

## GENERAL STUDIES

### Introduction

17 777 candidates presented for the General Studies examination paper in 1995.

The questions in this year's paper fulfilled the aims of the Syllabus. They were interdisciplinary and did not give unfair advantage to students studying related fields. Moreover, they could not be answered by prepared responses.

The paper as a whole was able to discriminate over the whole candidature with questions which allowed all candidates to make a genuine attempt, while allowing the better candidates scope to explore more complex issues.

### Question 1

Here candidates were shown a cartoon depicting the Pope and a priest.

*Religious leaders are frequently called upon to pass opinion on issues facing society. What is the role of religion in Modern Australian society?*

This question, covering aspects of Syllabus Topics 5 and 6, elicited a wide range of responses from candidates.

These responses indicated that a variety of outcomes had been met, including:

identifying the salient features of contemporary issues;  
thinking critically about contemporary issues, and  
supporting arguments with relevant examples.

These outcomes were met in varying degrees across the range of responses.

## 1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

Excellent and above average responses displayed a coherent structure, evidence of thoughtful planning rather than simply a trigger response to the word *religion*. Using an extensive range of examples from modern Australia, candidates here differentiated between the issues confronting religion in modern Australia and the role of religion in such issues. Some examples used in these responses included:

the role of religious leaders as social and political commentators;

the part religion plays in areas of social justice such as charity work carried out by various religious organisations, and

the role of religion in promoting tolerance in multicultural Australia.

Many candidates commented on the increase in the secular focus of modern Australian society and noted, with pertinent historical examples, the decline of the role of religion in areas of modern society, particularly in the establishing or upholding of a moral code.

Some responses in this range also took the view that the role of religion in modern Australia was a profoundly negative one. Examples used to support this viewpoint included the church's role in reinforcing patriarchal stereotypes, its standing in the way of scientific developments, e.g. in in-vitro fertilisation and genetic engineering, opposing euthanasia, and failing to seek equity for oppressed groups in society such as homosexuals and women. An understanding of recent Australian events including the passing of the Northern Territory's Euthanasia Bill and the beatification of Mary MacKillop, featured in many average responses. These candidates were also able to see the relevance of the cartoon, but were not restricted by it, and could extend their discussion of religion in modern Australia beyond a Judeo-Christian focus.

In average responses candidates made some acknowledgment of the role of religion in contemporary Australia, but showed a limited capacity to connect the issues with the role that religion plays in them. These candidates took a limited, and often solely Christian, view of religion. They perceived that there had been a change in the role of religion in Australian society without being able to state what that role was, or what it had become. Whilst some basic analysis was present in these responses, candidates tended to list the current issues such as euthanasia, homosexuality and abortion without discussing religion's role in these issues. Often their responses lacked a specific Australian focus and tended to suggest universal religious issues.

Responses in the below average range lacked depth of discussion, often ignoring the term *role* or ignoring the question in favour of a prepared comparative response relating to world religions. Many candidates who attempted to address the question lacked any sustained argument or examples, preferring to rely on anecdotal evidence. Some responses in this range focussed solely on the cartoon, describing it at length, but failing to recognise the significance of the characters in the cartoon, while other responses reacted to the trigger word *women* and produced prepared essays on feminism.

## 1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

### Question 2

'The United Nations has become ineffective as a peace-keeping organisation.'

How fair and correct is this claim?

How might conflicts between nations be better resolved?

This question relates to Syllabus Topics 7 and 8, and addresses a wide range of knowledge, skills and values outcomes, particularly challenging the candidates to:

- recognise the complexity of current issues of the world
- determine the effectiveness of policies, and
- acknowledge the fact that many problems remain open questions.

The above average responses made very perceptive comments relating to the effectiveness of the United Nations' peace-keeping efforts in a changing world order, as well as providing sound knowledge of the structure and broader work of the United Nations in the fifty years since its formation.

