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REPORT**

Aboriginal Studies

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ABORIGINAL STUDIES

Introduction

In 1998 512 students sat for the Higher School Certificate examination in Aboriginal Studies. This was approximately 52 more than in 1997.

The questions asked were received positively by students, and the stimulus material was considered to be both thought provoking and positive. Directions to students were clear.

Responses reflected students' detailed subject knowledge and understanding of the themes of the course. It is encouraging to note, once again, the involvement of Aboriginal communities in the teaching of the course, which would not be effective without such input.

This is a course which can make a difference both personally and nationally, but it is often a difficult subject to introduce and maintain in schools. Schools are therefore to be congratulated on their perseverance and dedication.

The criteria for marking were reached after the reading of papers by Senior Examiners and Pilot Markers. These were further refined in the briefing sessions.

SECTION I

CONTEXT

Question 1

A photograph accompanied this question.

Using the picture, answer the following questions.

- (a) Who are the TWO groups represented in the hands of Mr John Howard?*
- (b) What do the TWO groups want from the Government?*
- (c) State TWO ways land can be legally owned in Australia.*
- (d) Give THREE reasons why land is important to Aboriginal people.*
- (e) Give THREE reasons why land is important to non-Aboriginal people.*
- (f) 'Land and Culture' are significant issues in the stimulus material. Discuss these issues in relation to Native Title and Pastoral leases.*
- (g) The government, as represented by the Prime Minister in the photograph, is placed in a dilemma over land ownership. Explain why land ownership is a difficult issue for the Federal Government to address.*

This question was generally well answered, with most students showing a sound knowledge of the issues reflected in the stimulus material. The questions required them to interpret the stimulus material, and to draw on their own subject knowledge, thus providing a variety of responses and ideas. The depth of understanding shown by many candidates was both impressive and encouraging.

Parts (a) (b) (c) (d) and (e)

These questions were very straightforward and this was reflected in the responses. The majority of candidates answered these parts extremely well, showing that they had a sound understanding of the central and contributing themes of the course.

Part (f)

The complex nature of this question proved more of a challenge for candidates since it required them to discuss and connect a range of ideas. As a result their responses varied greatly.

Those who answered this question well provided very detailed and sophisticated responses. They possessed a good understanding of Native Title and Pastoral Leases and were able to reinforce this by discussing the importance of land and culture.

Many candidates, however, found it difficult to answer this question. Such candidates showed very little understanding of Native Title and Pastoral Leases and many had difficulty in realising that they were required to relate their ideas to the significance of land and culture. A number of candidates provided a detailed discussion of Native Title without referring to Pastoral Leases and land and culture.

Part (g)

This question allowed candidates to raise a number of issues that had not been investigated in earlier questions. Candidates were required to provide a detailed explanation of the issues facing the Federal Government in relation to land ownership and many found this difficult.

Responses from good candidates were well rounded and dealt with a number of issues. These candidates clearly understood the complex issues that they had raised.

The majority, however, had difficulty in answering this question. They made vague generalisations but gave no supporting evidence and generally repeated what they had said in the answering of earlier questions. Many candidates failed to interpret and answer it adequately.

SECTION II

ASPECTS — REGIONAL STUDIES

Question 2 — Cultural Expression

- (a) *List four Aboriginal writers.*
- (b) *Outline the forms of Aboriginal literature.*
- (c) *Explain the strategies being used to revive Aboriginal languages with examples from a specific region.*

Above Average Responses

Responses in this category named four Aboriginal writers, and outlined a variety of forms of Aboriginal literature, providing examples for each. Candidates provided a thorough explanation of several strategies currently being used to revive Aboriginal languages, providing relevant examples from a specific region.

Average Responses

Average responses were not as detailed but did list some ways in which Aboriginal people are achieving economic independence and attempted to explain how they were being used. Reference to regions was not as detailed.

Below Average Responses

- (a) Most candidates in this range were unable to identify four writers.
- (b) The majority of candidates discussed writing only but did not distinguish between forms of literature. Responses in this range lacked an explanation of the strategies and most merely listed a couple of general examples. Little detailed information in reference to a specific region was given.

