

## GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2011 National Politics examination required students to demonstrate an understanding of the institutions and processes used in the Australian and US political systems. Most students were well prepared for the task, with very few unable to provide basic explanations or evaluate the performance of these systems.

The most successful students presented sophisticated arguments that were supported by contemporary examples. The ability to apply basic political theory to specific events, particularly those that occurred throughout 2011, was a consistent feature of many high-scoring responses. A particular example was the carbon pricing debate which occurred in Australia during much of 2011. Many students were able to use their knowledge of this policy issue very effectively when answering several questions on the examination. Similarly, the ban on Australian exports of live cattle to Indonesia provided excellent evidence to support responses.

It was pleasing that most students had a good understanding of the broad nature and operation of the Australian minority government which operated during 2011. Many could name at least some of the independent members of parliament who were relied on to support the Gillard Government during the year. However, fewer students could describe the impact the minority government had on the operation of the Commonwealth Parliament, such as during Question Time.

Four questions in Section A asked students to define a single piece of terminology. While most students provided a clear and concise definition of these terms, some responses lacked clarity or detail. Students needed to do more than write a one-line statement. A brief expansion, explanation or relevant example was required in order to demonstrate complete understanding.

The other questions in Section A asked students to either describe or discuss two factors related to a specific aspect of the study design. In general, students who identified each of the two key factors in the question and followed on with a relevant discussion, elaboration or example of each factor were awarded marks. Students should avoid merely stating or listing factors. Several of these questions provided an opportunity for students to use contemporary evidence, particularly those drawn from People and policy and Contemporary foreign policy.

Sections B and C required students to write one extended response from Unit 3 and one extended response from Unit 4. There were very few short responses to these questions in 2011. Better responses displayed good writing skills and a clear structure. They 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 which drew the response together. The body paragraphs often commenced with a topic sentence and went into more detail as the paragraph progressed. Some responses lacked paragraph breaks at appropriate places, which restricted the flow and logical development of some students' writing.

The more successful extended responses demonstrated correct use of key terms and political concepts. These responses discussed terms such as impeachment or malapportionment with confidence. They also displayed extensive awareness of political events and issues, particularly those which occurred during 2011, and used these effectively in their responses. The use of examples and evidence relates directly to the second element of the examination's assessment criteria, and this evidence was an essential component of better responses.

## SPECIFIC INFORMATION

### Section A – Short answer questions Units 3 and 4

#### Washington to Canberra

##### Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	25	17	59	1.4

A federal system of government refers to one that involves more than one level or tier. Government responsibilities are divided between these levels, although there might be some overlap between them. A federal system is used in many countries, including Australia and the United States. Although local government is not formally part of the federal

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system in Australia, students were not penalised for implying that it is because local government is firmly entrenched as the ‘third level’ of Australian government. The division of government powers is also an essential characteristic of a federal system. Some students stated that the federal system was synonymous with a national government, such as the Australian Commonwealth Government. This definition lacked the precision required, and such responses were incorrect.

Following is an example of a successful response.

*A federal system of government refers to a political system in which power is divided between two or more levels of government. Usually, there is a strong central government and a series of smaller state governments. Australia is a federation with a Commonwealth government and six state governments.*

## Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	7	9	24	26	35	2.7

Most students had little difficulty in stating two key differences between the respective Houses of Representatives in Australia and the United States, although many found it more difficult to describe these differences in any meaningful way.

The key differences include the following.

- The Australian House of Representatives is based on the Westminster principle of responsible government, under which the government must command a majority on the floor of the House. The US House of Representatives does not operate on this principle.
- The Australian head of government (the Prime Minister) is a member of the House of Representatives, while the US head of government (the President) is not.
- The Australian House of Representatives is elected using compulsory, full preferential voting, while the US House of Representatives is elected using optional, first past the post voting.
- The procedures of the House of Representatives used in each nation are different. For instance, in Australia there is a daily Question Time. This does not occur in the US.
- The powers of the two Houses differ. For instance, the US House has the power to impeach the head of government (the President). The Australian House does not have this power.
- The Australian House is traditionally more adversarial in nature than the US House. This is reflected in the seating arrangements in which the government and the opposition sit opposite each other in Australia.
- Party discipline tends to be tighter in the Australian House of Representatives than in the US.

