



GENERAL COMMENTS

Most students were well prepared for the 2010 examination and used it as an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the political systems of Australia and the United States of America. These students achieved an appropriate balance between the short answer and extended response components, with few students unable to complete the paper in the allowed time. Many students appreciated the importance of including relevant evidence and examples, and many displayed extensive knowledge of developments in Australian and US politics in recent years. In particular, many strong students displayed awareness of the significant events that occurred in Australian politics during 2010 and found opportunities to incorporate them into their responses. This included acute observations regarding the change in the prime ministership, the outcome and implications of the 2010 federal election, and major debates surrounding public policies such as the proposed tax on mining profits. However, it was disappointing that comparatively few students referred to the so-called 'new paradigm' in relation to the operation of the Commonwealth Parliament, as this term is now a part of Australian political terminology.

Most students recognised the importance of spending too much time completing Section A. The most successful responses presented the required definition, description or discussion accurately. Brief responses risked marks for detail and clarity. Most questions in Section A invited the use of illustrative examples and it was pleasing that many students provided these, including recent events and names of significant individuals or groups within the political system. The use of such examples allowed the more successful students to demonstrate their ability to apply general, theoretical knowledge to specific, contemporary situations. Students needed to think carefully about how best to select and apply their knowledge and understanding.

Four questions in Section A asked students to define a single piece of terminology. In order to receive full marks for these questions, the key requirement was to present the essential information clearly and concisely. Planning was required before writing, even for short and apparently straightforward questions. Students needed to do more than write a one-line statement. A brief expansion, explanation or example was also required in order to demonstrate complete understanding.

The remaining eight questions in Section A asked students to either describe or discuss two factors related to a specific aspect of the study design. In general, one mark was allocated for correctly identifying each of the two key factors related the question and one mark for relevant discussion, elaboration or providing a relevant example of each factor. Full marks could not be awarded for responses in which students merely stated or listed factors.

Many students used numbered or dot points in questions that required the description or discussion of two factors. This was a sensible approach as it helped students to focus on the essential requirement of the question and to avoid vagueness and repetition in their responses.

Sections B and C required students to write one extended response from Unit 3 and one extended response from Unit 4. Each question in these sections required students to discuss a particular idea or evaluate the accuracy of a statement. The most successful students adhered to this requirement, demonstrated evidence of planning, and selected and incorporated knowledge that was appropriate to the question asked. Most students wrote well and demonstrated good time management skills. There were few very short or underdeveloped responses.

The more successful students displayed good writing skills and their responses had a clear structure. These students included an introduction, often expressing a contention or core argument, followed by a series of body paragraphs and a short conclusion. Body paragraphs often dealt with a single element of the response, commencing with a topic sentence and developing detail as the paragraph progressed.

The more successful students also demonstrated awareness of political events and issues, particularly those which occurred during 2010, and used these effectively in their extended 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 the more successful responses.



SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Note: Student responses reproduced herein have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

For each question, an outline answer (or answers) is provided. In some cases the answer given is not the only answer that could have been awarded marks.

Section A – Short answer questions

Units 3 and 4

Washington to Canberra

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	13	12	75	1.6

The presidential veto refers to the constitutional power of the US President to refuse to sign a bill that has been passed by the two houses of the Congress, thus preventing it from becoming law. The President must send a message to Congress explaining why the bill is being vetoed. Congress is then able to override this veto by obtaining a 2/3 majority vote in the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Most students showed knowledge of this key concept of the US political system. Full marks could not be awarded for repeating the word 'veto' in responses without use of a synonym such as 'block', 'reject' or 'fail to agree to' to clarify its meaning. It was difficult to define the term 'veto' by repeating that term in the answer.

The following is an example of a successful response.

A component of the US system of checks and balances, it refers to the constitutional power of the President to overturn legislation passed by Congress through withholding consent on the bill. However a Presidential veto can be overturned by a two-thirds vote by Congress. An example of a presidential veto is George Bush's veto of a stem cell research bill in 2006.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	3	3	20	22	53	3.2

Key differences between the federal electoral systems used in Australia and the USA include the following.