Question 3 — Economic Systems

- (a) *List FOUR ways in which Aboriginal people are achieving economic independence.*
- (b) *Outline how Aboriginal fire management techniques were used to maintain the environment.*
- (c) *Explain ways Europeans could benefit from Aboriginal land management techniques. In your answer, name and refer to a specific region.*

On the whole, this question was very poorly answered. Students did not seem to have a firm grasp of the meaning of ‘economic independence’ and in parts (b) and (c) included much irrelevant material. Their knowledge of a specific region was also very limited. Only 68 candidates attempted this question; this was the smallest number attempting any of those in this section.

Above Average Responses

These comprised a thorough overview of the use of fire in environmental maintenance and demonstrated detailed knowledge of land management in their regional studies.

Average Responses

Candidates tended to provide a summary of the topic, but did give some specific examples in support of their answers. In part (c) candidates referred more to historical examples rather than taking a contemporary line of argument or referring to future developments.

Below Average Responses

Candidates made vague generalisations about the use of fire, and in part (c) failed to identify their regional study.

Question 4 — Education

- (a) *List FOUR positive educational changes for Aboriginal students since the 1980s.*
- (b) *Outline the impact of a government policy on the education of Aboriginal students.*
- (d) *Explain what curriculum initiatives have been undertaken in Aboriginal Education to improve the education of all students about Aboriginal culture and history. In your answer, name and refer to a specific region.*

Above Average Responses

Responses in this range listed four positive educational changes for Aboriginal students. They identified and described a relevant policy and explained the impact of this policy on the education of Aboriginal students. Most candidates provided examples and data in support of their responses. More than one curriculum initiative was described in detail, with specific references to a region; its link to the education of all students about Aboriginal culture and history was clearly shown. Candidates possessed a broad range of knowledge and often wrote about education from kindergarten through to tertiary institutions.

Average Responses

Candidates could name a policy but were unable either to explain it in detail or to discuss its impact on the education of Aboriginal students. Some candidates confused several policies. Many failed to show a clear understanding of what constituted a 'curriculum initiative' or discussed only one. Most candidates did not adequately link this to the education of all students regarding Aboriginal history and culture.

Below Average Responses

Candidates in this range did not name four positive educational changes for Aboriginal students since the 1980s. Their responses were often inappropriate and showed little understanding of what a policy was, making no link to its impact upon the education of Aboriginal students or they linked it to the education of students in general, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. In part (c), they showed little understanding of the meaning of 'curriculum initiative' and the majority discussed it in relation to Aboriginal students only. These answers lacked information regarding regional examples.

Question 5 — Law and Politics

- (a) *List FOUR ways Aboriginal communities have been affected by government policy and legislation.*
- (b) *Outline the role of the Aboriginal Legal Service.*
- (c) *Explain how Aboriginal communities have worked towards self-determination. In your answer, name and refer to a specific region.*

- (a) On the whole this question was very well answered, with the majority of candidates receiving full marks. Candidates had a good understanding of the ways in which Aboriginal communities have been affected by government policy and legislation. A number provided a detailed explanation of the effects of government policy and legislation rather than simply listing them. It was pleasing to see that candidates did not focus wholly on negative effects, rather they provided a balanced account by addressing positive effects.
- (b) This question was generally answered fairly well. Candidates who responded well to it showed specific knowledge of the role of the Aboriginal Legal Service and provided a thorough account which described the varied roles of that organisation.

Those who answered this question poorly lacked specific knowledge on the role of the Aboriginal Legal Service. They therefore made vague generalisations that provided no specific or relevant information.

- (c) Most candidates provided an average response to this part. They attempted to explain how Aboriginal communities have worked towards self-determination, providing some relevant examples which referred to their own community. Such responses, however, lacked depth and insight into all aspects of the question.

A majority of candidates gave examples of Aboriginal owned / run organisations, but did not explain how these had resulted in self-determination for Aboriginal people. The better candidates, however, referred to Aboriginal people who control their lives, participating in decision-making, running their own community, gaining skills, setting up their own businesses etc.

