

Australian and International Politics

2013 Chief Assessor's Report



Government
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AUSTRALIAN AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

2013 CHIEF ASSESSOR'S REPORT

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 standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

Students and schools are complimented on the high quality of their work in each of the three assessment types in the school assessment and also in the external examination.

Moderators were impressed by the evidence provided by the students as measured against the performance standards. Examination markers noted a comprehensive level of both knowledge and understanding demonstrated in the more successful responses.

SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 1: Folio

Schools are advised to provide a copy of the folio tasks and to include an addendum, where applicable, for the learning and assessment plan.

It should be remembered that at least two of the folio tasks should be argumentative essays. It was often the case that the formal written arguments, as described in the subject outline, provided students with an opportunity to demonstrate evidence at the higher levels of the performance standards. The quality of responses to oral tasks and multimodal tasks can only be judged when evidence is presented.

Moderators commented that throughout the folio, they found that the assessment design criteria Knowledge and Understanding and Communication were more often than not in evidence at the higher levels of performance standard.

Moderators added that the assessment design criterion Research, Critical Analysis, and Evaluation was often at a lower level of performance standard. This is seen as an area for attention. This was mainly seen in the level of research, where in the less successful responses it was little more than 'competent' while in the more successful responses it was 'astute'. The analysis in the less successful responses was descriptive in nature.

While a research essay is an acceptable form of evidence, it was generally felt that there is a need to improve referencing (either in-text or footnoting) and to provide a bibliography.

Assessment Type 2: Sources Analysis

As in the past, moderators commented that this assessment type was the one that students completed most successfully. However, teachers are advised to pay very close attention to the precise wording of the questions. Although student performance in the sources analysis timed task was, predictably, not as successful as that in the sources analysis task not under supervision, both demonstrated high quality knowledge and understanding. Many students demonstrated a comprehensive knowledge, there was evidence of in-depth research in the task not under supervision, and communication was often astute and coherent.

If students collect their own sources, then they are advised refer to all sources presented during their response. For this reason it may be wise to limit the number of sources that students present. Moderators also noted the quality and diversity of secondary sources; however, the quality and diversity of primary sources could be improved by aiming for a 'balance' of views on a 'controversial' topic under consideration.

Moderators recorded that, in general, students produced astute and coherent replies when comparing sources, but that when assessing the usefulness and reliability of the sources the responses were less successful and tended to exhibit only 'generally clear responses'. This is clearly an area for improvement. This was, in some senses, compensated for when insightful understanding of participation and power was demonstrated in other parts of the students' responses. In a few cases, it was suggested that the questions need to start with the terms 'analyse', 'evaluate', or 'assess' rather than 'describe' or 'list'.

Assessment Type 3: Investigation

Students covered an even balance of local, national, and international topics in their investigations. Many investigations were excellent; however, moderators identified three areas for attention. Firstly, there is a need to look at the availability of adequate sources, as some students used only secondary sources. The subject outline advises that a range of primary and secondary sources should be used. Secondly, less successful responses lacked political engagement and thus became little more than a series of personal observations. Thirdly, on occasions students selected a non-political topic to investigate. Students should ensure that topics selected are appropriate for coverage within a study of Australian or global politics.

The majority of investigations varied from coherent to thoughtful in terms of Communication. Students generally provided reasoned arguments and this was evident in more contemporary topics such as those related to same-sex marriage, the Syrian situation, the role of minor parties, asylum seekers, in-fighting in the ALP, mental health, the live cattle trade, the rise and rise of Clive Palmer, Snowden, and the fall out of the Arab Spring. Investigations were less effective when dealing with more historical topics such as Afghanistan and the 'sacking' of Rudd. Perennial topics such as euthanasia, video ratings, the cat debate, and the Republic seemed to be less well covered. Those who looked at a more local issue often utilised an impressive variety of primary and secondary research and some impressive focus questions. Students might be advised to look to more to local issues if struggling to find a topic.

Students might note that while the use of a hypothesis or a range of key questions is popular, these are not the only methods of approach. Some impressive use was made of graph analysis through Survey Monkey; also useful, though less effective, were some comments that came via Facebook. Students are advised to look to analyse the range of views and examine the value of some comments that they obtain. It is essential for students to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of their own surveys.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 4: Examination

Comments are provided for those questions answered by students in the examination.

Section A: Australian Politics

The Australian Constitution and Federalism

Question 1

In nearly all cases, the quality of responses varied from sound to very good. Many responses noted that a written constitution is in itself an indicator of democratic values and looked to compare and contrast with selected areas linked to the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK). Other responses explored concepts such as elections, the rule of law and the role of the High Court. These responses often included accurately quoted relevant sections of the Australian Constitution as evidence. More successful response often outlined the Bill of Rights debate and referred to arguments around voting, juries, and religion. Markers noted impressive use of the referenda debate and the use, rather than the overuse, of specific referenda questions; in addition it was evident that the debates around the effectiveness of section 128 were well understood. There was no mention of citizen initiated referenda as an overseas alternative. Some saw the monarchy as a non-democratic feature and others bemoaned the lack of coverage of an Indigenous perspective. The absence of specific information about the Indigenous population was evident, except for in the more successful responses.

