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Australian and International Politics

2015 Chief Assessor's Report

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## Overview

Chief Assessors’ reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standard set out in the subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, with the quality of student performance, and any other relevant statistics information.

Both the members of the marking panel and the members of the moderation panel commented on the high quality of the work before them.

## School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Folio

In almost every case, students provided at least three pieces of work for the folio, with two in the form of a written argument and one that focused on an international topic. The majority of student responses remained within the 1000 word-limit and it was clear that teachers were applying these specifications in line with the subject outline.

Teachers are again reminded that each assessment task they present for this assessment type must stand by itself and that the moderators should not be expected to have assumed knowledge about the question or other information. Additional information and notes, and perhaps speech flashcards, may enhance a presentation, and could be seen as a part of the overall communication. That said, many variations on the traditional theme of a past essay examination question produced lively comment in the form of highly proficient critical analysis. In general terms, one or two sub-questions in each folio task, rather than three or more sub-questions, provided greater opportunity for detailed, astute, and coherent communication. Moderators commented that in general, ‘knowledge and understanding’ and ‘communication’ were better addressed than ‘critical analysis and reflection’, and indicated that in the latter there was an area for improvement.

Assessment Type 2: Sources Analysis

All students provided at least two sources analysis assessments, including one that focused on an international topic. In all instances, students had completed a sources analysis under supervision and within the 90-minute time limit identified in the subject outline. Students are advised to aim to for the 1000 word-limit in order to maximise their chances of achieving at the highest grade bands.

In general this assessment type was well done, and again the analysis of sources completed under non-supervised conditions was outstanding. The moderators felt that some improvements might be made in minor areas, including narrowing the range of the sub-questions asked/answered in the task, and narrowing of content/amount in the task itself related to some of the sources. The moderators added that more of the recommendations in the subject outline such as analysing, comparing, assessing the validity of, and evaluating sources, might be incorporated into task design for this assessment type.

Assessment Type 3: Investigation

In every case, students provided an investigation of a local, national, or international political issue in which they had a personal interest. Teachers are reminded that the selected political issues should be recent and that a hypothesis or focus question should be used to guide the investigation. In a few cases, student performance was limited by not having ‘adequate available resources’ as identified in the subject outline. In the broadest terms, this was the only area that needed attention. Students are advised to aim to reach the 2000 word-limit. While more is not necessarily better, it is likely that in reaching the word-limit, students will have a better chance to achieve at the higher grade bands or at least at a higher grade level in the grade band.

Moderators were impressed by the diversity of choice in political issues, which included whaling, same sex marriage, immigration, music in politics, university fees, the senate voting habits of Jacqui Lambie, matters relating to local councils, ISIS, matters relating to the Canadian election, the submarine debate, euthanasia, and the times and troubles of Tony Abbott. ‘Communication’ was thoughtful and clear and often astute and coherent; ‘reflections’ were well organised, but often lacked reflection on the value of surveys in terms of representation of societal opinion; ‘analysis’ was at least proficient but ‘research’ in general terms needed to be wider, using relevant primary and secondary sources, and based not only on Internet resources.

## External Assessment

Assessment Type 4: Examination

Question 1

The more astute and coherent responses examined whether or not the Constitution was ‘the’ basis or ‘a’ basis for contemporary Australia. The idea of federalism and its strengths and weaknesses in contemporary Australia gave the stronger students using proficient analysis the opportunity to demonstrate informed understanding. Others used precise examples from High Court decisions to mount the arguments both for and against its role in this debate. The discussion that the Constitution guarantees fair electoral outcomes was made against a backdrop of the ‘make up’ of the current senate. Stronger responses demonstrated reasoned, connected arguments in this area. Other points relating to the need or not for a Bill of Rights, the non-appearance or mention of the Indigenous people, and the debates around section 128 were argued to a position of proficient critical analysis as distinct from *highly* proficient critical analysis. One marker noted that the accurate citing of specific sections on the Constitution was better than in the immediate past.

Question 4

Responses tended to be a little shorter and had a focus on some four or fewer examples. Knowledge and understanding of the details of the 2014 Budget measures being lost in the senate were well covered, and the difficulties of the former Abbott government were documented in student responses. Some convincing comparisons were made to the situation of the Gillard government and the problems, at times, with Wilkie, Oakeshott, and Windsor. The point that upper houses are, in theory, meant to review was convincingly made. Equally well analysed was the change for the senate from a ‘states house’ to a ‘party political house’. Better responses noted that upper houses were arguably needed as a mollifier or as an editor, and need not be combative. The role of conventions appeared in the better responses.