Many began their discussion by adopting a historical perspective in referring to peace-keeping initiatives of the United Nations. They used the full time span to evaluate a selection of relatively successful and/or ineffective instances of United Nations' action in developing their argument. Some candidates looked beyond peace-keeping as a military activity and acknowledged the positive role that the United Nations has played in providing conciliation, food and medicine and, in so doing, removing some of the triggers of civil war. In this way these candidates were addressing the broader role of the United Nations as *peace-maker* rather than simply as a peace-keeper in the military sense.

A variety of current examples were also cited to assess the degree of effectiveness of United Nations' involvement. Reference was made to an apparent lack of United Nations' action in certain circumstances in which relatively localised disagreements and political tensions were allowed to develop into more complex conflicts and large scale military engagements. Reference was made to a variety of examples, such as: the Cold War, the Korean War, the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Cambodia, Somalia, the Gulf War, the New World Order and superpower involvement.

Both parts of the question were addressed and, in commenting on how conflicts between nations might be better resolved, candidates in above average responses often noted the complexity of the problem of conflict resolution, both between nations and within them. Examples of conflict resolution included suggestions such as economic sanctions, e.g.

embargoes on specific exports such as oil,

expanding the role of the International Court of Justice and increasing its powers

providing the United Nations with more powerful armed forces, including a standing army, and

## 1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

increasing the international *policing* powers of the United Nations by moving towards arbitration of disputes rather than conciliation.

The level of language in these responses was sophisticated, arguments were cohesive and well balanced, while an impressive array of relevant factual information was cited for support.

The average responses often tended to describe conflicts without developing an argument about the difficulties of United Nations' involvement. A more restricted range of countries experiencing conflict and United Nations' involvement was cited. Only passing reference was made to the question of how conflict between nations might be better resolved, with fairly superficial views being given on how to achieve more desirable outcomes of conflict resolution. These views were listed with minimal comparison with current United Nations' practice being made.

Below average responses were often media-centred comments on conflict, often adopting the approach of *blow by blow* commentaries on contemporary military engagements. The question of how conflicts could be better resolved was generally overlooked.

### Question 3

This question included a map of the world showing the average number of children per family.

*What factors can you suggest to account for the differences shown by the figures above?  
What are some social and political consequences of these differences?*

This question dealt quite specifically with world development and inequality, Topic 9 in the General Studies Syllabus.

Candidates appeared to have been well prepared for this very popular question. Most responses were well structured and followed a formal essay style with an introduction, discussion of crucial issues and a conclusion. This question addressed outcomes in which the candidates were required to identify the salient features of contemporary issues and problems, and to assess their significance.

Excellent responses showed a maturity of understanding and analysis, and compared the social and political consequences resulting from the number of children per family. Examples included the impact on the quality of life of factors such as inadequate housing, pollution, famine, limited access to clean water, inadequate sanitation and minimal access to health care and services. Other consequences mentioned were lack of access to education, urban sprawl, political unrest flowing from income disparity, trade imbalance and greater pressure on resources leading to environmental degradation. In citing supporting examples candidates revealed extensive research into the topic area.

## 1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

The better responses were interpretive and dealt with the question comprehensively. Presenting a good range of relevant factors, candidates attempted to analyse their significance. Some of these factors included family planning, religion, education, infant mortality rates, social security, access to and application of technology, and the status of women. They were then able to discuss and evaluate social and political consequences, using good examples to support their arguments, often focussing on specific countries.

Average responses attempted both parts of the question but lacked sufficient analysis. Some candidates appeared to find it difficult to differentiate between a *casual factor* and a *consequence*. Many presented prepared essays which they developed sufficiently to answer the question. Their responses tended to concentrate on social consequences and ignore the political consequences. Whilst there was adequate use of examples, China's one child policy featured in many responses.

Weaker responses did not consider both parts of the question. These responses dealt with relevant factors and proceeded to list them but gave little or no analysis. Many of these candidates in this category appeared to present prepared answers which they were unable to adapt convincingly in considering both factors and consequences.

