

2015 Australian Politics examination report

General comments

Overall, students performed very well on the 2015 Australian Politics examination. It was clear that many students had a high degree of awareness and understanding of key events in Australian politics both throughout 2015 and in the years immediately prior. These students were able to make effective use of examples from these events to add detail and depth to their responses.

In Section A, students were required to answer a series of short-answer and extended-response questions, three of which included stimulus material. Most students understood the stimulus material and were able to use it as a reference in their responses or as a starting point. The exception to this was the stimulus for Question 3 on domestic policy; some students seemed confused about the parliamentarians mentioned and their roles – which were the focus of Question 3c. – despite these being referred to in the extract. It is important that students familiarise themselves with the use of stimuli and extracts in their examination preparation.

Many questions in Section A asked students to outline or describe two key factors or differences. The examination paper included dot points to assist students with clearly identifying and delineating these components of their responses. Most students used these dot points to structure their answers and as a guide for the length of response required. High-scoring responses were evenly balanced between the two areas outlined and often incorporated evidence or examples. Lower-scoring responses tended to be imbalanced; that is, with too much focus on one factor and not the other. Some students repeated factors, using slightly different terms or emphasis, but this should be avoided.

The questions in Section B asked students to choose one topic and write an essay in response. Each of the four topics related to one area of study and required students to take a point of view and argue or discuss it in relation to the question. High-scoring responses were able to present a point of view and argue it consistently and coherently, providing evidence to support the view taken. These high-scoring responses made effective use of clear introductions, a sound essay structure centred on separate paragraphs, and succinct conclusions. It was apparent that each of these essays had been planned in response to the choice of topic, and each essay followed a sustained line of argument. Evidence was drawn upon and incorporated into each paragraph, demonstrating broad awareness of contemporary political examples and events. The names of relevant ministers, knowledge of recent domestic policy issues, reference to foreign policy forums, detailed knowledge of parliamentary procedures and an understanding of the differences between the US Congress and the Australian Parliament were evident in many of these high-scoring essays.

Lower-scoring responses merely attempted to include vast amounts of material from the relevant area of study without answering the question. These essays were often too general, lacked a clear point of view and were repetitive. Some were too short. Students are advised of the importance of practising their essay writing as part of examination preparation. Allowing enough time to write the

essay in the examination is also essential and requires careful attention to timing throughout. Students should avoid memorising and presenting prepared essays.

Section A

Australian democracy

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	11	89	0.9

C.: In a genuine democracy, the power of the government is subject to a range of constraints.

Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	26	74	0.8

B.: The voting procedures used in federal elections are described in the Australian Constitution.

A significant number of students incorrectly answered **A.** (There is public funding of election campaign expenses). However, the question asked which features are **not** part of the Australian democratic system; the public funding of election campaigns certainly is a feature.

Question 1c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	15	7	29	15	33	2.5

There were a number of possible responses to this question. The key was to relate the response clearly to ways in which the Commonwealth Parliament specifically works or operates and not to stray too far into the workings of democracy as a whole. High-scoring answers included: the impact of party discipline; dominance by the executive in the House; lack of representation of sections of the Australian community; a hostile Senate; the misuse of Question Time, including the use of Dorothy Dixers; and partisanship of the speaker. These parliamentary factors then needed to be related specifically to a principle or value of democracy.

The following high-scoring response outlines one way of addressing the question.

Parliament fails to uphold the value of accountability through the current operation of question time. In recent times 'Dorothy Dix' style questions merely highlight the good in the government rather than scrutinise the government. The opposition's questions are more attacks than holding the government to account.

Question 1d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	1	3	16	26	53	3.3

This question was generally well answered, with most students able to identify some ways in which the political and legal equality of citizens is upheld by the Australian political system. 'Legal equality' as part of the question allowed students with specific legal knowledge to refer to relevant sections of the Constitution.

