GENERAL COMMENTS

Responses to the 2008 Sociology examination suggested that students are becoming more familiar with the demands of the course and its content. They also reflected the wide range of issues and diverse social groups that students have researched and studied this year. Of particular prominence was the Rudd government's formal apology to members of the 'Stolen Generation' and the Howard government's Northern Territory intervention policy, but students also displayed a strong understanding of issues such as homelessness, gender inequalities and discrimination against migrant groups.

It was evident that students coped well with the demands of the short response questions and the two longer questions in Section A. However, responses to Question 3c. in Section B and Question 4c. in Section C tended to lack specific detail and suggested that there was some confusion regarding the demands of the particular topics. Consequently, responses to these questions were often underdeveloped and lacking in essential structure and detail.

It is pleasing to note that the essay responses in Section D continue to improve, with students consistently providing high quality responses. In particular, there was noticeable improvement in the structuring of responses and a greater attempt by many students to provide a genuine discussion of their chosen topic.

Overall, students were generally comfortable discussing specific or chosen case studies and extracting basic information from the representations in Sections B and C. However, it was evident that an inability to expand their discussions, provide specific examples or think conceptually prevented many students from gaining high marks.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section A
Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	3	2	6	7	13	12	19	16	11	7	4	**5.6**

Students were required to provide a satisfactory definition of community and then adequately identify and discuss two factors that have influenced communities in Australia. There was considerable scope for both selection and discussion of various factors and students offered numerous examples in their responses. These included climate change and the ongoing drought, urbanisation, multiculturalism, the social impacts of technological advances, workplace and industrial reform, changing social roles and perceptions, and globalisation.

While most students were able to easily identify appropriate social, environmental, economic or political factors, they often did not fully explain the influence that these factors had on either specific or general community groups. Stronger responses tended to look at community as a broad concept supported by specific examples of a particular community type, rather than simply focusing on individual or particular community groups. However, it was noted that the wording of the question allowed for both approaches and both were equally accepted. Stronger responses also demonstrated awareness of the theoretical understanding that underlies discussions about the concept of community.

Following is an excerpt from a good response.

> *Community and the concepts surrounding it are constantly changing and evolving to suit the circumstances of the day. The German sociologist Tonnies conceptualised community in two ways . . .Gemeinschaft communities are typically small, close knit, and members share bonds of blood, mind and place. Gesellschaft communities are generally large communities which may or may not be geographically linked. The relationships associated with Gesellschft communities are typically fluid, fleeting, superficial and brief. Across the globe and certainly in Australia, a shift from Gemeinschaft communities toward Gesellschaft communities is becoming more and more evident.*
>
> *Due to better technologies emerging all of the time, people have been interacting more online. This has given birth to the virtual community, which is a perfect example of a Gesellschaft community. People interact less with those geographically close to them, so as to interact more with those further away. Also, many relationships inside virtual communities do not incorporate any physical meeting. This makes relationships typically calculating, fleeting and superficial.*

Urbanisation [has] again pushed communities closer to the Gesellschaft concept. Before the boom of big cities, small towns with close knit communities thrived. These small towns epitomised Geneinschaft, however, with increasing urbanisation, relationships are again less close and more fleeting.

Technology and urbanisation have and continue to change and influence Australia's communities.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	8	3	6	8	10	12	13	9	15	9	6	**5.5**

Students generally demonstrated a good understanding of the demands of this question and discussed a range of community groups in their responses. It was essential for students to identify and discuss one community only and provide a satisfactory description of their chosen group. Similarly, students needed to clearly identify and label the type of issue that they were exploring and adequately discuss the positive or negative impacts that they would have on their selected group. High-scoring responses were able to:
- identify and describe a specific community
- identify and correctly label the chosen issues as either government, environmental or economic
- fully explore the impacts of each issue
- arrive at a conclusion about how the community has been changed, and whether and how this has been positive and negative for the members of that community.

The strongest responses also focused on specific community groups, such as the Serbian community of Wodonga, various distinct indigenous communities like Wadeye, or small locally-based clubs and organisations, rather than discussing broad umbrella groups such as the 'gay community' or the 'Muslim community'. It was, however, acceptable to discuss particular regional or identifiable groups within these umbrella communities. Common mistakes included failing to describe the chosen community, looking at more than one community group, only discussing one issue or discussing social factors instead of the factors listed in the question, failing to clearly label the type of factor being discussed and being vague, imprecise or too general in the discussion.

The following is an excerpt from a good response.