In these responses an over-emphasis often seemed to be placed on the lifestyle problems of the poor and the ramifications of over-population. An inordinate amount of time was spent here in defining north/south, First/Third World, DCs/LDCs, technologically advanced/newly industrialised countries, etc, rather than in answering the question about factors and consequences.

### Question 4

*'The beach, the outback, television programs, and sport define Australian national culture as much as literature and the visual and performing arts.'*  
*Discuss this claim.*

This question dealt quite specifically with the topic of Culture, from Topic 3 in the Syllabus. In terms of outcomes, it required candidates to recognise the values and assumptions behind different approaches to the analysis of problems and issues.

Here candidates were given wide scope in answering and they drew their responses from a variety of sources. The better candidates, in the introductory paragraph, debated the concepts involved in defining culture, giving a framework for their discussion and examples in the body of the essay. They recognised the fact that *culture* could have a wide frame of reference but could not be defined in simple terms.

The better candidates presented a line of argument, commenting on the significance of their examples. Many used statistics to explain why certain aspects of culture are more definitive than others. These responses were more balanced in treating both sections of the quotation. In a number of them candidates examined the historical perspective of the development of an Australian identity and the cultural icons of various historical periods.

## 1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

Average responses covered all areas of the question but were more superficial, especially in their treatment of literature and the visual and performing arts. Few commented on the evolving nature of culture. Generally they presented a number of icons, myths and images but, nevertheless, from a limited point of view. Many of these candidates began with the concept of *high* culture and *popular* culture, fitting examples into this pattern. There was evidence here of prepared answers rather than thoughtful responses.

The weaker responses were very generalised, being mainly descriptive and including lists of lifestyle activities. Here candidates responded to the trigger words *beach*, *outback*, *television* and *sport*. Little, if any, attention was given to the second part of the statement. In a number of cases these candidates wrote enthusiastically in promoting Australia, rather than evaluating the relative contribution made by the two sets of criteria in defining Australian national culture.

### Question 5

'Civilisation is to be judged by its treatment of minorities'.

How tolerant of minority groups is Australian society? In your answer consider AT LEAST TWO minority groups.

In this question relating to tolerance, candidates were required to refer to at least two minority groups. The most commonly referred to were Aboriginals, homosexuals and migrants. Excellent responses acknowledged that, although there was a majority of women in the population, for the purposes of this question they were being regarded as a minority in respect of their access to power.

The majority of these candidates presented responses of three or more pages. Almost all appeared to feel that we are moving towards a more tolerant society. Most showed evidence of the study of racism, discrimination and prejudice, and only a few referred back to the original quotation.

Excellent responses distinguished between behaviour regulated by legislation as opposed to entrenched feelings and attitudes. These candidates noted the difference between tolerance and acceptance. Most implied that, in theory, Australia is a tolerant country although individuals may not be so. The majority referred to more than two groups and indicated an emerging tolerant attitude. Excellent examples of the development of tolerance, together with relevant legislation, were common.

Most average responses consisted mainly of prepared essays on past grievances, with Aboriginals and the Women's Movement being the most common. These accounts were often well presented but were concentrated on discrimination. They referred to tolerance only in a brief introduction and conclusion. Most apparently assumed that *anti-discrimination is tolerance*.

Weaker responses referred to only one group or made little mention of the second. The concept of tolerance was not discussed and many appeared to be prepared essays on

## 1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

racism and discrimination. Usually they had a very brief introduction followed by one or two lists showing discrimination and racism, and either a poor conclusion or none at all. They did not link the lists with the issue of tolerance.

### Question 6

Here students were given two graphs showing unemployment trends, 1982-84.

*Give possible reasons for the employment patterns indicated in the graph above.  
What are some of the consequences of these employment trends in Australia?*

This question, relating to full and part-time employment in Australia, required candidates to address two parts - the reasons for employment patterns as presented in the two graphs, and the consequences of these employment trends. It was common for candidates to concentrate on only one part of the question.