Question 6 — Land Rights

- (a) *List FOUR Aboriginal demonstrations or protests significant to the Land Rights movement.*
- (b) *Outline the contribution of Aboriginal workers to the pastoral industry.*
- (c) *Explain why the struggle for Land Rights is important to Aboriginal people. In your answer, name and refer to a specific region.*

Above Average Responses

These candidates listed four Aboriginal demonstrations or protests significant to the Land Rights movement. They outlined the contribution of Aboriginal workers to the pastoral industry, covering a wide range of the tasks performed. These responses provided a detailed explanation of the importance of the Land Rights struggle and supported this with evidence from a specific region.

Average Responses

Most candidates in this category listed few demonstrations or protests which were of varying degrees of significance to the struggle for Land Rights. Their responses provided a sketchy account of the contribution of Aboriginal workers to the pastoral industry. They attempted here to explain the importance of the struggle for Land Rights but their accounts lacked depth and failed to provide detailed information relating to a specific region.

Below Average Responses

In these responses candidates listed irrelevant items for part (a), displaying a lack of understanding of the meaning of such demonstrations and/or protests. Their responses for part (b) comprised, mostly, vague generalisations which lacked specific information, while part (c) was mostly a general description of the importance of land to Aboriginal people. Little explanation was given of the struggle for land rights and no reference was made to any specific region.

Question 7 — Health and Medicine

- (a) *List four illnesses that occur frequently in Aboriginal communities.*
- (b) *Outline how European invasion affected the health of Aboriginal people.*
- (c) *Explain the differences between the use of traditional Aboriginal health practices and the European approaches to health. In your answer, name and refer to a specific region.*

Above Average Responses

In this category candidates listed four illnesses that occur frequently in Aboriginal communities. In their responses they outlined a wide range of the effects of European invasion referring to diet, lifestyle, bush medicine, introduced diseases, substance abuse and mental health issues linked to 'stolen generations'. Here candidates showed a clear understanding of what traditional Aboriginal health practices are as well as European approaches and could explain what the differences were. Students gave detailed examples of both and referred to a specific region.

Average Responses

Candidates often included some illnesses common to all people and/or more specific illnesses or confused these with a list of '1788' illnesses, eg smallpox, scurvy etc. Such outlines were limited in terms of their impact on Aboriginal health. Answers in Part (c) were weak in one of the areas, eg in reference to the traditional Aboriginal health practices or the European approach or the regional examples.

Below Average Responses

Most candidates either omitted the illnesses altogether or mentioned only one. Their account of the European invasion was not linked to the impact upon Aboriginal health. In part (c) these responses failed to show any understanding of the differences between traditional Aboriginal health practices and the European approach or failed to refer to a specific region.

SECTION III

ASPECTS — COMPARATIVE STUDIES

Question 8

Explain how indigenous and non-indigenous communities are working to resolve issues related to racism and prejudice. In your answer, refer to one of your Australian regional studies and your international study.

As in the past, the structured answers gave students the opportunity to answer the question best. The better answers show detailed knowledge of both Australian and indigenous communities but the problem of defining the communities still exists in the poorer answers.

Above Average Responses

In these responses issues were clearly delineated in the opening paragraph. Racism and prejudice were understood and issues related to them were developed constructively and given a contemporary focus.

Succeeding paragraphs clearly provided evidence for views expressed in the introduction. Details regarding these issues were given, with students linking programs developed by specific communities to deal with racism and prejudice.

Non-indigenous efforts were also explained and their outcomes assessed.

Average Responses

Candidates showed some understanding of the question but provided limited examples and analysis. Their answers were too often generalised with only vague references being made to racism and prejudice. The issues were poorly, if at all, linked to any resolutions.

Discussion of communities was attempted in a generalised way only.

Below Average Responses

Answers in this category were too brief because of lack of knowledge of communities and/or failure to answer the question in full.

SECTION III

ASPECTS — COMPARATIVE STUDIES

Question 9

- (a) *What social and/or political issues are common to indigenous communities?*
- (b) *Explain how TWO of these issues have impacted on indigenous communities.*
- (c) *Describe strategies being used to improve relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous communities in society today. In your answer, you must refer to one of your Australian regional studies and your international study.*

Above Average Responses

Candidates in answering part (b) were able to explain clearly several impacts of political/social issues on both local and international indigenous communities.

In part (c) candidates showed a detailed knowledge of strategies being used to improve relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous communities today in both an Australian regional study and an international study. Students either commented on the effectiveness of these strategies or compared their effectiveness with that of the strategies which they had discussed.

