instruments in key areas of our national interest, we have been able to contribute to the global war effort of the Ukraine. For example, we have contributed over $710m AUD of military equipment including Bushmaster vehicles, and over $75m AUD of humanitarian aid, both contributing to their war effort and upholding our reputation as good global citizens. Further we have placed numerous economic sanctions on Russia, utilising our position as a large exporter of our rich natural resources to cut off Russia’s supplies. This includes over 1100 targeted financial sanctions, as well as a complete ban on the import of Russian coal, gas, oil and gold, and machinery. Whilst the global response has been effective, war rages on, suggesting that our ability to influence is limited without specific military intervention.

Section B

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| % | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0.6 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 11 | 11 | 17 |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | Average |
| 15 | 10 | 7 | 8 | 0.6 | 0 | 13.4 |

The assessment of the essay in Section B was global, based upon criteria that were applied holistically and reflected the assessors’ appraisal of the whole answer. The focus of student responses needed to be on contemporary examples and case studies from within the last 11 years.

The assessment criteria, as detailed on the examination paper, were:

* development of a coherent and relevant argument that addresses the specific demands of the essay 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.

Question 1

This question asked students to evaluate the extent to which the operation of the Commonwealth Parliament ensures the executive is held accountable.

Responses needed to demonstrate an understanding of both the composition and role of the executive in Australian government. Essays needed to evaluate the effectiveness of parliamentary mechanisms in holding the prime minister and ministers accountable. These parliamentary mechanisms could include:

* question time, in which members of parliament can question the prime minister and other ministers about their policies and decisions; this is intended to provide transparency and hold the executive accountable to the legislature
* parliamentary committees, including Senate estimates committees, play a crucial role in scrutinising the actions of the executive. Committees can investigate government activities, examine proposed legislation and hold inquiries into specific issues
* parliamentary debates and votes, especially in the Senate where the executive seldom has a majority.

High-scoring responses discussed challenges to the Commonwealth Parliament in holding the executive accountable, including:

* strong party discipline limiting the effectiveness of parliamentary mechanisms
* former prime minister Scott Morrison secretly appointing himself to multiple ministries during the COVID-19 pandemic
* the failure of the parliament to prevent the Robodebt scandal, as a result of which no responsible ministers lost their jobs.

Question 2

This question asked students to compare the extent to which political parties within the Congress of the United States of America better uphold democratic values than political parties in the Australian Parliament. This question was answered by the fewest students.

Relevant democratic values included:

* equality
* freedom
* majority rule
* minority rights
* representation
* accountability.

High-scoring responses included contemporary evidence to support comparisons and made clear judgements about the influence of political parties in the respective legislatures. Relevant points of comparison included:

* Both countries’ legislatures are dominated by two major parties: the ALP and Liberal Party in the Australian Parliament, and the Republican Party and the Democratic Party in the United States Congress. In Australia, the party with the majority of members in the House of Representatives forms government and controls the legislative agenda, upholding the principles of majority rule and representation. In the US Congress, the party with a majority of elected members in the House of Representatives and in the Senate is called the Majority Party, which controls the legislative agenda and determines the committee chairs.
* Independents may win seats in both legislatures, but this is rarer in the US, where independents who are elected usually caucus with one of the major parties. The two-party dominance in the US can limit the representation of diverse viewpoints. By contrast, Australia’s multi-party system, especially with proportional representation in the Senate, allows for a broader range of political perspectives to be represented.
* Party discipline is much stronger in Australia than in the US. In the US, party members are encouraged to vote along party lines but decide their votes on an individual basis, upholding the principles of freedom and minority rights. In Australia, crossing the floor is rare and the ALP has formal party rules to discourage such action.

The following is the introduction to a high-scoring response:

In both the USA and Australia, political parties play a significant role in the operation of the legislative branch, upholding the democratic principles to a large extent, though Australia is considerably more successful. The presence of political parties both aids and inhibits the democratic principle of representation, in which elected representatives act on behalf of the population. Moreover, political parties in both the Congress and Parliament are successful to an extent on holding the government to account. Finally, the presence of political parties in the US and Australian legislature aids in the strengthening of the democratic principle of popular sovereignty.

Question 3

This question required students to examine whether or not an electoral mandate ensures the successful implementation of domestic public policy. Responses needed to reference one or more of the domestic public policies studied this year. Few students chose to respond to this question.

To score strongly on this topic, responses needed to demonstrate an understanding of the different notions of electoral mandate in Australian politics: firstly, the broad general permissions to govern granted to a government by voters at the most recent election; and secondly, the authority a government may believe it has to implement specific policies that were the subject of an election campaign.

Some responses discussed the leverage in parliament that an electoral mandate grants a government when seeking to legislate its campaign promises. The policies presented in support of this point included the Albanese government’s legislation of a target of 43 per cent emissions reduction by 2030, and the Morrison government’s legislation of personal income tax cuts following the 2019 election.

As some responses suggested, passage of legislation is no guarantee of the successful implementation of a policy, and even the successful rollout of a policy is no guarantee of policy success. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese’s election promise to hold a referendum for an Indigenous Voice to Parliament was used in some responses to support this point. These responses argued that the Opposition respected the government’s mandate to hold the referendum, unopposing the passage of the referendum bill in parliament, but then campaigned against the referendum proposal, which ultimately failed to gain the necessary support in October 2023.

Question 4

Question 4 required students to evaluate to what extent maintaining national security is the most important objective in the making of Australian foreign policy. Two-thirds of students chose to answer this essay question.

High-scoring responses weighed up the relative importance of each of the key objectives of contemporary Australian foreign policy as listed in the study design:

* maintaining national security
* promoting Australia’s economic and trade interests
* promoting Australia as a good global citizen.

The VCAA glossary for VCE Australian Politics defines national security as: ‘traditionally this term refers to the protection of a state’s borders from intruders but has evolved to include other forms of security, such as resource and environmental security, which are necessary for a state to maintain sovereignty’.

Higher-scoring responses generally applied broad interpretations of national security and presented a range of relevant evidence, including:

* Australia’s continued commitment to the Australia–US alliance as the cornerstone of our national security
* Australia’s commitment to AUKUS, the trilateral security partnership with the United States and the United Kingdom intended to promote the openness, freedom, security and stability of the Indo-Pacific
* Australia’s maintenance of security and intelligence networks such as the Quad and Five Eyes
* Australia’s cooperation in joint military training with an expanding list of nations, including in the biennial Combined Exercise Talisman Sabre
* Australia’s commitment to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050
* The Pacific Policing Initiative announced at this year’s Pacific Islands Forum
* Australian cooperation with international partners to ensure security of trade routes, including in the Strait of Hormuz in 2019 and ongoing maritime air surveillance of the South China Sea.

Many responses commented on the intersection between different key objectives of foreign policy, and policy actions that simultaneously address multiple goals.

The following is the introduction from a high-scoring response:

Australian foreign policy is developed and implemented to meet the national interest. Economic prosperity is strongly enmeshed to Australian foreign policy, reflected in Australia’s embrace for free trade, whilst good global citizenship punctuates Australian foreign policy through a generous foreign aid program. Yet it is national security which prevails as the most important objective of Australian foreign policy, informing all aspects of its formulation and implementation.