Possible answers included: compulsory voting (a form of enforced equality); universal suffrage; separation of powers; the principle of one vote, one value; the right to run for elected office; the rule of law; the ability to lobby government and MPs; the right to make submissions to parliamentary committees; the implied right to freedom of political communication; the five express rights in the Constitution; and an independent judiciary.

Question 1e.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	4	12	25	39	19	3.5

This question asked students to discuss how effectively the Australian political system upholds the key democratic principle of the separation of powers. High-scoring responses included a definition of the concept of the separation of powers and an outline of why it is important to democracy. These answers then explained how the separation of powers operated in Australia, noting the overlap of the executive and legislative branches and the independence of the judiciary. A concluding statement about the overall effectiveness was also required. Many students included relevant evidence in their answer, such as reference to the 2011 Malaysia Solution case in the High Court, which demonstrated how the separation of powers had recently been successfully upheld in Australia.

Australian democracy in perspective**Question 2a.**

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	4	5	91	1.9

This question was very well answered. It required students to state that a bicameral system of government is one where there are two legislative houses of parliament, such as exists in the Australian and US legislatures.

Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	4	4	21	18	53	3.1

Most students demonstrated a very good knowledge of the differences between the working of the Commonwealth Parliament and the US Congress (the legislative branch of the UK, Germany or India could also have been selected). It was important that answers focused on the operation of the legislature in both nations, not broader political differences.

It was essential that students discussed two separate points in their responses, rather than repeating the same point twice.

Key differences in relation to the US Congress included the following points.

- Party discipline is not as strict in the US Congress as it is in the Commonwealth Parliament.
- The head of the US Government is not a member of Congress, whereas the Australian prime minister is a member of the Commonwealth Parliament.
- Minor parties and independents have a greater presence and role in the Australian Parliament – and in the Senate particularly – than is evident in the US Congress.

- In the Australian system, all the ministers (the executive branch of government) must be members of the Commonwealth Parliament. In the USA the members of the executive cannot be members of the legislature.
- In Australia the legislature has no power to overturn a decision of the head of state. In the USA the legislature can overturn a presidential veto (this is not a veto power of the Congress as many students misstated).
- In Australia, appointments of, for example, High Court judges are made by the executive. In the USA the Congress must approve appointments of, for example, appointments to the Supreme Court, and this gives the Senate in particular a significant degree of power.

Question 2c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	13	6	20	61	2.3

This question required a clear explanation of one way in which the legislature of the US, the UK, Germany or India holds the executive branch to account.

In relation to the USA, students could have described: the impeachment process; the power of the Senate to reject presidential appointments; the Congressional power to overturn a presidential veto; and refusal to pass the executive's budget.

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

The US Congress (the legislature) can hold the President, the executive, accountable by overturning Presidential veto. If a US president veto's a piece of legislation passed by the Congress, as President Obama has done recently regarding the implementation of a major pipeline, the Congress can overturn this veto and continue with the implimentation of the legislation by a vote in both the House of Representatives and the Senate that is won in both house with a 2/3 majority. This prevents the Presidential role becoming undemocratic and holds it accountable to the Congress.

Question 2d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	5	7	10	13	25	26	15	3.8

Many students found it difficult to construct an answer that addressed all elements of the topic. Students were asked to evaluate the given statement from the point of view of how the Commonwealth Parliament had operated in recent years.

Evaluation requires some judgment when weighing up different views. Students needed to discuss evidence for and against the view in the statement that 'There is a lot of dissatisfaction expressed about the Commonwealth Parliament because it does not have a great deal of power; it is completely dominated by the executive government ... Both the House of Representatives and the Senate lack real power.'

Students who scored highly on this question were able to describe how in the past governments could expect to control both houses of parliament and that therefore the executive did indeed dominate the parliament. Some students discussed the experience of the Howard government and how during its period of control of both houses in the mid-2000s, they were able to successfully pass a large amount of legislation without the sort of scrutiny and negotiation that might be seen in the parliament today; for example, the ultimately rejected WorkChoices legislation.