Average Responses

Most students were able to identify four separate issues, with the majority stating two social and two political issues in the first part of the question. Some answers, however, were repetitive.

In the second part of the question students were able to list in general terms impacts related to one issue or one community.

In part (c) average students successfully identified two strategies. Those that were described had limited relevance to the issues and the way in which they improve relationships. Focus was on indigenous communities only, with no reference to non-indigenous communities.

Below Average Responses

Students identified fewer than four separate issues in part (a) and so were unable to answer parts (b) and (c) effectively.

Explanation of the impact of two specific issues on indigenous communities was too generalised in part (b).

In part (c) descriptions of strategies being used to improve relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous communities were vague and dealt with one at only a superficial level.

SECTION IV

THE SYNTHESIS

Question 10

On 26 May 1997, at the Australian Reconciliation Convention, John Howard, the Prime Minister of Australia, was quoted as saying:

'Personally, I feel deep sorrow for those of my fellow Australians who suffered injustices under the practices of past generations towards indigenous people.

Equally, I am sorry for the hurt and trauma many people may continue to feel as a consequence of those practices.

In facing the realities of past, however, we must not join those who would portray Australia's history since 1788 as little more than a disgraceful record of imperialism, exploitation and racism.'

- (a) What 'practices of past generations' is the Prime Minister referring to?*
- (b) Explain the ongoing effects these practices have on Aboriginal communities.*
- (c) Discuss the differing opinions on the importance of a national apology in achieving true reconciliation.*

This was by far the most popular question of the section, and a full range of marks was awarded for answers to this question. Perhaps the suggestions in previous examination reports regarding answering structured rather than unstructured questions have been heeded.

Above Average Responses

Candidates were able to provide the following features:

- comprehensive understanding of the importance of a national apology linked to reconciliation;
- some conclusion that was reached or attempted in the response;
- the identification of the opinions of diverse and specific groups;
- use of specific examples in the response;
- provision of direct links from (a) into (b).

Average Responses

Average responses provided the following features:

- attempt to connect national apology to reconciliation;
- discussion of relationship of quotation to the question;
- generalised identification of different groups;
- ability to provide one practice from (a) with ongoing effects.

Below Average Responses

Below average responses provided the following features:

- poor conceptual understanding of both national apology and reconciliation;
- opinions that were often exaggerated or stereotyped and linked either to apology or reconciliation only;
- failure to identify specific practices, confusion of policies and practices.

Specific Comments:

Part (a)

This was generally handled very well, though some students confused practice with policies. In some cases policies were identified, yet specific practices within the policy were ignored.

Part (b)

Some confusion was apparent in linking the practices identified in (a) into answering this part. Some confusion was evident in interpretation of the term 'ongoing' in the question. Students generally tended to include all practices together as a singular impact; that is, no distinction was made between separate practices. Some responses tended to resemble shopping lists. Examples tended for the most part to be general rather than specific, while regional / community specific examples were almost totally ignored. This resulted in scripts which could not be placed in the very best category.

Part (c)

This was the real area of differentiation in terms of the awarding of marks. To a significant extent there existed here a thorough understanding of what was meant by 'opinion'. While this may have been generally indicated, responses lacked a focus on the motives behind the opinion that were driving or forcing the opinion. There was a good understanding of what is meant by a 'national apology', ranging from the very comprehensive and legalistic to the very general, confused and inaccurate. A rather general confusion between a 'personal' and a 'national' apology and its direct link to the achievement of 'true reconciliation' was apparent.

Question 11

'Through our art, our performance and our music we show that indigenous culture today is fresh, contemporary, vibrant, innovative and above all, relevant.'

Rhoda Roberts (Koori Mail, 8 October 1997, p.15).

Discuss this statement in relation to the contribution indigenous culture continues to make to Australia's identity in the 1990s.

This was the second most popular question in the section.

Above Average Responses

Candidates were able to provide the following features:

- maintenance of a strict focus on the set question;
- demonstration of comprehensive conceptual understanding;
- discussion of quotation and question and their relationship to each other;
- identification of art and music and performance, with specific examples showing the relationship between 'contribution' and 'identity' in a contemporary setting.