A community can be defined as a group of people who share common values and beliefs which create the core of their identity and a concept of where they belong. The Serbian community of Wodonga, North East Victoria consists of around 220-250 members. They migrated to Australia after World War Two and were housed in the Bonegilla migrant camp. When they were released into the wider community the government policy of the time, Assimilation, proposed that they abandon their own national culture in order to blend in with the Australian community. This policy had a devastating effect on the Serbian community. They had plunged into an unknown world and had lost their grip on their sense of identity and belonging. The culture, identity and heritage which bound the community together were weakened due to assimilation . . . Their whole community had been thrown into turmoil in the absence of their values and beliefs that held the community securely together. The government eventually amended its policies introducing the policy of multiculturalism which aimed to preserve the cultures of immigrants as well as incorporating Australian values. Multiculturalism restored the Serbian community of Wodonga as they were finally able to embrace their culture. They opened up the Serbian Hall, a place to come together and immerse oneself in the heritage of their community. Once again able to connect with each other through their shared culture the bonds that kept the community together were once again strengthened and today the Serbian community feels pride, an important factor in the well being of any person, no matter where they come from or where they feel they belong.

Section B
Question 3a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	1	15	84	**1.9**

This question was generally very well done, and students were rewarded for either selecting one reason for the apology or briefly discussing it, or for clearly identifying two reasons for the apology. Strong responses simply quoted directly or clearly paraphrased from the article.

Question 3b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	0	5	25	38	32	**3**

This question was problematic for many students who struggled with the open phrasing of the topic. To adequately answer the question students were expected to identify clear potential problems outlined in the article and expand briefly upon them in their discussion. The best responses were able to distinguish between practical and symbolic forms

of reconciliation and arrive at clear conclusions as to what changes the apology might signal. Students were rewarded whether they explored positive or negative possible impacts, with many strong responses suggesting that there would be little or no change without more meaningful action to support the apology. Possible impacts that were identified and discussed included improved relations between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, the opportunity for a new start by recognising the mistakes of the past, a chance to improve living conditions, health and educational opportunities for indigenous Australians, and the possibility that the apology would not make any difference at all.

The following is an example of a good response.

> *The apology by the Rudd government on 13/2/08 will address the symbolic reconciliation for ATSI peoples. By apologising 'for the pain, suffering and hurt' of the Stolen Generation, which were the indigenous children forcibly removed under the government policy from the early 1900's to the 1960's, ATSI peoples can move on so that practical reconciliation can significantly reduce the disadvantage which ATSI people experience. Thus the government and ATSI population can work together to 'close the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity'. Thus, the apology will have a significant impact on solving the ATSI disadvantage as Indigenous peoples will be more willing to work with the government to address the social disadvantage, including the 17 year gap between indigenous and non-indigenous in life expectancy.*

Question 3c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	8	12	27	32	22	**2.5**

This was another problematic question for many students who tended to identify a problem, but then struggled to discuss it in enough depth or detail. To score highly, students needed to identify a contemporary problem outlined in the representation and then provide specific evidence or examples to support their discussion. It was also essential that students limited their discussion to **one** problem only, and that it was contemporary in nature. For students who chose to discuss the 'Stolen Generation', it was necessary for them to link it with the ongoing difficulties experienced by survivors or communities today, rather than simply focusing on issues from the past. Other problems commonly discussed included the gap in life expectancy, education and health care between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, family and community break up, economic disadvantage and continuing discrimination.

The following is an excerpt from a good response.

> *One of the contemporary problems referred to in the representation is the 'gap that lies between [indigenous and non-indigenous Australians] in life expectancy'. In 2008, an average 17 year life expectancy [gap] exists with the living and health conditions of most Aboriginal . . . communities to blame. In terms of health, the infant mortality and death rates for Aboriginal people are twice that of other Australians and seven times [for] diseases such as Chlamydia . . . Aboriginal people are more likely to die from accidents or assault and the living conditions of Aboriginal people have been likened to that of a Third World country. Many houses are characterised by poor washing and sanitation facilities and in 2002, 26% of those Aboriginals over 15 were living in overcrowded housing. These conditions result in the life expectancy gap that exists and until these issues are addressed, the gap will not be 'closed'.*

Question 3d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	7	8	12	11	15	15	12	8	6	4	2	**4.3**