- Australia's federal electoral system is administered by an independent statutory authority – the Australian Electoral Commission – that runs all aspects of the election in a way that is uniform and consistent across the whole country. US federal elections are administered at local government levels, so the systems used to record and count the votes differ across the country. This lack of uniformity can lead to considerable confusion as witnessed in the 2000 Presidential election in the state of Florida.
- There are two different voting systems used to elect representatives to the two chambers of the Australian Parliament. Neither the preferential voting system used for the Australian House of Representatives nor the proportional voting system used for the Australian Senate is used in the USA. Instead, a simple majority or 'first past the post' method is used to elect members of both the US House of Representatives and the US Senate.
- The Australian electoral system only indirectly allows voters to participate in the selection of the elected executive (via election of a majority party, whose leadership then forms the government). In the USA, citizens elect the head of the executive (who is also the head of state) via an electoral college system that translates voters' choices from each state into a national majority for a successful candidate.
- Voting is compulsory in Australia as failure to enrol to vote may result in penalties. As a consequence, political parties are not required to encourage citizens to vote as part of their role. Voting is voluntary in the USA and political parties are required to 'bring out the vote' in order to maximise their potential success.

Most students contrasted the compulsory aspects of the Australian electoral system with the voluntary nature of the US electoral system. However, some less successful students did little more than state this basic idea. The more successful students followed up the basic point with a description regarding the differing levels of voter participation in the Australia and the US, or with a brief reference to the democratic merits or drawbacks of requiring citizens to take part in elections.



Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	16	12	29	23	20	2.2

Similarities between the political party systems in Australia and the USA include:

- the domination of two major political parties. It is almost certain that the US President will belong to either the Democrats or the Republicans, and that these parties will also make up the bulk of the members of the US Congress. In Australia, the Prime Minister belongs to either the Australian Labor Party (ALP) or the Liberal Party of Australia, and members of these parties also make up the majority of the members of the Commonwealth Parliament
- political parties are the main vehicle for the development of policy in both countries
- the two major political parties are representative of particular ideologies and claim to represent particular sectors of society. For example, the ALP is representative of labour and the 'left' or 'centre-left' in Australia; similarly the Democrats in the US are regarded as a 'centre-left' party. Conversely, the Liberal Party of Australia and the Republicans in the US are regarded as further to the right on the ideological spectrum
- there is a range of smaller parties seeking representation in both Australia and the US, but these parties are unable to achieve government in their own right in current circumstances.

Many students were not well prepared for this question. The key knowledge of the study design makes clear reference to the political parties of Australia and the US. Despite this, few students wrote confident responses. A number of students contradicted themselves by discussing the impact of party discipline. Party discipline was a difficult issue to discuss because many students introduced it as a similarity and then went on to discuss the differences between the ways parties exercise this discipline in the US and in Australia. Many students seemed unaware that this discussion pointed to a difference between the parties rather than a similarity.

The less successful students discussed similarities between the Australian and US political systems in a more general sense rather than discussing specific similarities between the party systems. Such responses did not score any marks as they did not address the key aspect of the question.

The following excerpt from a successful response discussed two similarities.

Both party systems are dominated by two major parties, in Australia those being the Labor Party and the Liberal Party, and in the US being the Democrats and the Republicans. Although minor parties do exist, their power is most often less than that of the major parties.

Both systems have parties which represent both sides of the political spectrum while having smaller parties that sit further to the right and left of these. In Australia it is the Labor Party sitting just to the left and the Greens further to the left as well as the Liberal Party sitting just to the right and the Nationals . . .