An example of an excellent response:

Introduction:

Australia's identity is receiving [sic] a facelift in the 1990's by the contributions made by Aboriginals.

Main Body paragraph:

Through art, Aboriginal people are achieving success and recognition nationally and internationally. One such artist could be Jimmy Pike. Jimmy Pike has received wide acclaim for his company Desert Designs which prints his artwork on clothes. This venture is very popular internationally, adding a diversity to Australia's identity.

Links Aboriginal to Australian 'identity':

It seems that people are starting to recognise Aboriginal expression as an important part of everyday Australian life.

Aboriginal culture is forever changing or growing, stemming out into the future and leading the way. Australia is changing its identity too.

Aboriginal culture and heritage is Australia's culture and heritage.

Use of specific example:

The Koori Mail is valuable to Aboriginal people but also relevant to white Australia, informative and fresh.

A typical conclusion which ties the question to the quotation and comes to a form of resolution:

The contribution this [Aboriginal culture] makes is clear, as said in the quote, being 'fresh, contemporary, vibrant, innovative, and above all, relevant'. It seems that since Australia has become ready [sic] to accept the influence of Aboriginal culture into Australia's society, changes have come for the better.

Direct focus on the question and relevancy related to student's own cohort:

In the 1990s many contemporary forms have contributed to Australian society, especially the younger generation. Examples of this are seen in dance. Such as the Bangarra dance company. Bangarra have used all aboriginal [sic] dancers ... elements of tradition [sic] Aboriginal dances with contemporary elements to show and express as contemporary style which is appealing to the generations of today ...

Conclusion:

So therefore, through many forms like those shown in the statement, Australian society in the 1990s, Aboriginal culture is recognised both in traditional and contemporary forms. Hopefully striving to emphasis the process of reconciliation and taking all forms of Aboriginal cultural expression into the next century. Towards 2000!

Above Average Responses

Above average responses provided the following features:

- mostly maintained a strict focus on the set question;
- general conceptual understanding demonstrated;
- discussion of quotation but lacked focus on its relationship to the question;
- identified the main areas — Art and Performance and Music — and sustained a general contemporary focus;
- tended to be more descriptive than analytical.

Average Responses

Average responses provided the following features:

- limited or narrow discussion of the quotation;
- generalised identification of the main areas from the quotation;
- some use of examples, which were not however linked to the contribution towards Australian identity;
- imbalance between treatment of key issues or prompts within the quotation.

Below Average Responses

Below average responses provided the following features:

- misunderstanding the difference between Australian and Aboriginal identity;
- provision of only passing, general references to the quotation;
- no treatment of the significant concepts;
- very stereotyped in approach.

Comments

The question was generally handled well, with the full range of marks being awarded. There were some excellent scripts which displayed a thorough and comprehensive understanding not only of the question but also of the stimulus quotation. There was also evidence of students or teachers adopting different strategies in preparation for the examination. There was, on the whole, no marked drop-off in script quality and quantity in the responses in the synthesis this year.

Students will need to examine the quotation more carefully in future examinations, and to refer to it more directly in their responses to the question. Some identifiable areas of confusion existed in this question. First, students seemed to have interpreted the question as being like 'Cultural Expression' from the aspects, and not a synthesis response which requires a contemporary and future orientation.

Confusion existed regarding the meaning of 'performance' and 'literature'. Students tended to list writers or poets without making any connection between literature as either 'Art' or 'Performance'. Literature needed to be more specifically related to the question.

A significant confusion also existed between 'Australian identity' and 'Aboriginal identity'. Many scripts maintained a focus on the Aboriginal side only, neglecting the key concern of the question, namely, on how this identity 'contributes' to Australian identity and a lack of focus on the 1990s. In many cases the link to an Australian identity was neglected in the responses.

Students did not treat the adjectives as prompts for their responses. This again comes back to students' either not carefully examining the quotation or failing to incorporate it into their responses.

Question 12

The vision statement of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation is:

'A united Australia which respects this land of ours; values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage; and provides justice and equity for all.

(Walking Together, Number 19, August 1997)

Discuss the key issues of the vision statement in relation to one of the following contributing themes of the course:

- *heritage and identity*
- *colonialism, racism and prejudice*
- *social and political issues.*

This was by far the least popular question of the section and one which did not seem to elicit responses at the higher end of the marking scale.