This was possibly the most challenging question on the examination for many students. While there was no direct requirement for students to refer to the representation, many strong responses chose to use the apology as a starting point for an expanded discussion of examples of government policy from their own study. It was, however, essential for students to take a clear stand in relation to the topic and to clearly identify and discuss at least two clear government policies affecting indigenous Australians. Due to the wording of the question, it was also acceptable for students to discuss any level of government policy and to draw upon historical examples if they so chose. Students discussed policies such as assimilationist policies of the past, land rights, Native Title and Wik, self-determination and the abolition of ATSIC, reconciliation and the recent apology for the 'Stolen Generation', the Howard government's 2007 Northern Territory intervention, mutual obligation and a range of educational, employment and health initiatives. Students who referred to specific policies, provided clear evidence and examples in their discussion and demonstrated an awareness of the concept of reconciliation, scored highly. The main difficulties experienced by students tended to be a lack of depth in their discussion or a failure to take a clear position in regard to the topic. Students had to very clearly state whether government policies were or were not important and then discuss examples that supported their position. Many students simply listed policies with little clear discussion of their importance and no attempt to link them conceptually with indigenous and non-indigenous relations.

The following is an excerpt from a good response.

Government policies such as the mutual obligation scheme in indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, schemes to keep youths in school and the Federal government's apology are important in addressing the problems faced by the ATSI peoples in the sense they are steps towards closing the gap between ATSI and [non-indigenous] peoples. The mutual obligation scheme is working towards creating better health and living conditions by supplying the communities with the necessary tools and skills to better [things] themselves. The schemes implemented to help youths continue their education by offering scholarships will help . . . ATSI people to be qualified to apply for higher paying and better workplaces. Finally, the Federal government's formal apology shows a national commitment to achieve solutions to the problems faced so there can not be a gap between Australians.

Section C
Question 4a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	1	8	92	**1.9**

Students tended to cope very well with this question. The safest approach was simply to provide direct quotes from the article which clearly identified specific concerns that had been raised about the citizenship test. Examples of these included a fear among migrants of deportation for failing the test, the inappropriateness of some questions, the declining number of migrants applying for citizenship, the complexity of the level of English used in the test and the political motivations behind the test.

Question 4b.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	5	21	74	**1.7**

Students generally did very well on this question. However, students had to be very specific about the examples that they chose to use and had to clearly identify which was a responsibility and which was a privilege. There was also some confusion as to what constituted a 'privilege'. Examples of responsibilities included to serve on a jury, to obey the law, to exercise the right to vote, to defend the country if needed and to value democracy. Some privileges included the ability to enrol to vote, to stand for public office, to seek consular assistance when overseas, and to join the defence force.

Question 4c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	3	3	10	17	32	21	14	**3.9**

Most students were able to correctly identify two arguments for the citizenship test, but many failed to properly evaluate the strength of the arguments. The best responses clearly identified the arguments, discussed the merits of each and arrived at a conclusion as to how valid the claims were. While students had to limit their examples of arguments to those taken from the government advertisement, they were able to bring in relevant information from their own study to support their evaluation. Examples of arguments used were the need to understand and respect the values of the Australian community, the need to make a contribution to the community, the respect for equality that Australia provides, and the need to know the history, traditions, customs and symbols of the nation. Evaluation of the arguments ranged from them being fair, reasonable and necessary for successful integration into Australian society, to being irrelevant, hypocritical or even contradictory to the values the advertisement claims to be Australian. Common mistakes included only identifying and evaluating one argument, identifying more than two arguments, or identifying arguments without attempting to assess their merit.

The following is an excerpt from a good response.

The government advertisement for the citizenship test identified 'learning more about our country and understanding our values' as an argument for the citizenship test. The advertisement highlights that it believes this will 'help people take part in Australian life, make a contribution and become part of our diverse community'. However, many new Australians have been able to integrate and 'take part' in Australian life for decades, successfully without passing the citizenship test. Similarly, who decides what Australia's values are or who decides that the Australian government can decide what 'our' values are as values are individual to each person. The government advertisement also identifies 'making sure people becoming citizens know about Australia and understand the responsibilities and privileges of committing to our way of life'. This argument has many flaws as many Australians do not know of their responsibilities and privileges. Similarly, many Australians do not know . . . many of the 'well known' facts about Australia and many average Australians cannot answer the questions.

Question 4d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	4	4	9	12	11	15	20	14	8	3	1	**4.9**

While most students demonstrated an understanding of this question, very few fully met the demands that it presented. Common mistakes included a lack of definitions, inadequate discussion, an imbalance in the space allocated to each of the chosen groups, or only focusing on one group. Students were expected to define both citizenship and democracy, and to clearly address concepts of both equality and mutual respect in their discussions of their selected groups. The strongest responses focussed on contemporary evidence to support their assertions and were able to acknowledge the complexities involved in the experience of citizenship for different groups within modern Australia. Factors included in discussions were various forms of discrimination, stereotyping, social and occupational exclusion, government policies, social attitudes, media representations, social participation and access to rights and privileges. Groups that were commonly discussed included women and migrant groups, with many students choosing to focus on the Muslim experience, young people and indigenous Australians. Student responses were often underdeveloped or cut short. It is important for students to make use of the additional writing space at the end of the examination booklet if they find the space allocated for their response is insufficient. It is also essential for students to think carefully about how they will structure a long response such as this so that they allocate equal discussion space to each group that they discuss.