However, in recent years we can see that this situation has changed and that as well as governments very rarely controlling the Senate due to the increasing numbers of minor party and independent senators gaining election, more independents and minor party members are also being elected to the House of Representatives, which resulted in a particularly significant period of minority government under prime minister Julia Gillard from 2010 to 2013. This minority government certainly reduced the notion of executive dominance, as does the current situation for the Abbott/Turnbull government, who must negotiate with a hostile Senate where the balance of power is held by a group of disparate independents. Both these governments have shown that parliament cannot be taken for granted.

Students could also have stated, in contrast, that despite the nature of the Senate, the executive still dominates the legislative process. The majority of Bills originate with the executive, and procedures in the House where the governing party holds a majority can be used to suit their purposes – as seen, for example, by the refusal of the Abbott government to introduce same-sex marriage legislation into the House for debate.

High-scoring responses canvassed this sort of discussion and came to a conclusion about the stimulus statement. They also made specific reference to examples from recent years in Australian politics.

Lower-scoring responses were too broad, often short and failed to focus on the key components of the question, particularly neglecting to include evidence from recent years.

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

In recent years the Commonwealth Parliament has lacked power in some circumstances, depending on the composition of Parliament. Currently the Senate is highly powerful, as neither party holds majority ... Minor parties and independents have used this to their advantage with Jacqui Lambie for example holding out on voting with the government unless defence personnel see a pay rise ...

Domestic policy

Question 3a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	9	29	63	1.6

A mandate is the authority or permission the electorate has granted the government to introduce new or amended policy. A mandate is received through the process of democratic election.

This question required students to make specific mention of authority and policy, as well as a link to election. This is seen in the following high-scoring response, where the policy is mentioned in the example given.

A mandate refers to the permission given by the people to the government to make decisions on their behalf. A mandate is granted by winning the majority of votes in an election. For example Tony Abbott had a clear mandate to implement the “Stop the Boats” policy.

Question 3b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	3	9	24	33	31	2.8

This was a challenging question for many students, and it demonstrated the importance of students ensuring that the stimulus material was referred to in the most useful way possible when framing an answer.

The emphasis in the question was on the difference in roles played by Scott Morrison and Christine Milne in policy formulation – not on their roles. The extract clearly stated that Scott Morrison is the Minister for Social Services (or was at the time of writing) and that Christine Milne is an Australian Greens Senator (or was at the time of writing). The facility for these two members of parliament – one a minister of the government and one not – to develop policy ideas is quite different. Some of these differences include the following.

- Morrison has an entire public service department at his disposal to research policy, provide policy briefings and advice, and draft legislation. Milne does not head a government department and so does not have access to this advice.
- Morrison is a minister and can take proposed legislation to Cabinet, and then introduce it to parliament. Milne is limited to introducing a private member's Bill in the Senate, where legislation is rarely introduced, after her own consideration and that of her party.
- As a member of the government, Morrison has received an electoral mandate to introduce public policy. As a member of a minor political party, Milne has no such mandate.

Question 3c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	7	6	28	17	42	2.8

This was another challenging question for many students, and it demonstrates the importance of a clear understanding of the key knowledge in this area of study. Policy implementation is different from policy formulation; these two concepts are clearly outlined in the study design. They are linked in practicality but in the examination they needed to be understood and explained differently.

Constraints, limits or restrictions on the ability of a government to implement their domestic policies refer to events or forces that impact on the carrying out of the policy that has been formulated and in most cases successfully turned into legislation; therefore, students were not awarded full marks for referring to constraints inside the parliament, such as the Senate blocking legislation or having to compromise with Senate crossbenchers as part of the implementation process. It is essential that this understanding is noted by teachers and students. Instead, constraints such as those listed below were accepted, alongside relevant examples.