Excellent Responses

Excellent responses provided the following features:

- strict focus on the set question;
- discussion of quotation and theme, with both being connected;
- issues being drawn from the theme and related to the quotation;
- provision of a range of accurate, specific examples;
- maintenance of a contemporary focus with some future orientation;
- attempt to provide some form of resolution.

An example of an excellent response

Introduction:

The vision statement for the Aboriginal council (sic) for Reconciliation makes its point quite clear. In regards to heritage and identity the statement is crucial to the place of Aboriginal people in Australian society in the 1990s. The statement gives light to what the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation wishes to achieve; however there is greater depth to the vision than this. The vision is about walking side by side, not just Aboriginal and European, but all members of the Australian wider community. As Mudrooroo comments: "Today in Australia we are diversified and we are from many lands, but we can all meet at the same place and exchange gifts, sing the same song and dance the same dance".

Links quotation to theme:

A united Australia would acknowledge the unique heritage of this nation and also give light to Aboriginal identity in the 1990s ... It is imperative that the wider community establishes a basic knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture to accordingly understand heritage.

Focus on quotation and use of future orientation:

To be equitable is not to be sympathetic for what happened in the past, but being empathetic and ensuring that the future is brighter.

Introduction:

The "united Australia" envisaged by the Council for Reconciliation has a number of key issues to be addressed, especially in relation to heritage and identity.

Relationship of theme to specific issues:

The Council put forward eight key issues for reconciliation, all of which relate directly back to the vision statement, but the issues of particular importance to the aspect of heritage and identity are the key issues one, three and four. ... Key issue number three, Valuing cultures, addresses the indigenous heritage, directly relating to the vision statement of "A united Australia which ... values the ... heritage" of indigenous people of this nation.

Use of specific example linked to both quotation and theme:

Recommendation 295 in the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths In Custody states "syllabuses should reflect the fact that Australia has an Aboriginal past"; that is, to acknowledge in accordance with the Council's vision, that united Australia values the heritage of Aboriginal Australia.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, heritage and identity is addressed to a large extent by the Council for Reconciliation's vision statement, allowing for a respect of land: a crucial part of heritage and identity, a value of indigenous heritage and providing justice and equality for all.

Above Average Responses

Above average responses provided the following features:

- maintenance of a significant focus on the set question;
- discussion of both quotation and theme, yet showing an imbalance in treatment;
- identification of some issues from the theme, though in a more general fashion;
- maintenance of a mostly contemporary focus;
- some attempt at conceptual understanding.

Average Responses

Average responses provided the following features:

- general focus on the question and some mention of the quotation in the response;
- lack of balance with ONLY either the quotation OR theme dealt with in the response;
- vague or general attempt being made to identify issues;
- use of a few examples which tended to be either very general or exaggerated.

Below Average Responses

Below average responses provided the following features:

- some attempt made to answer the set question;
- failure to identify theme in the response;
- quotation not used or referred to in the response;
- poor conceptual understanding apparent;
- contained repetition and inaccuracies also apparent.

Specific Comments

Confusion was apparent over how to interpret the quotation and relate it directly to the actual question. While there was generally a marked improvement in this area, it still remains one of student refinement for future examinations.

The wording of the question seemed to provide difficulties for the students, in that there was no apparent direction of what was expected in terms of thematic knowledge. Was the expectation that they link the knowledge to aspects, and the issues within those aspects which could effectively be linked to the chosen theme?

There existed some confusion between the Council's 'vision statement' — indeed, of what is meant by a 'vision statement' — and the Council's eight key issue papers. Some students referred to the key issues papers without relating them to the quotation or to their chosen theme.

Students need to read each question carefully to ascertain the tense used. In this question the present tense was used and there seemed to be a neglect of the fact that the Synthesis is contemporary and futuristic — as shown in the 'vision' statement. In some cases, students identified the theme yet referred to only half of it in their response. For example, they might choose Heritage and Identity, yet their response included references and interpretation regarding Heritage only, with, in many cases, a total neglect of Identity. Many students also had difficulty in providing ideas or a means of achieving a resolution or action. This may have been because the stimulus was a 'vision statement'.

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