Continuity and change

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	27	20	54	1.3

The reserve powers refer to the powers of the Australian Governor-General as described in the Constitution but that, by convention, are not exercised in normal circumstances. While the Constitution grants significant executive powers to the Governor-General, it is understood that it is the Prime Minister who exercises these executive powers. By convention, the Governor-General acts on the advice of the Prime Minister. If the Governor-General acts independently of this advice, they are exercising their reserve powers. The reserve powers of the Australian Governor-General include:

- the power to appoint a Prime Minister if an election results in a hung parliament
- the power to dismiss a Prime Minister in circumstances where the House of Representatives has passed a 'no-confidence' motion against the Prime Minister
- the power to refuse to dissolve the House of Representatives contrary to ministerial advice. The refusal by a Governor-General to dissolve the House on ministerial advice has been the most frequently used reserve power in Australia
- the power to refuse a double dissolution (although this has not been exercised in Australia on any of the six occasions when a double dissolution of parliament has been requested)
- the power to withhold assent to Bills that parliament has passed
- the independent discretion to select a new Prime Minister in circumstances where the outgoing Prime Minister resigns after a defeat in the House of Representatives



- the power to dismiss a Prime Minister in circumstances where the government cannot obtain supply and the Prime Minister refuses to resign or to call an election.

Most students were able to explain the concept of the reserve powers in the Australian political system. Some less successful students confused the reserve powers with the residual powers, the exclusive powers or others terms used to describe aspects of the powers set out in the Australian Constitution. These responses were not awarded any marks.

Many students mentioned the dismissal of the Whitlam government by Sir John Kerr in 1975 as an example of the reserve powers. While this was an appropriate example, some students did not provide a general explanation of the key term. It was difficult to adequately define the key term by the use of an example only.

The following response contained the essential elements.

Reserve powers are powers that are mentioned in the Constitution but conventionally they are never utilised. The Governor-General possesses these reserve powers, but traditionally relies on the advice of the Prime Minister.

Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	32	10	22	12	24	1.9

A high proportion of students had poor knowledge of changes made to the Australian Constitution since Federation. Most students focused on the eight changes made to the Constitution as a result of the passage of a referendum, although it was acceptable to describe the effect of significant High Court cases. Both are deemed to change the Constitution. While referendums change the wording of the Constitution, High Court decisions can affect the way the Constitution is interpreted. While it was not essential for students to make reference to specific Sections of the Australian Constitution, many strong responses did so.

Many students described the changes made as a result of legislative amendments rather than referendums. These included changes such as voting rights for women (1902), the introduction of compulsory voting (1924) and the lowering of the voting age from 21 to 18 (1973). None of these changes required alteration to the Australian Constitution and consequently students who described them did not score any marks. The referendums held during World War I relating to conscription were also incorrect as they did not change the Australian Constitution.

Few students opted to describe the effect of High Court decisions on the Constitution. Some successfully described the effect of the Franklin dams case (1983) and the First Uniform Tax case (1942), both of which altered the interpretation of Section 51. Students who described the Mabo case (1992) were less successful as this is not regarded as a constitutional case.

Many students accurately described the change made to Section 72 of the Constitution, which resulted from a referendum passed in 1977. This set 70 years as the compulsory retirement age of High Court judges. An equally popular example was the 1967 referendum, which altered two Sections of the Constitution, both relating to Indigenous Australians. However, while most students knew this referendum related to Indigenous Australians, few could describe accurately what it involved and its effect on the Constitution. Some students incorrectly suggested that the 1967 referendum gave Aboriginals the right to vote. The 1967 referendum made some significant changes to Sections 51 of the Constitution and deleted Section 127 entirely. However, neither of these changes involved voting rights. All Aboriginal people became eligible to enrol and vote in federal elections and referendums in 1962 (*AEC Electoral Pocketbook* revised edition 2009, p 26).

The following response described two changes as a result of referendums. The second comment is particularly effective as it anticipates and highlights the error many other students made in their responses to this question.

- In 1977 a referendum was put to the Australian people proposing to introduce a retiring age for High Court judges at age 70 which was promptly accepted by the public.*
- In 1967, over 90% of the Australian public voted to amend the Constitution to include indigenous Australians in the Constitution. This referendum is commonly believed to have granted Aborigines voting rights although technically they had already had it since 1962.*



Question 6

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	8	9	17	17	48	2.9

Most students were well prepared for this question and demonstrated good understanding of the important role that the Senate plays in Australian democracy. A successful way to answer the question was to identify two different democratic values and discuss how the Senate achieves them. The values of accountability and representation were described by many students. Democratic values fulfilled by the Australian Senate include the following.