Excellent responses, which gave equal weight to both parts of the question, were characterised by the ability of the candidate to interpret both graphs while using knowledge drawn from other sources. These responses differentiated between the factors influencing full-time employment and those influencing part-time employment. Many considered the cyclical nature of full-time employment linked to changes in government fiscal policy. They also observed that part-time employment had steadily increased due to the influence of many factors, including the restructuring of the work place and increased participation by women. In their treatment of consequences, they considered both economic and social aspects and linked these to their analysis of the graphs.

Average responses were characterised by a reasonable explanation of trends in the graphs, but rather superficial analysis of the reasons. Examples of consequences were generally limited, often focussing on one area.

Some weaker responses appeared to be prepared essays on unemployment which did not address either part of the question. In other weaker responses candidates gave a basic explanation of full-time and part-time employment patterns, and were often unable to interpret the scales on the graphs correctly. They generally failed to account for the differences between the two graphs and did not consider any of the consequences.

### Question 7

*In his 1995 Australia Day speech, the Governor-General, Mr. Hayden, referred to communication technology. He said that the information super-highway is being over-hyped and exaggerated. This could lead to unrealistic expectations and disappointments.*

*Do you agree with the Governor-General?  
What are possible benefits and problems of current communication technology? In your answer, refer to AT LEAST TWO of the following:*

## 1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

- *privacy*
- *copyright*
- *cultural identity*
- *the Internet*
- *marketing*
- *education*
- *leisure.*

The question focussed on Topic 1 of the Syllabus and dealt particularly with the following Outcomes:

- recognition of the importance of key issues for society.
- expression of a personal viewpoint about contemporary issues.

It was a lengthy question which required a discussion of two clear issues:

**The first** pertained to the question of whether the information super-highway was over-hyped and exaggerated, thus leading to unrealistic expectations and disappointments. This clearly involved an understanding of the meaning of the words *over-hyped* and *exaggerated*, which proved difficult for many candidates.

**The second** involved coverage of the benefits and problems of current communication technology with reference to at least two examples. This was the more straightforward section but required up-to-date knowledge of the situation in the examples used.

Not surprisingly many candidates obviously possessed a great deal of knowledge about the topic generally, indicating a comfortable attitude toward this section of the Syllabus, as well as a sound background of preparation and information.

The majority could clearly distinguish *benefits* from *problems* and were able to write in an informed way about several examples with privacy, education, leisure and the Internet being the most common.

The better responses consisted of a well balanced discussion assessing the implications of Mr Hayden's speech with reference to the present situation, and expressing an informed opinion about benefits and problems related to current communication technology.

Average responses were of a good length and made a cursory reference to the claim of exaggeration and possible disappointment while developing the theme as their essay progressed.

In the poorer responses candidates often appeared to rely on prepared answers on technology modified slightly to conform to the spirit of the question. They showed little understanding of the implications of the statement given and treated the essay as a discussion of the pros and cons of communication technology.

## 1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

### Question 8

*'Good Government requires an effective Opposition'.  
Do you agree with this claim? Support your answer with relevant examples.*

This question was not popular, as was evident from the low number of responses, many of which were very brief.

Many of the better responses carefully analysed various situations and drew logical conclusions from their explanation of 'good Government' and 'effective Opposition'. The roles of both Government and Opposition were examined in relation to specific examples, the most common of which was a comparison between democracy, communism and dictatorship. It was evident that, in some responses, an historical perspective was taken as well as a contemporary approach. This was effectively achieved when the candidate adopted a global view. In some answers the broad idea of the *Opposition needing to be diligent so as to keep the Government on its toes* or *to keep the bastards honest* was quite clear. A few of these responses discussed what would happen if the Opposition were more effective than the Government.

Average responses attempted to develop a line of argument by using examples from Australia and without attempting to make a comparison with other political systems. It was apparent that in this category many candidates were confused between *government* and *political systems* and/or *political parties*.