Some weaker responses selected less significant differences which were rather difficult to describe. For instance, many students stated that the size of each House is different. That was accurate; however, many students could not elaborate on or draw any significance from this point. This suggested that students needed to think more carefully before deciding on their answer, and concentrate on more substantive key points rather than less significant ones.

The following response contained the required elements.

*In Australia, the government sits as part of the House of Representatives and is formed by the party with the majority of seats there. In the US, the government (meaning the President and secretaries) do not sit in the House of Representatives as they are separate from the legislature.*

*In Australia, the House of Representatives may pass a no-confidence motion forcing the government to resign. This is not the case in the US. The President may only be removed through impeachment or an election.*

## Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	1	4	26	31	38	3

The more successful responses to this question nominated two specific democratic values, such as representation, accountability, rights and freedoms, and participation. Core aspects of the US electoral system were then discussed in relation to these values. Many students discussed the voluntary nature of the US system as fulfilling the democratic value of political freedom. While these responses were often successful, it was pleasing that other successful responses discussed less predictable aspects of the US electoral system. These included the strong mandate granted to the US head of government via direct election, the high degree of accountability achieved by means of a fixed electoral cycle and the wider range of positions and issues upon which American voters can express a preference.

## Continuity and change

### Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	14	22	64	1.5

A minority government is one in which a party or formal coalition of parties is unable to command a majority in their own right on the floor of the Lower House of Parliament. Hence, the government relies on the support of minor party members or independent members of parliament in order to form an effective, workable majority. The Gillard Government, elected in August 2010, operated as a minority government during 2011.

As Australia's minority government was historically unusual, it was expected that students would have a good understanding of the concept and be able to define it precisely. Some weaker responses touched on some relevant aspects of the term but failed to provide a completely convincing definition. Most students were aware that Australia had a minority government during 2011; however, merely stating that fact was not enough. Other weaker responses incorrectly stated that a minority government lacked a majority in parliament as a whole body, rather than the Lower House of Parliament.

The following response contained the essential core idea and was assisted by reference to the Australian government formed following the 2010 federal election.

*When a political party cannot obtain a majority of seats in the House of Representatives and will need the support of minor parties or independents to form government. The current government of the day is a minority government with the support of the Greens and independents.*

### Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	38	8	22	9	23	1.7

The most significant recent changes made to the operation of the Australian Parliament include:

- the introduction of greater independence for the Speaker of the House of Representatives
- supplementary questions are now common practice in the House of Representatives
- strict time limits are applied in both asking and answering questions in the House of Representatives
- a stricter procedure used when raising Points of Order during Question Time
- greater opportunities for individual MPs to present Private Members Bills.

Some responses displayed extensive knowledge of this rather technical matter by referring to the 'Agreement for a Better Parliament' which was formed following the 2010 federal election. Some referred accurately to these recent changes as the 'new paradigm'. Particularly strong responses cited changes made to specific 'Standing Orders' of parliament. While this was not considered necessary to achieve full marks, it indicated the depth of knowledge of some students.

Conversely, a high proportion of students had poor knowledge of recent changes made to the operation of the Australian Parliament. Many weaker responses were unable to state any recent changes, while others described changes which occurred many years ago and hence did not meet a key requirement of the question.

### Question 6

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	3	8	30	24	36	2.8

Most students interpreted this question correctly. They recognised that while the question referred to ways in which the Australian electoral system **does not** fulfil democratic values, it could also refer to ways in which the system **might not** fulfil democratic values. That is, exactly what is considered to be a failure to fulfil democratic values is open to interpretation. Some stronger responses acknowledged this by mentioning that while a single aspect of the Australian electoral system might weaken democratic values in the eyes of some people, other people might consider that same aspect to be a strength of Australian democracy. Compulsory voting was discussed by some students in this context.