- The Senate represents states in the federation equally (12 senators are elected from each)
- The proportional method of electing the Senate provides representation for smaller parties and independent senators. For example, the Australian Greens, the Family First party and Senator Xenophon (Independent, South Australia). This means that the Senate provides a more diverse representation than the largely two-party-dominated House of Representatives.
- All citizens have the opportunity to vote for their state's senators.
- The Senate committee system and inquiries call for and allow private submissions from citizens in reviewing legislation or government policies.
- Perhaps the Senate's most important role is to check on the power of the executive government's control of the lower house.
- Senate approval is needed before a Bill can be approved and given to the Governor-General for Royal Assent.
- The Senate committee system allows for detailed scrutiny of proposed Bills and public scrutiny of the executive's actions and planned actions.
- In recent decades, it has been rare for the party holding a majority in the lower house to also hold a majority in the Senate, thus increasing the scrutiny of contentious legislation.
- Since 1975, the Senate has not acted to block supply of an elected government holding a majority in the lower house. In this way, the Senate does not undermine the legitimacy of the government.

The following is an excerpt from a successful response that provided clear identification of two different democratic values, and then elaborated on them.

1. The Australian Senate fulfils the democratic value of accountability by acting as a House of Review for all the legislation passed in the House of Representatives, scrutinising proposals . . . This ensures the government is held accountable for its actions.

2. The Senate fulfils the democratic value of representation by providing equal representation for all States regardless of population or size. Each State has 12 representatives and 2 for each Territory.

People and policy

Question 7

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	25	21	53	1.3

It was pleasing that most students were able to define this more technical aspect of the Australian political system. A parliamentary committee is a selected group of members of the Commonwealth Parliament (members of the House of Representatives and/or Senators) who carry out the role of scrutinising and examining government actions, proposed legislation or broader issues of relevance to the Australian community. Committees can be effectively permanent (with changing membership over time; for example, standing committees) or established for particular purposes. Parliamentary committees exist in both houses and some committees have members drawn from both (joint committees). The Senate's committee system is more elaborate and effective than that used in the lower house, due to the history of government parties in recent decades lacking a majority in the Senate. The Senate estimates committee is a prominent example of a parliamentary committee.

The following response defined 'parliamentary committee' successfully.

A committee formed within the parliament by a group of MPs with the aim of investigating, researching and scrutinising legislation among other things. Parliamentary committees can contain members from both houses (Joint Committee), be permanent (Standing) or temporary and dissolved once their task has been completed.

Question 8

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	15	8	28	21	28	2.4

2010 Assessment Report



While most students had some understanding of the influences of the bureaucracy in federal domestic policy, many could do little more than state that the public service is a source of information and policy advice to the government. Many students focused on the formulation of domestic policy and overlooked the role of the bureaucracy in policy implementation. Few students provided relevant examples, although some strong responses referred to the prominent role of Treasury Secretary, Dr Ken Henry, in relation to taxation policy.

The following response demonstrated two relevant influences.

Firstly, the bureaucracy influences federal domestic policy through the advice it gives to government ministers. An example of a report given by the bureaucracy is the Henry Tax Review. Public servants will make submissions or policy advice to the minister for the department. Secondly, it is the bureaucracy which will organise the implementation of particular policy. Public servants will organise the government's policy to be put into effect in society.

The following response demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the role of the bureaucracy in domestic policy.

As with the Westminster tradition, the bureaucracy in Australia is apolitical. That puts the bureaucracy in a position to provide impartial and objective advice to ministers about domestic policies. In addition to this, the bureaucracy remains constant and does not change with the government. Therefore the public service, unlike the incumbent politicians, will already have accumulated and maintained the experience needed to formulate and influence federal domestic policy.