The following is an excerpt from a good response (though it is lacking definitions of citizenship and democracy).

> *The above statement can be seen as true to some extent, however, events such as the 2006 Cronulla riots and terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the 2002 Bali bombings have made it hard for certain ethnicities and religious identifications to feel as if they are indeed treated with equality and respect.*
>
> *Although Australia has long been identified as a multicultural nation, with a policy protecting the culturally plural society as well as . . . 935 of Australians polled in a 2005 survey agreeing with it, certain ethnic groups are still targeted and persecuted as seen in the Cronulla riots with the Lebanese community of Sydney [being] attacked. This cannot be seen as being a product of an equal and respectful society.*
>
> *Certain religious communities have suffered similarly. Such as the Australian Muslim community's persecution after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Those with a religious affiliation to Islam were quickly branded as 'terrorists' and support for multiculturalism dropped down to only 70% - an all time low. Because of their religious identification, the Australian Muslim community did not enjoy equality and mutual respect and to some extent, still do not.*

Section D

Question chosen	None	a.	b.	c.
%	2	64	32	2

Question 5

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	2	2	2	2	3	5	6	8	7	8	11	9	8	8	6	4	4	1	1	**11**

Students seemed to be cope better with the demands of the essay task this year than in previous years. While detailed discussion and use of precise and relevant evidence continue to pose problems for many students, there have been obvious improvements in essay structure, length, and relevance of discussion to the chosen topic in recent years. However, many responses still needed to be more concise in their discussion and better supported by well-chosen evidence. Similarly, students needed to manage their time more carefully throughout the entire examination as it appeared that many left themselves with little time to formulate a fully considered approach to this task.

Students needed to begin with an introduction that addressed the topic, outlined their contention and points and defined key terms before moving on to distinct, equally weighted paragraphs that provided clear points and supporting evidence in the discussion of individual points.

It was evident that many students did not read their topic carefully enough as many chose to discuss three or more aspects or features in their essay despite all topics clearly asking for only two to be discussed. While students were not penalised directly for this, the third aspect or feature could not contribute toward their mark and many students wasted time or left other points underdeveloped while writing points that could not be considered.

Question 5a.
In order to fully answer this question students needed to:
- define globalisation
- write in essay format
- identify two clear aspects of globalisation that have led to significant changes in Australia's social, economic or political life
- discuss changes with detailed supporting evidence
- arrive at a logical conclusion as to the overall impact of the changes
- keep the focus of the essay on the Australian experience.

Changes that were commonly discussed included the impact of the global economic crisis, changing work patterns, loss of jobs and industries, the increasing influence of trans-national companies, impacts on Australia's standard of living and leisure activities, multiculturalism, the benefits of an increased access to a variety of imported goods and technologies, and the increased economic competition that globalisation brings about.

Question 5b.
In order to fully answer this question students needed to:
- define globalisation
- adhere to the essay format
- state whether globalisation was a positive or negative process of change
- identify and discuss two changes
- provide relevant supporting evidence to support claims made
- arrive at a logical conclusion which was consistent with the evidence provided.

Positive elements identified by students for their arguments included the positive economic benefits that globalisation offers developed countries, the benefits of cultural diversity and global interaction, the wider array of goods and services now available, the sharing of new technology and knowledge, international agreement on major issues such as climate change and increased travel and communication. Negative elements included the threat of terrorism, the exploitation of developing nations, climate change, loss of jobs and industries off-shore, cyber fraud and stalking and the increased exposure to and risk of pandemics.

Question 5c.
In order to fully answer this question students needed to:
- define globalisation
- define democracy
- adhere to the essay format
- state whether globalisation has promoted or eroded democracy in Australia and give clear reasons for the position
- clearly identify two features of globalisation that have impacted on Australian democracy and discuss them with supporting evidence
- arrive at a logical conclusion which was consistent with the evidence provided
- maintain a focus on Australia.

Features that students chose to discuss included the impact of transnational corporations on Australia's national sovereignty, the increasing inability of national governments to control global events that threaten the safety of their citizens, the impact of international treaties and agreements on the decision making of the Australian government, and Australia's increasing role within the global community and whether this has impacted on local policy making decisions.