Question 5

Stronger responses honed in on the word ‘guarantee’ and set about using a range of reasoned, connected arguments to deliver their case. There was a well-informed understanding of the conflicts between social responsibility and infringement of personal liberty with respect to so-called ‘compulsory voting’. The concept of a secret ballot appeared in most responses. The argument that one overriding body at federal level — the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) — did in itself provide surety was made against the backdrop of some recent problems in Western Australia. Debates about unicameral examples were well known and coherently analysed. Most students could cite cases at both federal and state levels where a majority of votes did not bring victory and used this point to indicate comprehensive knowledge in answering this question. The use of more historical examples was covered to good effect. The line of argument that malapportionment is considerably less likely now than in the past was well made.

There was no need to spend time explaining the preferential system(s) in great detail, and this was a problem for some students. Some did argue in an impressive manner about the need or otherwise for compulsory preferential voting, which made for impressive comparisons at state level. Some mused that the current systems seemed more democratic than the first-past-the-post scenario, while others championed the preferential system.

Question 6

Markers were impressed by the quality of the responses and the range of examples used to make the case for either policy or leadership, or indeed for other factors. The range of examples came from the past quarter of a century.

Knowledge and understanding of the 2001 federal election impressed markers. Better responses not only noted that both Tampa and 9/11 were ‘game changers’, but also suggested through proficient critical analysis that outcomes were a mix of leadership and policy — others mentioned xenophobia and pragmatism. Better responses covered the more general aspects of these and covered ‘children overboard’ and did not fall into the trap of giving unnecessary details.

Students may focus on state or federal examples, but this year covered state examples in only a fleeting manner or as a useful comparison. Better responses covered more than two examples and to uneven levels of detail. Some were keen to argue that, at a federal level, 2007 voters were influenced more by leadership or lack thereof whereas 2010 was too short a formal campaign to determine. Both examples presented students with the opportunity to present critical analysis.

Question 7

Student responses to this question were of a very high order, and demonstrated both comprehensive knowledge and highly proficient critical analysis. Strong responses usually articulated the core ideologies of both Labor and Liberal and their position on the political spectrum, while the better responses evaluated how various policies were either in-line with or departed from this. A range of examples were given for both views; that is, that pragmatism ‘wins through’ and that ideology can also ‘win through’. The former category saw excellent examples cited from both the Hawke/Keating era and the Playford era. There was lively discussion around the idea and actions of Howard, particularly gun control in 1996 and WorkChoices in 2007. One marker noted that ‘there was a rush’ to use Tony Abbott’s phrase, ‘dead, buried, cremated’, in this context. Some responses focused mainly in the post-2001 era and spent time with the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and Minerals Resource Rent Tax (MRRT) examples. The more astute noted through reasoned, connected arguments that the absolute fundamental ideology is still seen as the core and many argued that changes to policy are only made on the matters which are not core to the ideology. Others felt that a party emerging in the 1890s, or for that matter in 1945, needs to change in order to remain relevant. Many responses mused that to succeed, a party needs to be in-tune with its constituents, and must also sense when pragmatic reasoning must be applied or when a return to ideological roots is a better path.

A small number of students noted that a possible reason that minor parties were minor parties could be linked to the idea that they were too ideologically driven and that a narrow focus that likely follows accounted for this.

Question 8

Responses to this question were spirited, occasionally passionate, and used a range of examples. That said, as in the past, students are strongly advised not to attack in a vitriolic manner an individual or party as this will likely lower their level of achievement, possibly by a grade band. Overall understanding varied from ‘comprehensive’ to ‘considered’ and from ‘astute communication’ to ‘generally clear communication’, which was reflected in the results gained by individual students.

One marker cited the ‘lively debate’ around individuals like Clive Palmer and Jacqui Lambie while the voting record of these and others like Bob Katter were cited with accuracy. Some students implied that some of the candidates in the recent Canning by-election did represent the lunatic fringe! The Greens were generally seen as a party of principle and as high-minded rather than ‘lunatic.’ There was critical analysis of Nick Xenophon: his anti-pokie stance was noted and cited as the ‘moral high ground, and the reverse debate was seen around his use of stunts (including ‘cash cow’ and the ‘giraffe at the zoo’ incident). These issues dotted the papers and were well analysed.

Students often concluded that this group provided political diversity, which they saw as good. Some mused that what is ‘lunatic’ is a matter of opinion and others noted that the proportion of first preferences for major parties is on the decline in Australia, and went on to imply that minor parties and independents were now more ‘popular’ than ever before.

Question 12

Responses were mainly in the middle grade bands for this question. These responses used generalities and lacked specific examples, and hence understanding was ‘considered’ and analysis tended to be only ‘competent’.

Comments about the Internet, television, and online news were accurate, if shallow. There was some interesting and critical analysis of surveys that suggested that some cohorts of the population saw Facebook, Reddit, and Tumblr as informative.