Question 9

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	14	10	27	21	27	2.4

A significant number of students overlooked the key element of this question – the influence of a recent federal election. The question required more than a discussion of two recent examples of domestic policy making. While most students were able to discuss relevant examples, far fewer could link them to the influence of a recent election. The events leading up to the 2010 election, as well as the consequences of the election, were considered appropriate influences for students to discuss in their responses. These influences included:

- the change of the ALP leadership during 2010 and the subsequent election meant that a number of key policies were altered. For example, the Resources Super Profits Tax changed in name and scope in order to neutralise a damaging media campaign
- pressure by the opposition during 2010 saw changes made to government immigration policy
- the decision by the Gillard Government to consider the introduction of a carbon tax after having earlier ruled it out. This decision was made after forming minority government with support from the Greens
- the formation of minority government on the basis of support from the Greens and Independents led to the establishment of a committee to examine ways of putting a price on carbon
- the influence of key independents in the formulation of rural and regional policies
- the formation of minority government on the basis of support from the Greens and Independents led to the so-called 'new paradigm' in Australian politics, particularly the operation of parliament. This has seen greater attention directed to policy issues such as same-sex marriage.

This response discussed two of these influences successfully.

1. Following the 2010 election where three rural independents held the balance of power, the government committed increased funds towards rural development and created a special department to oversee its spending.

2. A key policy area that emerged from the 2010 election campaign was the legislation of same-sex marriage which is now a key federal policy debate with both major political parties having a stance and the Greens proposing a private member's bill to the Senate.

Contemporary Australian foreign policy

Question 10

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	26	29	44	1.2



This question presented considerable difficulties for some students. While most students had an idea of the meaning of the term ‘refugee’, many explanations were too broad and too strongly influenced by common misconceptions of what a refugee is.

A good response relied on the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which defines a refugee as ‘A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.’ As a signatory to the 1951 Convention, the Australian Government accepts this definition. Hence a refugee is not an asylum seeker, displaced person, illegal migrant, unauthorised person or a ‘boat person.’ While some asylum seekers are later determined to be refugees, not all meet the criteria and so are subject to deportation to their home country. In addition, a refugee is not a person who is seeking to leave their home country for economic reasons, and many students lost marks for referring to factors such as poverty or lack of economic opportunity as common characteristics of refugees. Similarly, people escaping a natural disaster are not refugees.

The following high-scoring responses provided the essential information.

A refugee is a person who has been granted asylum in a nation or state which is not their own due to the threat of violence and or persecution against themselves or their families. Many people arrive in Australia seeking asylum, however refugee status can take a long time to process.

A refugee is a person who due to their fear of persecution or discrimination due to their race, political or religious beliefs are no longer safe in their country and must flee to seek asylum and protection from another country.

Question 11

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	9	8	27	23	33	2.7

This question assessed students’ understanding of the role of the Foreign Minister in Australian foreign policy. Most students successfully described the participation of the Foreign Minister in bilateral or multilateral meetings. The question lent itself to the use of contemporary examples, and many students mentioned the role of Kevin Rudd in the 2010 AUSMIN talks with the US Secretary of State. However, many students encountered difficulties in describing a second factor. These included the Foreign Minister’s role as:

- chief communicator of Australian foreign policy. The Minister communicates the policies of the government to neighbouring or other states. For example, Stephen Smith speaking with the East Timor Government about a possible regional refugee processing centre during 2010
- Australia’s government representative abroad. For example, Kevin Rudd speaking at the United Nations MDG progress meeting in 2010, which was attended by many heads of government
- leader of Australian Government overseas delegations
- defender of and spokesperson for Australia’s actions. For example, Stephen Smith explaining Australia’s decision to grant a visa to the Uyghur independence activist, Rebiya Kadeer, in the face of Chinese opposition in 2009
- member of the executive government. The Minister speaks in Cabinet in support/defence of appropriate foreign policy actions to be taken.