Question 2

In the more successful responses students did evaluate. A good overall knowledge of the subsections of Section 51 was clear. Again, there was evidence of students confusing the terms 'division of power' and 'separation of power'. The term 'evaluate' indicates the need to look at both sides of a debate. Generally the two tier system was briefly and correctly outlined. More successful responses looked at the competing notions of federalism as either providing a durable practical system or serving a growing and changing nation. Some responses successfully evaluated Alfred Deakin's view of state rights and then examined the praise from John Howard and the criticism from Tony Abbott for the federal structure. Most responses made reference to the High Court and often to the Uniform Tax Case and/or the Tasmanian Dam Case and/or Work Choices to cover debates around state power. One mused that federal-state politicking was an exasperating process. The general consensus was that federalism had served Australia well but it could have done better.

Political Representation, Parliament, and the Executive

Question 3

There were a limited number of responses to this question. It was important for the 'bicameral' structure of parliament to be covered, as well as dealing with the need for effective representative government.

Voting and Elections

Question 5

While responses discussed proportional and preferential voting systems, one marker noted that, again, prepared answers on the advantages and disadvantages of the different systems appeared, with some modifications. This was not what the question was asking. While the general nature of the proportional system was understood, little reference was made to above- and below-the-line voting. One marker lamented that no reference of consequence was made to the election of micro-parties in the 2013 federal election which, it could be argued, provided a different (if not more diverse) result from the election. Students were again aware of the Hare Clark electoral system but were unable to enunciate why it may or may not produce diversity.

Question 6

This was the most popular choice in Section A. The level of both knowledge and application of information of the 2013 federal election was impressive. More importantly, the knowledge was applied to the precise words of the question in an analytical manner. As in previous reports, it needs be made clear that students should resist the opportunity to vilify a politician whom they dislike. Lively debate again centred on the 2001 federal election and the incidents around Tampa, 9/11, and Children Overboard, and whether or not these case studies supported the premise of the words of the question. Again, the xenophobia argument found its way into many papers. The perennial birthday cake debate in 1993 proved a winner for some who viewed the result as the opposition losing the election. The lack of popularity debate in the Queensland state election of March 2012, where Anna Bligh's attempts to personally attack Campbell Newman were well documented, was usually used to good effect to support the premise in the wording of the question. One marker noted that this question need not only refer to federal election outcome.

Political Parties

Question 7

More successful responses provided a brief explanation of the origins and core ideology of the major parties. However, some spent too much time in this area. The key term 'always' was the focus of the debate of the more successful papers, whereas the less successful responses simply described a range of scenarios. Typically, the case studies of the Hawke government(s) in the 1980s were used as examples of where ideology was 'sacrificed' as a response to global economic circumstances. This sacrifice, students argued, maintained the ALP in power from 1983 to 1996. The more astute argued that the first Rudd government broke with ideology in economic matters but followed a more ideological line in social and environmental matters. Invariably, the discussion gave a good and accurate cover to Work Choices, or more precisely, the Workplace Relations Amendment Act 2005,

and the discussion centred on how this reflected Liberal ideology. Most mused that this was a key factor in the 2007 federal outcome. A few reflected on the ideological underpinning of a number of ALP positions, such as the minerals resource rent tax (MRRT). It was often the case that students specifically mentioned the debate around pragmatism versus ideology in the final paragraph. Tony Abbott's quip that 'if there is any choice between political principle and pragmatism I'll go for the pragmatic option' was seen in some papers.

Question 8

Most students agreed with the proposition that minor parties and independents are essential for Australian democracy and seemed to be determined to prove their point. The more successful papers questioned the view expressed in the question and developed a coherent and balanced argument. One marker saw the responses as 'very lively'. There was limited cover of state politics in the answers. That said, more than one response argued that the Greens were essential not only for democracy but for the planet.

Much was made in some papers about the Sex Party. The initial results in the senate election of 2013 were well known and often interpreted as providing the 'little person' with a say. This, the argument went, was evidence of their essential nature. The names 'Muir' and 'Dropulich' appeared which indicated some depth of knowledge. Nearly all responses noted that the last federal election saw the greatest support for minor parties and independents since Federation and saw this as more evidence of them being essential.

Section B: International Politics

Global Media

Question 12

The term 'political success' was usually interpreted as winning elections; however, invariably the more successful responses adopted broader interpretations of power. In the responses that challenged the assumption, references to the Arab Spring were prominent and written in a convincing manner. The phrase 'the manipulation of political discontent' was used to good effect. The role of the alternative media was well documented. Reference was made to media moguls being able to determine political success. Comments around the headlines 'It's the Sun Wot Won It' and 'Kick This Mob Out' dotted the better responses. Few missed the opportunity to refer to Silvio Berlusconi in Italy as being able to determine success in a unique manner. The impact of 'The O'Reilly Factor' was examined in an impressive manner by the students who used the USA as an example.