The argument that the ‘Americanisation of the media’ diminished its value was raised. Likewise, the increasing impact of media moguls in a range of countries was seen as limiting choice. Most students were keen to stress that despite its alleged shortcomings, social media — which was seen as arguably a form of global media — had much to offer and provided an alternative viewpoint.

Question 13

This was the least popular question in the Global Media section but produced quality responses. The impact of Rupert Murdoch received wide coverage. Some highly proficient analysis of the role of *The Australian* and its ‘attacks’ on the Julia Gillard leadership were given. Knowledge of the role of Alan Jones Breakfast Show on 2GB was wide, as was the somewhat counteracting role of Paul Barry on Media Watch. Analysis suggested that in Australia there is currently a problem with balanced reporting. Others mentioned that Ray Hadley and Andrew Bolt very clearly tipped the balance against balanced reporting.

Some coverage was given to the Fox News attacks on Obama in 2008 and 2012, and evaluation suggested that Bill O’Reilly was not ‘fair and balanced’. Students often took the opportunity to compare reporting in a totalitarian regime where balanced reporting is minimal or nil, and here North Korea was a popular example to cite.

Question 14

This was the most popular question in the Global Media section and produced quality responses while sometimes using a narrow range of examples.

Students demonstrated comprehensive knowledge of the 15-M movement in Spain initiated by the ‘indignados’ — the outraged. Critical analysis of the Spanish financial crisis was noted, as was the role of Facebook and Twitter and indeed the *Washington Post*. The role of alternative media was evidenced in the Arab Spring and particularly with Tunisia and Egypt where coherent communication emphasised the role of dissatisfaction with traditional politics. The now famous quote, ‘We use Facebook to schedule protests, Twitter to coordinate, and YouTube to tell the world’, appeared more than once. The incident involving the ‘blue bra girl’ in Egypt reinforced this point. Much was made of the Occupy Movement in its various iterations. The non-existent role of alternative media in China was covered in a well-informed manner.

Question 16

The few responses to this question were impressive. They tended to cover the usual examples of United Nations and Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty (ANZUS) and Australia-United States Ministerial Consultation (AUSMIN) in their iterations, but also the lesser-used examples of trade agreements and social security agreements and regional agreements such as the Five Power Defence Arrangements. This broader range enabled students to demonstrate ‘comprehensive knowledge’ and often ‘astute communication’, and these students were rewarded accordingly.

Question 24

This question was interpreted in a variety of ways, and with few exceptions the responses were of a very high quality. Some students focused their argument on the idea that America had many major challenges prior to 9/11. This became part or all of their response, which was in itself acceptable and often demonstrated comprehensive knowledge. These students looked back to selected aspects of the Cold War in a range of global locations and then looked at overseas and national challenges centred on the Clinton years and the Iraq War in the decade before 9/11.

Other students focused on the challenges that America has faced since 9/11. Most responses started with incursions into Afghanistan and Iraq and made reference to ISIS, the war on terror, and the rising economic power of China. A few mused that matters within America were a challenge in themselves and went on to explore ideas around gun laws, some of the current Republican presidential candidates, and Congressional gridlock as oblique but significant problems. This range of examples provided opportunities for critical analysis and astute communication of ideas. Markers were impressed that the current (November 2015) situation in the Spratly Islands also received coverage.

Question 25

The word ‘major’ in the question gave the more astute students the opportunity to write a lively, coherent essay and to demonstrate highly proficient critical analysis of the range of examples that they chose. Most students took the approach that the aim of providing global security was only supplementary to the major aim of promoting economic interests and maintaining global position as a hegemonic power. Many references were made to wars in the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, and Iraq. The phrase ‘you need win the war then the peace’ dotted the papers, and such critical analysis was commendable.

Some argued that America’s efforts with the war on terror and ISIS Islamic state has destabilised the Middle East and exacerbated conflict within the region, leading to worsened global security. Others argued that America’s involvement in the Middle East is aimed at stabilising the region and reducing the threat of terrorism. Better responses covered both, and these were in the majority. Details of the situation with the Assad regime in Syria were well covered. Some were keen to argue that although removing Gaddafi provided security, the resulting power vacuum has been a problem. A few noted that global security was difficult with the current situation in the Middle East.

## Operational Advice

School assessment tasks are set and marked by teachers. Teachers’ assessment decisions are reviewed by moderators. Teacher grades/marks should be evident on all student school assessment work.

In all cases the learning and assessment plan and addendum, where appropriate, was presented. This was also true for the provision of task sheets and sources for all assessment tasks, something which is extremely helpful at moderation.

Furthermore, packaging was ideal and where teacher comments and marks were left on student materials moderators could easily identify evidence against the performance standards, making it easier to confirm teacher decisions. Teachers are encouraged to use highlighted performance standards to indicate their assessment decisions for individual students.

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