Question 12

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	11	10	27	24	28	2.5

This question required knowledge of a more technical aspect of Australian foreign policy. The challenges Australia faces in pursuing its trade and economic interests include:

- dealing with the competing national interests of other countries; for example, the protection of the US, Japanese and EU agricultural sectors makes it more difficult for Australia to sell exports in those markets
- the difficulty of achieving multilateral outcomes in World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations on trade, such as the Doha Round
- the difficulty of balancing China as an important export market for Australian products, while also expressing concern about the Chinese political system or human rights issues in China such as Tibet
- the decline of the USA as a financially stable country and its impact on world trade, especially in commodities
- growing competition from other countries such as Brazil in commodity export markets



- climate change and its effect on the price of Australia's key export (coal) and energy production costs.

Section B – Extended response questions

Unit 3 – Democracy in the making

Question chosen	0	1	2
%	1	80	19

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	3	5	4	4	8	8	10	10	14	9	8	5	2	0	12.5

Question 1

It was possible to approach this question in a variety of ways. Most commonly, students introduced their responses with an overview of democracy and its key values and characteristics. This was a successful approach as it provided a theoretical framework on which to evaluate the democratic merits of the US and Australian political systems.

Having introduced the key values of democracy, many successful responses analysed a series of institutions and processes of both the US and Australian political systems. This was done not purely as a comparison, but with frequent references to the key values of democracy. Examples included:

- representation – it could be argued that the Australian Senate is a far more representative body than the US Senate. Each state elects more senators in Australia than the US and, more significantly, the proportional voting system used to elect the Australian Senate allows a greater number of minor parties and independents to be elected than is likely under the simple majority system used to elect the US Senate
- participation – most obviously, the compulsory nature of the Australian voting system results in a far higher turnout than is seen in US elections. The more successful students quoted the percentage size of these respective turnout figures
- accountability – the fact that the executive government in Australia is located inside the legislature means the executive is constantly under the scrutiny of parliament. The Prime Minister has to be accountable to the legislature on a daily basis. This level of accountability is not seen in the US political system.

These points all supported the contention that the US system is less democratic than the Australian system. However, many successful students argued the opposite position by discussing democratic strengths of the US system, including its elected head of state, the clear separation of powers, and an extensive network of checks and balances, which are either absent or not seen as clearly in Australia. Another successful approach was to argue that both systems had democratic strengths and weaknesses, and so it is difficult to be strongly in favour of either.

Many less successful responses lacked this theoretical basis. Instead, they contained a list of differences between the two systems, with little or no reference to democracy and democratic values. While these responses often reflected good knowledge, they did not address the key aspect of the question.

The more successful responses established a contention in the introduction and then presented a series of arguments, each of which was supported by relevant examples and evidence. Too many students underestimated the importance of evidence, particularly in relation to the US system. Students were expected to have engaged with the Australian and US systems in such a way as to be able to cite specific incidents and events that have occurred in recent years. For example, stronger students made reference to the mid-term US Congressional elections which had taken place in the week prior to the 2010 examination.

The following opening paragraph introduces the response with an overview of democracy and its key values and characteristics.

Both the Australian and the US political systems have been shaped and based around the three democratic values of representation, participation, and accountability. While there are many similarities between the two systems, there are a number of different ways in which each upholds these values. The way in which the President is separately elected and voters choose the candidates, compulsion in Australia, the different voting systems, individual and collective ministerial responsibility are all functions which attempt to better uphold these democratic principles, but which of these two political systems better upholds these democratic values?



Question 2

This question assessed students' understanding of the key aspect of continuity and change in the Australian political system. It required students to recognise the often very partisan and political nature of change. While some students had a sophisticated appreciation of this matter and could discuss it with reference to series of relevant case studies, the less successful students had very limited knowledge of such evidence and were restricted to making general and repetitive comments that lacked essential elements.