- campaigns by interest groups and/or the media, such as protests against East West Link in Melbourne
- cost or finance problems, such as the National Broadband Network cost blowout and delays
- lack of cooperation of key stakeholders, such as lack of support by the states in education policy
- unanticipated problems, such as falling mineral prices leading to the Rudd/Gillard government's mining tax not raising much revenue
- incompetence or inefficiency by bureaucracy, such as the Rudd government's roof insulation scheme

- the policy might be challenged in the High Court, such as when aspects of the asylum seeker policy of the Gillard government and Abbott government have been successfully challenged.

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

The actions of the public service greatly affect the implementation of domestic policy. For example the 'pink bats insulation scheme' failed in part due to the mismanagement of the implementation process by the bureaucracy.

The reaction of the media and public can also affect the successful implementation of government policy. Protests against operation border force in Melbourne prevented an aspect of the policies implementation.

Question 3d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	4	3	8	23	42	20	3.5

This question required students to draw further on their understanding of the significance of a mandate in domestic policy formulation. The definition of mandate was assessed in Question 3a. and this may have assisted students to begin their discussion.

An electoral mandate is listed in the study design as a factor in the formulation of domestic policy. A description of what the term means was required in responses to this question, as was discussion of some recent domestic policy examples. High-scoring responses often made mention of the 2013 election and in some circumstances the 2010 election.

High-scoring responses made reference to the idea of the electoral mandate signifying the support or approval of the electorate for a government to go ahead and introduce policies because the political party in question had campaigned on them in the lead-up to an election. For example, the Abbott government's pre-2013 election promises to scrap the mining tax and carbon tax and to 'stop the boats' gave them a clear mandate. On the other hand, some decisions of the Abbott government in relation to the 2014 Budget and actions such as announcing cuts to the ABC were clearly not campaigned upon, and therefore the government was criticised for overlooking the significance of a mandate. In 2010 Julia Gillard was heavily criticised for introducing the 'carbon tax' after the election, despite saying in the campaign she would not. Higher-scoring discussions of this example referred to the fact that changing circumstances (for example, leading a minority government) could lead to a legitimate overlooking of the mandate theory and that governments can be seen to have a general mandate to govern overall once they are elected.

High-scoring responses acknowledged that while a mandate is an important influence on domestic policy, it cannot be taken too literally. It is rather simplistic and naive to argue that having no mandate or breaking a promise means that the resultant policy lacks any legitimacy. References to other recent domestic policy examples, such as metadata retention and citizenship reform, were often discussed well in the context of this question.

Foreign policy

Question 4a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	1	12	49	38	2.3

National security is one of the main objectives of Australian foreign policy. It refers to the maintenance of the security/defence/peace and protection of the Australian state and its citizens.

The involvement of Australian defence forces in Afghanistan and Iraq, the signing of security treaties and the tracking of Australian citizens in terrorist zones overseas are all examples of national security. An example or elaboration of the basic definition was required to score full marks.

Question 4b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	3	4	20	16	57	3.2

This question required students to outline interests (or objectives) that are shared (aligned) in relation to foreign policy by both the USA and Australia. Some students misinterpreted this question and focused only on Australian foreign policy objectives more broadly.

Possible answers could have included one of the following, plus an example of how both the USA and Australia share the identified interest.

- regional security; for example, both nations have an interest in the peace and security of the Asia-Pacific region, given the rise of China
- economic prosperity; for example, both the USA and Australia will benefit economically from the recently signed AUSFTA and from ongoing trade liberalisation talks and agreements such as the TPP
- anti-terrorism; for example, both Australia and the USA are committed to action against ISIS and other terror groups in the Middle East, for the security of both nations at home and abroad

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

The United States and Australia both seek to capitalise on the economic boom of the Asia Pacific region, as evidenced by the Trans Pacific Partnership that both nations have signed off on.

The United States and Australia also have similar interests in maintaining peace in our South East Asian region. This can be seen in mutual co-operation in military exercises, the ANZUS treaty and an increased US presence at Pine Gap military base.

Question 4c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	0	3	9	19	68	3.5

Most students were able to clearly identify advantages and disadvantages of the US–Australian alliance. The alliance is broader than the ANZUS treaty alone.