Many successful responses were linked to two clearly stated democratic values. These included political equality, accountability and the right to political participation. These were discussed in relation to some of the following aspects of the Australian electoral system.

- The compulsory nature of the Australian system (enrolment and attendance at elections) undermines the democratic freedom not to participate in the political process.
- The serious malapportionment evident in the Australian Senate reduces the effectiveness of ‘one vote, one value’.
- Full preferential voting for the House of Representatives effectively means that most House of Representatives electorates are a contest between the Australian Labor Party and the Coalition. After the distribution of preferences, all the votes cast in these electorates are allocated to one of the two major parties.
- A party may win government with a minority of the two-party preferred vote (for example, in 1998 and 1990).
- Preferential voting increases the level of informal votes.

Some responses referred to the age of voting as a democratic flaw in the Australian electoral system. This was accepted, provided it was supported by some discussion of the reasons why lowering the voting age would strengthen democracy. Merely asserting that it would do so was not sufficient to be awarded full marks. Many students discussed the fact that the Australian prime minister is not directly elected by the Australian people as a weakness in the democratic value of accountability. This was also accepted.

The following response discussed two ways the electoral system could be regarded as failing to fulfil democratic values.

*One way the Australian electoral system does not fulfil democratic values is that voting is compulsory. Compulsory voting violates the democratic rights of freedom and participation. Citizens should be able to portray their democratic right not to participate in political affairs. The malapportionment that occurs in both the election of the Australian Senate and House of Representatives is in breach of the democratic right of one vote, one value. Tasmania, a State more than 10 times smaller than Victoria and New South Wales has an equal number of Senators, 12. Under the Constitution, Tasmania is guaranteed 5 House of Representatives seats, however in population, does not require this much.*

## People and policy

### Question 7

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	9	14	78	1.7

An independent is a member of parliament (either a member of the House of Representatives or a Senator) who does not belong to a political party. They are sometimes referred to as ‘crossbenchers’. Independents are elected to represent their own views or those of their constituents, rather than those of a political party. However, an independent may agree to support a particular party in parliament to allow that party to form an effective majority and so form government.

A number of weaker responses stated that an independent member of parliament does not belong to either of the two major parties, rather than not belonging to **any** political party. Hence, some students incorrectly stated that a member of parliament representing a minor party such as Family First or the Greens is an independent.

The following response contained the core elements and was complemented by an accurate, contemporary example.

*An independent member of parliament is one who does not belong to a political party and occupies a seat on the cross bench. For instance, Rob Oakshott is an independent member of parliament.*

### Question 8

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	2	3	19	26	50	3.2

Methods used by interest groups to influence the formulation of domestic policy include:

- direct lobbying of the bureaucracy, government ministers or members of parliament
- media campaigns including media appearances, press and electronic advertising
- public protests, street rallies and demonstrations
- publicising and highlighting policy issues during election campaigns.

Although most students responded to this question successfully, some placed too much emphasis on describing specific examples of interest group activity and not enough on the methods used by interest groups. For instance, a detailed

description of the aims of an interest group in favour of the introduction of a carbon tax was of limited value if it did not also discuss the methods used by the group in pursuit of that aim.

Many students suggested that interest groups seek to attract public support to their cause. This was not awarded any marks unless it they also discussed the method by which this might be achieved.

The following response was effective as it selected one direct method and one indirect method often used by interest groups. It also included two contemporary and topical examples.

1. *Through direct action, a method such as demonstrations can be used where a large number of supporters gather in a public place and chant and make speeches to get their message across. For example, the pro-gay marriage movement has demonstrated in Melbourne this year for equal rights.*
2. *A more indirect method used by more wealthy and well-resourced interest groups is that of advertising through the media to influence public opinion and thus policy. For example, the tobacco industry ran an advertising campaign against new cigarette packaging laws.*

**Question 9**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	10	11	34	23	22	<b>2.4</b>

This question required students to recognise that the media can be an active influence in the domestic policy-making process. The media does more than report the views of others. It can express its own views and seek to influence the views of its users. In these ways, it can influence the making of domestic policy. Most students understood this and discussed aspects of the media such as opinion pieces, editorials, cartoons and talkback radio as examples of this active role. However, some students discussed the possible influence of media advertising as an influence on recent domestic policy making. Examples such as the television and press advertising campaigns run against the Resource Super Profit Tax (2010) and the carbon tax (2011) were discussed. These are not considered relevant as in these cases the media was merely running advertisements produced by other groups seeking to influence policy, rather than the media itself trying to influence policy.