Question 13

Many responses took the statement at face value and constructed a case accordingly. As in the past, references to 'fair' and 'balanced' again dotted responses when using the USA as an example. The idea of what constitutes 'the public interest' dominated the most successful responses, and here the students demonstrated a highly proficient critical analysis and were rewarded accordingly. An astute coverage of the work of Andrew Bolt and Alan Jones and the Sydney Morning Herald reflected in-depth work by other students. Invariably the case studies of News of the World and other British tabloid newspapers found their way in to the responses, usually with thoughtful and clear communication. Some cover was given to alternative media as

the alternate face of 'the right to report', including social media such as Facebook and Twitter, online media such as YouTube, and amateur media such as blogs. Ideas around 'challenge to the gatekeepers' and 'information silos' were covered but in a less convincing manner than in previous years.

The United Nations and Human Rights

Question 18

Responses often started with an outline of the many branches of the United Nations (UN), and an acknowledgement that the UN is limited by its lack of power and authority. Debates around the role of the power of veto and the Security Council in general demonstrated a well-informed understanding of power and global 'government'. Many were keen to stress that it was an improvement on the League of Nations. As in the past, some students got caught in a discussion of its history — Paris 1948 etc. — and some used quotes from the 30 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) Articles to good effect. This was often supported by a proficient coverage of the ever-changing situation in Syria but a wide geographic range of examples was used, and usually to the level of comprehensive knowledge. The debate around the terms 'too divided' was well covered in the more successful responses and the argument that a 'well-intentioned person in a blue hat' can do little in a war zone was presented.

Question 19

In general, responses to this question did not 'critically assess' the statement. Examples and debate included past case studies from Africa like the Hutu massacre of the Tutsi people, more recent examples from China, and briefer references to the Kurds in Turkey. These demonstrated well-informed understanding of governments in international contexts. Much was made of the humanitarian role of the United Nations in a range of global examples. The case study of Syria was well covered and indeed the Sunni/Shia example was well known and was often associated with the more successful responses.

Question 20

The more successful response had a focus on the term 'real progress' and used it as a platform for highly proficient critical analysis. The UN Security Council was criticised and the power of smaller countries in specific conflicts was well covered. Students meaningfully examined Australia's role in the asylum seeker debate. Specific examples included brides in India, the situation in Kosovo, the Bahá'í in Iran, and the UN Mission in Liberia. Students who provided these examples impressed markers with their comprehensive knowledge of complicated situations. The more successful responses reflected on how progress is difficult to measure in some locations and how some progress might be superficial.

The United States of America and World Affairs

Question 24

In responses that argued the case, the more successful papers displayed highly proficient critical analysis, but others provided merely a competent critical analysis. A few missed the terms 'since the end of the Cold War' and their time lines were not good. Others skilfully argued that both Korea and Cuba have still had a role to play in

the last quarter of a century. Again it would be fair to note that the general level of language sophistication was impressive. The students generally saw the USA as a global power in such fields as the military or the economy, as well as social and political leadership. Those taking a more historical perspective referred to the threat of Communism being replaced by threats coming from the Middle East and China. A limited number again covered congressional gridlock as a challenge to global leadership. Some used an array of statistics to imply that the USA is now anything but the 'only' global power.

Question 25

This was the most popular question in Part B International Politics and a wide range of examples was used. The broad range of student marks reflected the ability to 'evaluate' or to merely produce 'a historical coverage'. The former of these showed a 'comprehensive knowledge'; the second, a 'considered knowledge'. The extent to which students addressed 'significantly advances' from the question wording allowed the more successful responses to demonstrate an 'astute and coherent' communication while the poor papers demonstrated 'generally clear' communication.

Some began with a wide range of examples from the Cold War, including examples centring on Vietnam, Korea, and conflicts in Afghanistan. Most students gave ample background about the Cold War without falling into the trap of giving too much historical detail.

Events after 1990 dominated the arguments of most papers. Questions around the Gulf War were often put and tightly answered. The years of the Clinton administration were less well covered. The 'retaliation' post 9/11 was well documented as it impacted the interests of the global community.

The less successful responses merely took the opportunity to see the Gulf War as only a USA grab for global oil and/or attacked the mental capacity of George Bush Junior. There was a very good level of knowledge about the often-quoted Bush Doctrine.

Question 26

The 'Australia' dot point question was, again, the least popular of the 'USA' questions. Some students started out by arguing that in the past Australia was the servant and, as such, Australia relied on the USA. Students then briefly cited the 'great and powerful friends' catch cry and further added that the USA 'saved us' post Pearl Harbor and in the Battle of the Coral Sea. Other looked to the ongoing (if a little imprecise) Australia, New Zealand, United States (ANZUS) Treaty. Knowledge about Australia – United States Ministerial Consultation (AUSMIN) and the Robertson 'base' appeared in many papers. This, along with coverage of Pine Gap, produced lively debate. While all of this analysis was sound, it was hoped that the military would not be the only point of focus. The more successful responses moved to economic aspects, which provided some room for debate.

OPERATIONAL ADVICE

The learning and assessment plans were attached. The information in the addendums (where necessary) was not always made perfectly clear. Specific information about the array of folio pieces was, in places, unclear.

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