Advantages

- The USA is one of the greatest economic and military powers in the world.
- Australia has a long history of military engagements with the USA and it works closely with the USA (for example, bases, stationing of troops and peacekeeping programs)
- There is an expectation (belief) that the USA would assist Australia if attacked.
- The alliance gives Australia access to US military technology etc., which other nations do not have.
- Joint training exercises improve the expertise of the Australian Defence Force and help keep Australian defence spending at a lower level.

Disadvantages

- Australia is meant to follow and support the USA regardless of circumstances.

- Australia's alliance may increase its targeting by US enemies.
- The alliance is an outdated concept that does not reflect contemporary realities of both the world and the region in which Australia is located.
- Australia has become too dependent on the USA and there are occasions where we believe the USA is wrong, but we say nothing and so lose our independence.

Question 4d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	7	5	15	21	53	3.1

This question required two specific foreign policy examples. It was essential to identify how the action was part of the foreign policy response to the threat of global (not regional) terrorism.

Possible answers included:

- recent commitment of the Australian air force to air strikes against ISIS in Syria
- earlier military deployments in Afghanistan and Iraq against Al Qaeda and the Taliban
- anti-terror legislation in Australia designed to reduce the risk of global terrorism impacting on Australia; for example, the proposal to strip dual nationals involved in overseas terrorist groups of their Australian citizenship
- support by Australia as part of the UN Security Council for anti-terrorism resolutions and decisions
- an increase in funding to agencies such as ASIO and ASIS to operate anti-terror measures
- foreign aid programs in recent years that have aimed to enhance secular schools in Indonesia to reduce the growth of radical schools.

An answer such as 'accepting refugees from Syria and providing aid to those affected in the Middle East' was accepted if students could link this response to the way in which it sends a sign that Australia is opposed to and acts against the impact of global terrorism on civilians.

Section B

Question chosen	none	1	2	3	4
%	0	23	29	9	39

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	3	2	4	3	7	10	13	15	10	11	10	5	3	2	13.6

Question 1

This question asked students to discuss accountability in broad terms, not simply define it in one sentence and then move on to discuss Australian democracy. The key factor needed to be how accountability relates to democracy.

High-scoring responses stated that representative democracy involves government by an elected body on behalf of a broad population, and those representatives must not simply forget about the people who elected them but must remain answerable to them. Higher-scoring responses argued that, in practice, accountability is often hard to achieve as governments, once in office, believe

(rightly or wrongly) that they need to keep their business confidential and they go to great lengths to achieve that. This makes the idea of open and transparent government rather unrealistic and, at the same time, this aim often dominates the procedures of the parliament in order to stifle accountability.

Key forms of accountability in Australia that were well discussed included: the electoral system; the operation of parliament; the principles of responsible government, including individual ministerial responsibility; and the independence of the judiciary. A free media was also mentioned by some as an important accountability mechanism, and free speech in general.

High-scoring responses were informed, clearly structured and made effective use of relevant examples.

The following is an example of a high-scoring introduction to this topic.

Accountability is a fundamental characteristic of an effective democracy. A democracy is a political system in which the power of the government is held by the people. An effective democracy contains a vast number of ways in which the government is to be held accountable. Accountability refers to the principle that the government should be held responsible and answerable for its decisions. It is a fundamental aspect to the Australian political system to prevent the abuse of power. Accountability ensures the government's power is sustained but the people and ensures that the Executive does not dominate the political system. In Australia the value of accountability is effectively upheld through our bicameral system, the principle of responsible government and the ability of the public to scrutinise the actions of the government.

Question 2

This question required a detailed comparison of the powers of the heads of government in both Australia and one other nation studied; for example, the prime minister of Australia and the president of the USA. Students needed to frame the comparison with their point of view of whether the Australian prime minister has too much power, and this point needed a conclusion. Some discussion on what 'too powerful' might mean in the context of a democracy helped higher-scoring students to articulate their point of view.