Successful responses needed to discuss media methods such as the following.

- Australian television provided extensive coverage of a series of natural disasters (for example, floods and cyclones) in early 2011. This is likely to have added to pressure on the Australian government to introduce a flood levy to raise the funds required to rebuild infrastructure destroyed in these extreme events.
- Australian newspaper editorials argued either in favour of or against the carbon tax during 2011.
- Prominent commentators used media space to seek to directly influence public opinion. For instance, Andrew Bolt (*The Herald Sun* and the *Bolt Report*) had extensive media exposure and used it to attack the Gillard Government’s carbon tax on numerous occasions during 2011.
- Alan Jones used his talkback radio show as a way of criticising government policy. This was a springboard for Jones to appear at anti carbon tax rallies outside parliament in Canberra.
- Cartoonists such as Mark Knight and Ron Tandberg often highlighted the shortcomings of the government’s asylum seeker policy during 2011.

Some responses focused too heavily on the policy issue involved, rather than discussing the specific method employed by the media. Many students discussed an episode of ABC TV’s *Four Corners* showing mistreatment of Australian cattle exported to Indonesia that screened in May 2011 as an example of the influence of the media in policy making. This was an excellent example as it demonstrated students’ awareness of one of the most significant policy issues to emerge in 2011 and the almost immediate influence it had on government policy.

**Contemporary Australian foreign policy**

**Question 10**

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	7	24	69	<b>1.6</b>

National security refers to the safety, stability and lack of external threats to a nation. Such threats include military invasion or attack, unauthorised entry of people or products, terrorism and breaches of quarantine and bio-security. National security can also refer to the economic strength of a nation. Most students were able to incorporate several of these ideas into their responses to earn full marks. Some weaker students confused the concept of national security with regional or global security.

The following example contained the key requirements.

*National security refers to protecting Australia's borders from potential threats. Illegal immigrants, war, and terrorism are all examples of issues that fall under national security.*

**Question 11**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	9	8	35	20	27	2.5

In responding to this question, students were able to describe the ways in which the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) can influence both the formulation and the implementation of foreign policy. Stronger responses appreciated that while it is the executive government which forms Australian foreign policy, it is DFAT which puts it into effect. For instance, once the Foreign or Trade Minister has signed a bilateral agreement with another country, officials working for DFAT design and implement the fine details of that agreement. This can have a significant influence on the effectiveness of the policy.

Appropriate responses referred to the following points.

- DFAT can influence Australian foreign policy by providing guidance and expert opinion to the government, particularly the Foreign Minister, regarding foreign policy issues.
- Via its network of embassies and High Commissions, DFAT acts as the 'eyes and ears' of Australia internationally and provides the government with ongoing information regarding foreign policy.
- The implementation of foreign policy by DFAT will clearly influence how effective that policy proves to be and may be the reason that refinements and amendments are made to future foreign policy.

Several common weaknesses were evident in student responses. Many students incorrectly referred to the influence of government ministers in relation to foreign policy. While ministers undoubtedly do have influence, this was not relevant to the question. Students were required to confine their responses to the public servants or bureaucrats who work for the Department, rather than the minister who is responsible for it. Another weakness was that many students limited their responses to the influence of DFAT in the formulation of foreign policy, which restricted the range of factors they could describe.

The following response describes two relevant influences.