It was pleasing to see that most students handled this question well. Strong responses appreciated that many proposals for change to the Australian political system encounter resistance. This opposition comes from a range of sources, including interest groups, political parties, public opinion and the media. Perhaps the most obvious area of change is to the Australian Constitution, and most students discussed the difficulties in employing Section 128 to change the Constitution by means of the referendum process. However, merely reciting the mechanical difficulties of this process, most notably the so-called 'double-majority' requirement, was of limited value. The less successful responses placed too much emphasis on this structural barrier to change at the expense of more partisan or political forces of resistance. These forces included a lack of voter understanding of, or lack of bipartisan support for, specific proposals. The proposal that Australia should become a republic remained a relevant example, and many students discussed it effectively. They demonstrated understanding that this profound change to the Australian political system has encountered strong resistance in the past, and the fact that this resistance continues is a likely explanation for the Australian Government's reluctance to initiate further consideration of the issue. A few strong responses discussed the current proposal to amend the Constitution so as to formally recognise Australia's Indigenous population as the original inhabitants of the land. It was noted that if both major political parties were to support this proposal, it is very likely to be achieved because one of the principal sources of resistance would be missing.

Some strong responses also discussed possible changes to the Australian electoral system and the resistance such change is likely to encounter. These students displayed good knowledge of the changes made to the *Electoral Act* under the Howard Government and the resistance these changes encountered from a range of sources. They offered an explanation of the reasons why these changes were so strongly resisted, and discussed the implications of the High Court decision in the Roach case as well as the attempts by the Rudd and Gillard Governments to reverse aspects of the Howard Government legislation. However, the less successful students did not demonstrate this level of knowledge.

Few students discussed changes to the operation of the Commonwealth Parliament. This was somewhat surprising as these proposals (commonly referred to as the 'new paradigm') were a prominent aspect of the agreement between the Labor Party, a Greens member of the House of Representatives and the three Independents that formed the basis of the Gillard minority government in 2010. This agreement led to a series of significant changes to the operation of key aspects of the parliament, including the role of the Speaker, Question Time and Private Members' Bills. While some students had awareness of these changes, few had a detailed appreciation of their significance and the circumstances in which they came about. The Rudd Government's short-lived experiment with Friday sittings of parliament was another excellent example of the way in which change or proposed change to the Australian political system encounters forces of resistance, yet few students discussed it.

Section C – Extended response questions

Unit 4 – The challenge of power

Question chosen	0	1	2
%	2	43	55

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	3	1	1	2	2	2	3	6	5	5	6	6	8	10	11	8	8	6	4	2	1	11.6



Question 1

This question required a mature understanding of the role of the executive branch of government in the formulation of domestic Australian public policy. Strong students demonstrated and appreciated that the extent of executive domination of policy making varies depending on prevailing circumstances. These students displayed accurate knowledge of the situation faced by the Gillard minority government following the 2010 federal election. This was in stark contrast to students who produced formulaic responses that described the policy-making process in far more general terms.

The more successful responses avoided agreeing too strongly with the contention that the executive dominates policy-making. These responses acknowledged the central role of the executive, but also recognised the possible influence of a series of other factors including minor parties, interest groups, the media and the opposition. However, the influence of these factors varies. For instance, the less successful responses were unable to demonstrate that interest groups such as trade unions are likely to exercise greater influence on workplace relations policy under a Labor Government than under a Coalition Government.

A successful response to the question required reference to one or more specific policy issues. While some responses analysed a single policy issue throughout their response, others discussed a range of different issues. While both approaches were successfully used, analysing a single policy area allowed students to demonstrate the depth of their knowledge of a specialist policy issue rather than superficial knowledge of a range of issues.

The Howard Government's WorkChoices legislation provided a useful case study of policy making in which the executive exercised significant influence, although the more successful students noted that the policy was amended in the face of negative public opinion and ultimately abandoned following the defeat of the Howard Government in 2007. Discussing the Rudd Government's Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) was another appropriate way of analysing the role of the executive in domestic policy formulation. Many students demonstrated keen understanding of the difficulties the government faced in formulating this policy. These responses discussed the influence of numerous forces well beyond the control of the executive. The lack of bipartisan support, opposition from minor parties and lack of international progress all contributed to the Rudd Government abandoning its policy in early 2010.