This question required students to clearly state a point of view in relation to the topic stated, and so this should have made it difficult for students to simply write a prepared essay or just list memorised facts about both roles. However, some students did this and consequently received lower scores. Some students were confused about the head of government in Australia and attempted to contrast the role of the governor-general with that of the US president.

High-scoring responses contrasted the two positions evenly. They contained focused paragraphs around the similarity of the roles, before contrasting the differences. These essays also mentioned many examples from the terms of office of Tony Abbott, Malcolm Turnbull and Barack Obama.

The following points were relevant and may have been used by students.

Powers of the Australian prime minister include:

- strong system of party discipline, which gives a lot of power in the party
- selects ministry
- chairs Cabinet – supported by Cabinet solidarity, but can be undermined if weak/unpopular (e.g. by leaks)
- can make 'executive' decisions (e.g. Abbott's 'captain's calls') without consulting parliament or government ministers
- heads the executive in the broad sense and has the resources of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the increasingly important personal staff of the prime minister

- determines the parliamentary and legislative agenda, appoints the speaker and the main parliamentary officers
- controls the committees, especially in the House
- can make foreign policy decisions without parliamentary scrutiny or approval
- can determine the date of the election, within a maximum of three-and-a-half years
- no restriction on his or her terms of office
- powers are not codified, so lack of regulation
- not able to be voted out by the people in his or her capacity as prime minister.

Constraints on the Australian prime minister's power include:

- the party machine, in the case of an ALP prime minister; backbenchers and Nationals, in the case of a Liberal prime minister
- the party may change leaders (e.g. Abbott and Turnbull in 2015), thereby removing the prime minister from power
- hostile Senate – the number of minor parties, independents or opposition holding the balance of power constrains the prime minister's policy agenda
- the governor-general, who has the ability to withhold royal assent and exercise reserve powers
- public opinion, including the opinion polls and the media reporting
- the Constitution and rule of law, through the independent High Court (e.g. the Malaysia Solution).

Comparisons with the US president include:

- the US president cannot count on party support/discipline to the same extent
- the separation of powers – the US president has no access to Congress, and therefore much less ability to control the legislative agenda, House/Senate committees and congressional officers
- checks and balances, which limit the power of the US president
- the US president cannot decide military operations without the approval of Congress
- the US president cannot appoint judges or ambassadors without the approval of Congress
- the US president can withhold assent – presidential veto, though this is subject also to congressional veto
- he or she is subject to the US Constitution and the rule of law – Supreme Court
- the US president has more constitutional limitations on powers – electoral terms restricted to two, and age and citizenship restrictions
- the powers of the executive are more clearly spelled out, but the US president does not have to contend with a governor-general with reserve powers
- the US president has much greater clout on the international stage and more respect on the domestic front
- he or she does not have to deal with an opposition that facilitates negotiation with Congress to some degree
- he or she has a longer term of four years.

Question 3

This question proved challenging for many students. Some responses did not fully address the topic, which required a specific focus on interest groups and an examination of their role in policy formulation and implementation. The rewriting of a domestic policy case study essay researched during the year, with a sentence on how interest groups played no role but other factors did, received a low score. This question did not allow students to disregard interest groups and discuss a list of other formulating factors on a policy case study. It required specific mention of actual

interest groups' names and examples. One or more domestic policy examples could be used; higher-scoring responses drew upon a range of domestic policy areas.

High-scoring responses were able to identify a broad range of interest groups in the Australian political system and evaluate their relative influence on a number of recent domestic policy areas.

Why do some groups have greater influence than others?

- Some have better/more resources than others.
- Some have more effective methods and tactics than others.
- Some are 'insider' groups that the government wants to listen to because the group largely has the same or similar policy objectives as the government. For example, industry groups such as the NFF, BCA, AIG and AMA are likely to get a much more sympathetic response from a Coalition government than an ALP government, and vice versa with groups such as the ACTU, AEU and ANF.
- Some interest groups can actually contribute to the policy process because the group has expertise and knowledge that is valuable to the government. The government seeks their advice and input.
- Some groups have formal links with political parties – for example, the ACTU with the ALP.