1. *(DFAT) can bring the government up to date information from their embassies, consulates and trade posts around the world so the government knows what action to take on issues with other countries such as during the Egyptian overthrow of government.*
2. *(DFAT) can influence the formation of a free trade agreement (FTA) with another country since DFAT staff actually perform the highly complex negotiations such as the current 16th round of negotiations of a FTA with China.*

**Question 12**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	10	7	24	23	36	2.7

The most successful responses identified two distinctly different issues which have affected recent Australian foreign policy. Most students confined their discussion to issues which have faced Australian foreign policy in the past few years. A broad range of issues was accepted, provided they were issues that had received foreign policy attention. These included natural disasters and humanitarian crises, foreign aid, peacekeeping, the quality of governance in fragile states and the fear of 'failed states' in the region, people smuggling and trafficking, and individual Australians facing legal problems in the region (for example, Stern Hu in China and the Australian teenager arrested on drugs charges in Bali in late 2011). Few students had difficulty recognising that the region referred to in the question was the Asia-Pacific region.

Some students encountered problems in linking selected issues to Australian foreign policy. To receive full marks, students were required to discuss just how the particular issue had affected Australian foreign policy. Some responses were unsuccessful because that vital link was not made. For example, a discussion of the plight of the Australian boy charged with drug possession in Bali was of limited relevance if it failed to comment on the ways in which Australia's relationship with Indonesia was affected by the event. Other weaker responses sought to use the same issue in relation to two separate events. For instance, it was not acceptable to discuss the effect of natural disasters on Australian foreign policy in relation to the New Zealand earthquake and then discuss natural disasters in relation to the Boxing Day tsunami. This constituted a single issue.

The more successful students discussed the responses of Australia’s foreign policy in relation to a range of regional issues such as improving the quality of governance in the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, as well as the use of Australia’s foreign aid program to address the lack of economic development and opportunity in East Timor and Indonesia.

**Section B – Extended response questions**

<b>Question chosen</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>%</b>	0	58	42

<b>Marks</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>Average</b>
<b>%</b>	1	1	1	1	2	2	3	3	6	4	6	7	9	11	10	9	7	8	4	4	1	<b>12.3</b>

**Unit 3 – Democracy in the making**

**Question 1**

Although this question could be regarded as a straightforward comparison of the powers of the heads of government of the United States and Australia, some students demonstrated a more subtle interpretation of the question. These students not only compared the powers of the US President and the Australian Prime Minister, but also argued that such a comparison was made more difficult because of the different nature and traditions of the US and Australian political systems.

Students who asserted that the US President has greater political powers than the Australian Prime Minister could present a range of arguments such as the following (most of which include a specific example of the power being exercised by the US President). It was disappointing that such examples were rarely seen in student responses. While many students could present a range of relevant powers, far fewer could illustrate their operation in practice.

- The US President has a stronger mandate than the Australian Prime Minister. For instance, Barack Obama was elected in a national election in 2008 in which all eligible Americans were able to participate. During the election, he said he would withdraw US troops from Iraq and reform the US health care system. He had the authority to implement these policies.
- The US President is both head of government and head of state. During 2011, President Obama spoke at the dedication of the Martin Luther King Memorial in Washington DC in the same week as he campaigned for the passage of his latest employment legislation, the American Jobs Act.
- The US President has a strong power of veto over legislation. Barack Obama has exercised this power on just two occasions, but other Presidents such as Ronald Reagan used it much more frequently.
- The US President selects his/her own Cabinet from outside the legislature. Barack Obama selected Hillary Clinton to act as his Secretary of State.

Students who claimed that the powers of Australian Prime Minister are greater than the US President could argue the following points.

- The Australian Prime Minister sits in the legislature whereas the US President cannot do so. As a member of parliament Julia Gillard was able to ‘oversee’ the passage of her Clean Energy Future legislation through parliament in 2011. In the US, Obama resorted to appealing to constituents to write to their Congressmen/women asking them to vote in favour of his employment bill in Congress in 2011.
- The Australian Prime Minister does not face the array of checks and balances the US President does, such as congressional approval of judges and senior diplomats. Barack Obama had to receive Senate approval of his appointments to the US Supreme Court, whereas John Howard made several appointments to the High Court with little or no scrutiny.
- The Australian Prime Minister cannot be removed via the impeachment process. Regardless of how unpopular Julia Gillard may become, provided her own party does not move a ‘spill motion’ of leadership positions and she can retain the confidence of the House, she can remain Prime Minister until she calls an election. There is no formal constitutional method of removing the Prime Minister as there is in the United States.
- The US President can be frustrated and blocked by a hostile Congress. In 2011, Barack Obama had a difficult time in getting his bill to raise the US debt ceiling through the Congress because, unlike the Australian Prime Minister, he is not assured of the support of the Lower House of the legislature.