Many students displayed good knowledge of the Minerals Resource Rent Tax (MRRT). The more successful responses discussed this policy issue and many recognised that while the executive endeavoured to dominate the formulation of the policy, the MRRT encountered intense resistance from a range of sources, particularly the well-funded mining industry and its major interest group, the Minerals Council of Australia. As a result of this pressure, the executive made some significant changes to its original proposal.

A clear point of difference between strong and weak responses was the extent to which students recognised the diminished power of the executive following the 2010 federal election. While the less successful students failed to acknowledge its significance, the more successful responses understood that the policy-making power of a minority government can be quite different from one commanding a clear majority in the House of Representatives. In circumstances in which the government relies on the support of a series of independent and minor party members, the policy-making process can take on a different complexion. Far greater levels of consultation, negotiation and compromise by the executive may be required in order to maintain a workable majority in the lower house. The more successful students were able to name the crucial cross-bench MPs on which the Gillard Government relies and discuss specific areas of domestic policy on which they have or are likely to have influence on the government. This evidence added weight to the argument that, in current circumstances, the executive is unable to dominate the formulation of domestic policy.

This question provided an excellent opportunity for students to reveal their understanding of the policy-making process in a contemporary Australian context. Strong students took advantage of this, while weaker students interpreted the question as requiring a general description of the policy-making process. While some marks were awarded for that knowledge, such responses suffered in comparison to those that evaluated the extent of executive domination of domestic policy making.

Question 2

Although it was possible for students to present a range of contentions in response to this question, the more successful students focused on the importance of regional issues as an influence on Australian foreign policy. In doing so, these students offered extensive evidence of recent foreign policy initiatives in the region, generally defined as the Asia-Pacific. Examples of Australian foreign policy response to regional issues discussed by many students included:

- Australia's response to natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis and other natural disasters in the region

2010 Assessment Report



- Australia's foreign aid program heavily focused on Asia-Pacific
- regional security issues such as the fear of 'failed states' in the South Pacific
- poor governance and lack of democracy in the region
- issues of border security, asylum seekers and people smuggling
- peacekeeping operations.

Many students noted the reactive nature of foreign policy in response to such issues. As one of the wealthiest nations in the region, the world looks to Australia to take a lead in times when poorer neighbouring nations are in need of help. However, some strong students argued that, in addition, much Australian foreign policy is more proactive and seeks to advance Australia's national interests by careful policy planning, diplomacy and cooperation. These students provided evidence to argue that much of this style of policy is focused on the region. Examples of this more proactive foreign policy included:

- the establishment of free-trade agreements within the region, including with Thailand and New Zealand
- continuing efforts by Australia to form new free-trade agreements, notably with China – Australia's largest trading partner
- joint military exercises with the US and other regional nations in order to enhance Australia's national security
- Australia's initiatives under Kevin Rudd to develop a broader Asian community.

Many students' knowledge of such regional issues was impressive. Some less successful students adopted a similar contention but were unable to sustain it due to their lack of such evidence. Their responses were often very general, repetitive and brief. This highlights the crucial role evidence and examples play in writing about contemporary foreign policy. Without specific knowledge of what Australian foreign policy involves, student writing was vague and unconvincing.

Other less successful responses largely avoided regional issues and wrote general overviews of the factors influencing the formulation of Australian foreign policy. Many of these responses lacked genuine engagement with the topic. In responding to the question 'To what extent do you agree?', students needed to take a position, and students who neither clearly agreed nor disagreed with the contention that Australian foreign policy is largely formulated in response to regional issues did not gain marks.

Rather than confronting the key element of the question, the less successful responses discussed broader influences such as national security, economic prosperity and global citizenship. Some devoted too much attention to Australia's relationship with the US at the expense of other parts of the region. Some students more successfully argued a 'middle course' by contending that, while Australian foreign does respond to regional issues, other influences play an important role in shaping Australia's foreign policy. However, many of these responses did not achieve the marks awarded to students whose knowledge of contemporary Australian foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific region sustained their entire response.