Regardless of the policy issue(s) selected by the student, interest groups will be involved in some way, even if they have very little influence.

Some essays focused on the recent Australian citizenship reform policy (where dual nationals involved in terrorism will have their citizenship revoked) and referred to groups such as the Human Rights Commission, the Law Council of Australia and the Muslim Legal Network.

Responses examining the 'no job, no pay' immunisation policy mentioned groups such as the AMA, childcare centre operators and parents' rights groups.

It is important for teachers and students to note that a broad interpretation of 'interest groups' is required in this area of study. Interest groups can also be considered to include 'pressure groups' and may incorporate many groups in society who try to influence government policy without necessarily having a self-interest. So groups with a broader focus – such as ACOSS, the AMA, the Human Rights Commission and Animals Australia, for example – can be considered as interest groups in the context of this area of study, as they aim to influence and shape government policy.

The following is an extract from an introduction to a high-scoring essay on this topic.

The capacity of interest groups to influence the formulation and implementation of domestic policy is largely contingent on their power, resources and 'insider or outsider' knowledge status. Often powerful sectional interest groups are able to significantly influence domestic policy. Unions are one such entity, recently using their clout to oppose rises in the GST and advocate for pay rises for Fire-fighters in Queensland. However the influence of both promotional and sectional interest groups is often restricted when a policy is reactive in nature, ultimately the extent to which interest groups influence the formation and implementation is dependent on their individual power, the political climate and the nature of each individual policy.

Question 4

This question was a popular choice and some excellent essays were written in response. The focus of the topic – the formulation and implementation of foreign policy, rather than its objectives – distracted some students but many were able to identify a range of domestic and external factors that are influential on Australian foreign policy, depending often on the context and situation.

The question required students to take a point of view and argue a contention throughout the response. An understanding of the reactive and proactive nature of domestic policy formulation

and the impact this has on implementation was needed, and it was expected that many recent relevant foreign policy examples would be discussed. Some of the recent examples given were: Australian air strikes against ISIS in Syria alongside the USA; the signing of the TPP; the signing of FTAs with Japan and others; opposition to the death penalty in Indonesia; the acceptance of 10 000 Syrian refugees; Australia's term on the UN security council; asylum seeker boat turn-backs; and recent budget cuts to foreign aid. High-scoring responses discussed the interconnection between domestic and external factors in foreign policy and the notion that the government must balance both in attempting to protect the national interest.

External factors are those that come from international sources, as opposed to those coming from inside Australia. Relevant external factors could have included:

- alliances
- United Nations (UNICEF, UNHCR, UNDP)
- world bodies; for example, WHO, WTO, IMF, International Court of Justice, International Criminal Court
- the threat of global terrorism
- international disasters; for example, loss of Malaysian planes
- coups, change of governments, political instability, invasions; for example, the instability seen in the Thailand Government in recent years
- global economic conditions, such as the impact of the GFC
- trade liberalisation and free trade agreements
- change of leadership in other countries; for example, change of US president
- change of policy in other countries; for example, the determination of the Indonesian Government to carry out executions of drug smugglers in 2015
- environmental issues
- Australia's responses to world opinions.

Domestic (or internal) factors that might influence Australian foreign policy include:

- the influence of the prime minister; for example, Tony Abbott became more active in foreign policy during 2014, as did Julia Gillard in her last year in office
- relevant minister(s); for example, Julie Bishop and Andrew Robb were both regarded as successful and active in their roles
- the executive/Cabinet can be of influence in some circumstances
- the Commonwealth Parliament
- the public service; DFAT is clearly prominent and powerful
- security agencies (ASIO and AFP); these agencies are staffed by experts the government is likely to listen to, particularly given overseas events
- public opinion; for example, on foreign aid the public is quiet but on live exports they are vocal
- the media and pressure or interest groups
- domestic security or defence issues; for example, the Martin Place siege and the murder of NSW police worker Curtis Cheng.