The use of relevant evidence and examples to demonstrate the powers of the Australian Prime Minister was better than that used for the US President, although weaker responses were very general and often little more than a list of short paragraphs outlining the comparative powers. Often these referred to the ‘US President’ and the ‘Australian Prime

Minister' with no mention of a specific President or Prime Minister or any actions they have taken which demonstrate their respective powers.

Some of the most successful responses argued that a simple comparison between the powers of the US President and the Australian Prime Minister was made more difficult by the differences between the US and Australian political systems. The fact that the role and powers of the US President are clearly described in the US Constitution whereas the Australian Prime Minister exists largely due to convention was discussed by some students. They argued that almost by definition, this gives the Australian Prime Minister considerable powers because it is unclear just what these powers are in the first place. While this line of argument was not required to receive a high mark for the question, it did indicate a more sophisticated level of thinking about the question and was rewarded.

A few students commenced their response by stating clearly that either the US President or the Australian Prime Minister was the more powerful position, but contradictions emerged as their response proceeded. This suggested a lack of careful planning before writing and that these students added ideas and arguments as they came to mind during the writing process, rather than determining a clear contention or line of argument at the start and maintaining that throughout their extended response.

### Question 2

Many students were well prepared for this question. It was evident that they had extensive knowledge of all three Australian political institutions of relevance to the question and many students devoted a separate section of their response to each of these institutions. By discussing all of them, students were able to argue that while some institutions operate very well at present, others are in need of reform. Other students suggested that all three institutions were in need of reform as the following opening paragraph demonstrates.

*The Australian political system operates well however, it would benefit from, and become more democratic through change. The Constitution, parliament and electoral system of Australia are three institutions which need to become more democratic.*

The following opening uses a similar line of argument, with the added strength of an interesting reference to the political changes which occurred in North Africa during 2011. While knowledge of these systems is not a requirement of the National Politics study, making a direct, brief comparison with Australia was particularly effective and showed an awareness of political events occurring on a broader scale.

*In comparison to other nations who had to fight for democracy during the recent Arab Spring, Australian's political system of course operates very well, especially in upholding representation in the electoral system and accountability on the parliamentary floor. However, our system is in need of change, something that will perhaps flourish in the 'new paradigm' which has already heralded reforms such as the Agreement for a Better Parliament.*

Students who challenged the contention and argued in favour of further reform to the Australian political system could discuss a range of specific aspects, including the following.

- The Australian Constitution is outdated and in need of major reform. Its stability is merely a reflection of the difficulty of changing it, not its success. For instance, it could be argued that the failure of the 1988 referendum, which aimed to extend a range of civil and political rights to Australians, was due to technical difficulties associated with changing the Constitution, rather than satisfaction with the current protection of such rights in the Constitution.
- The current proposals to amend the Constitution to recognise Indigenous Australians and to recognise the role of local government in the Australian system of government should proceed.
- The Australian Constitution does not accurately describe the way the government operates in practice. For instance, the roles of the Prime Minister and Cabinet should be clarified.
- Parliament does not operate well and needs reform. Parliament needs to adapt to and more closely reflect the nature of contemporary Australian society. It needs to be less adversarial and more collaborative. While some recent reforms have achieved some progress, much more needs to be done.
- The electoral system is too much under the control of the executive and hence the changes which are made tend to be designed for political advantage, rather than improving Australian democracy or improving the operation of the political system in general.

Weaker students devoted extensive parts of their responses to the compulsory nature of the Australian electoral system and called for a voluntary voting system. While this point was valid, many responses were unable to indicate how such a reform would improve the operation of the Australian political system. Merely expressing a personal preference did not constitute a strong argument in favour of change.



Students who argued that the Australian political system, or at least some of its key institutions, operates very well at present could discuss the following points.

- Australia has proven to be a successful liberal democracy, particularly when compared to other nations. While some complaints are raised (for example, against compulsory voting), they are rarely so widespread or sustained that change is justified.
- Australian voters have shown a marked reluctance to change the Constitution via the referendum process, suggesting it does not need reform or change. For instance, Australia conducted a lengthy and detailed consideration of the republican issue throughout much of the 1990s, culminating in the 1999 referendum. However, the populace voted against change.
- Australia's major political institutions have proven to be stable and effective. Even under a minority government since the 2010 federal election, the Australian parliament has operated effectively. The government was able to get most of its legislative program through the parliament, including difficult pieces of legislation such as the Clean Energy Future package in November 2011.
- Prime minister Kevin Rudd's short-lived experiment with Friday sittings of parliament was abandoned, indicating it was not required in the first place.
- Some of the reforms made to the Electoral Act in 2006 have been reversed, indicating that they were not needed.
- The Australian political system is often altered or tweaked in minor ways which ensure it adjusts to changing needs. However, radical change is not necessary or justified. For instance, the operation of parliament undergoes changes which make it work effectively, such recent changes to Question Time.

Interestingly, very few students argued in favour of major change to the Australian political system. Most suggested that, at its core, the Australian system contains many democratic values, although it could be improved with some further changes.

### Section C – Extended response questions

Question chosen	0	1	2
%	1	30	69

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

## Unit 4 – The challenge of power

### Question 1

This question provided an excellent opportunity for students to demonstrate their understanding of the public policy-making process in Australia. In order to write a successful response, it was essential to have a good knowledge of one or more contemporary policy issues. Most students demonstrated this, and while some discussed a single policy issue throughout their response, others discussed elements of several issues. This approach was particularly effective as it allowed students to draw on different policy issues to illustrate different arguments, which demonstrated their breadth of knowledge as well as preventing their response from becoming merely a narrative on the progress of a single policy issue.

A clear majority of students broadly agreed with the contention, although more sophisticated responses suggested that the ease and certainty of policy making often depends on the prevailing circumstances facing the government. The following opening passage clearly expressed that line of argument.

*The domestic policy making process can be difficult and uncertain. This is dependent on the constantly changing political reality. In some instances, the process is dominated by the executive, in particular Cabinet and is relatively straightforward. In others, the process is subject to a myriad of influences outside the executive including the Opposition, minor parties and independents, interest groups and domestic and international factors. This was certainly the case in the formulation of the Clean Energy Future legislation, the largest component of which is the carbon pricing scheme, this year.*

A few students argued that policy making was relatively straightforward; however, this argument was difficult to sustain, particularly given the wealth of recent evidence to the contrary. The formulation of the carbon pricing policy (Clean Energy Future), the Minerals Resource Rent Tax and asylum seeker policy were commonly cited by students as examples of the difficulty of the making policy. Each of these provided numerous examples in support of the contention.

Successful responses pointed out that domestic policy making largely depends on the make-up of the current parliament. For instance, the Howard Government held a majority in both the House of Representatives and the Senate between 2005 and 2007, which removed one of the major difficulties that Australian governments face in formulating their policies, in particular in this case, WorkChoices.

Although it was not essential to consider the difficulty and the uncertainty of policy making as separate components of the question, some students did so. These students discussed the Rudd government's abandoned roof insulation scheme and the unsuccessful attempt to introduce an emissions trading scheme in 2009 as examples of the uncertainty of the policy-making process.

While a broad range of policy issues were discussed by students, the most popular issue was the Gillard Government's policy of placing a price on carbon. As this policy was released in July 2011, it indicated that these students had selected a very contemporary issue rather than relying on older case studies. Many students mentioned that the legislation to establish a carbon price was passed by the Australian Senate on November 8 – the same day as the National Politics examination. While weaker students simply referred to this as the 'carbon tax', stronger responses understood that the policy involved far more than this. They discussed multiple aspects of the Clean Energy Future program and the difficulties and uncertainties faced in formulating it during 2010 and 2011 before it was passed by the parliament.

### Question 2

This question assessed students' understanding of the broad nature and purpose of Australian foreign policy. The suggestion in the question that Australia **should** pursue good global citizenship rather than economic interests required students to recognise there may be some trade-off between these two aims of foreign policy. Furthermore, the question implied that good global citizenship is a superior foreign policy objective than a narrower, more self-interested objective focused on trade and economic benefits. These elements gave students plenty of scope to present a clearly argued response, supported by examples drawn from contemporary Australian foreign policy.

It was possible to take one of several lines of argument and successful responses were written using each of these approaches. Students reflecting a more 'realist' view of foreign policy tended to disagree with the contention. They argued that foreign policy has been, and remains, largely based on protecting and advancing the national interests of Australia and that, increasingly, this means trade and economic interests. Many of these responses pointed to the formation of the Department of Trade and Foreign Affairs (DFAT) in 1987, Australia's strong advocacy of trade liberalisation in the World Trade Organization and the emphasis placed on forming free-trade agreements with a range of countries such as China as demonstrating the importance of this objective in Australian foreign policy. Some students suggested that, without a strong economy, Australia's contribution as a good global citizen via programs such as foreign aid was limited, and so economics and trade should be the highest priority. Other arguments consistent with this reasoning included that:

- good global citizenship is an idealistic view of the world which ignores the more realistic view that foreign policy is based on protecting and advancing the interests of Australian citizens, not the citizens of the whole world
- other nations use their foreign policy in pursuit of their own economic interests, and it is naive for Australia not to use it in a similar way
- Australia already plays a leading role in demonstrating its good global citizenship and so it does not need to do more than it already does
- Australian interests such as exports and jobs would be placed in danger by more active global citizenship
- Australian national security would be placed in danger by more active global citizenship.

However, many students adopted the contrary argument and largely agreed with the contention. Some presented a largely 'idealist' view, arguing that Australia should be a better global citizen simply because it is the 'right' thing to do as a member of the international community. These responses contended that:

- as an advocate of human rights, Australia has an obligation to play a leading role in the global community; it should practise what it preaches
- as a wealthy nation with abundant resources, Australia can afford to be more progressive in relation to issues such as climate change, the acceptance of refugees and meeting the United Nations recommended target for foreign aid.

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Interestingly, more students were somewhat less idealistic and argued that displaying good global citizenship brings benefits to Australia. Some students used the expression 'win-win' to describe these benefits. These students raised many relevant arguments, including that:

- good global citizenship enhances our international standing and we would benefit from that in ways such as increased trade, more international students studying in Australia, greater foreign investment in Australia and increased levels of foreign tourism
- good global citizenship, such as foreign aid, can benefit Australia by providing employment and business opportunities for Australians
- programs such as the Pacific guest worker program provide much needed labour for Australian agricultural industries
- by assisting in peacekeeping operations in neighbouring countries such as East Timor and the Solomon Islands, Australia removes potentially troublesome 'hot-spots' on our front door step which present a threat to our national security
- by acting to prevent or limit climate change, Australia may prevent a large number of environmental refugees from Pacific nations threatened with rising ocean levels wishing to relocate to Australia.

A fourth successful approach was to argue that these two foreign policy objectives do not necessarily involve any trade-offs. Australia is mature and wealthy enough to pursue its national economic and trade interests at the same time as being a good global citizen; they should be given equal weighting. Yet another successful approach was to argue that the key objective of Australian foreign policy should be neither good global citizenship nor trade and economic interests but the protection of Australia's national security.

Weaker responses largely avoided any of these approaches and merely described the current objectives of Australian foreign policy. While many of these responses displayed some useful knowledge, they did not really engage with the question or appreciate its contentious nature.