The weaker responses rarely cited examples and for those who did so, the accuracy and relevance of their examples were not always relevant. Most of these responses were very short, lacked analysis and showed little understanding of the mechanics of government.

### Question 9

*A parliamentary inquiry into youth violence was told that teachers are being distracted from teaching by having to deal with a range of social issues.*

*These issues include family problems, violence, and even making sure students are properly fed, clothed, and have a place to sleep at night. Many parents are creating false expectations of what teachers should do by neglecting their own parenting obligations.*

*Schools are not capable of being total welfare agencies.*

*Has the school replaced the family in the role of parenting?  
What do you consider to be the main role of the school in the education of a young person?  
Explain your point of view.*

This question addressed the last three issues nominated in Topic 7 of the Syllabus, which targets, in particular, the Syllabus Outcomes wherein students are required to show they can:

## 1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

- identify key issues and recognise the importance of these for society;
- determine items of knowledge relevant to an issue;
- think critically about contemporary issues and problems; and
- express a personal viewpoint about contemporary issues.

Because of an assumed familiarity with the subject matter, this question attracted a large percentage of the candidature, and the stimulus material provided a broad spectrum on which to base their answers.

In the better responses candidates dealt with both parts of the question and showed a good understanding of the changing nature of the role of the school. They conceded that there were two sides to the argument, and discussed the underlying causes of the social issues raised. Such candidates offered excellent suggestions for the concept of a good education, frequently envisaging this as encompassing a well-balanced approach to growth and development in the adolescent years.

The average responses made some attempt to deal with both parts of the question. Here candidates tended to concentrate on the fact that schools have adopted a parental role. These responses accepted the inevitability of this role shift, commenting that it was not desirable but offering no rational sympathetic remedies. The responses tended to mirror their own educational experience, while highlighting their lack of awareness of the reality of socio-economic differences.

The weaker responses were often distracted by *trigger* words such as *youth violence* and *family problems* in the stimulus material, and did not address either of the questions asked; instead personal anecdotes were used as arguments with little, if any, relevance.

### Question 10

*'There are advantages and disadvantages of languages other than English becoming commonly used in Australia.'*  
*Discuss this statement.*

This question addressed the following issues which were nominated in Topics 4 and 5 of the Syllabus:

- the inter-relationship of language and culture;
- the role of language in social interaction;
- conservation of cultural heritage; and
- attempts to eliminate discrimination through education.

The Syllabus Outcomes which are particularly relevant to this question are that candidates:

- should be able to support arguments with relevant evidence;
- communicate ideas, arguments and conclusions;
- draw conclusions based on reasoned arguments; and
- acknowledge that many problems remain open questions.

## 1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

Despite the simple terms of the question, candidates who attempted this found it difficult to attain any breadth of argument; quite frequently *multi-lingual* and *multi-cultural* were interchanged and this led to a predictability of response.

The better candidates found arguments for both sides of the proposition, and these were better expressed and developed. Economic advantage was often cited, that of trade and tourism being the most popular. The on-going maintenance of culture through language was a powerful argument, with excellent negative examples being given, e.g. Koori languages. These responses generally advocated the benefits of additional languages, producing balanced comments which were both convincing and relevant.

The average responses adopted an unbiased, albeit occasionally contradictory, approach. They accepted wholeheartedly the desirability of being conversant with more than one language, but tempered this with the cautionary advice that we should all speak English. It was seen as a corollary that acceptance of other cultures is a result of language acquisition, but an undue amount of attention was often accorded to the negative consequences of cultural intolerance, i.e. violence, race hatred and soccer riots.

The weaker responses were typified by a lack of understanding of any issues beyond the trivial. The immigration debate was needlessly canvassed and many of these responses revealed a racist viewpoint. Some also interpreted the question as proposing that English be supplanted by another language.

### Question 11

Here candidates were shown a cartoon depicting a father saying to his son "Sorry son, we have no paper but lots of trees".

*'Governments are being faced with more and more policy decisions where there is conflict between environmental and other interests'.*

*How successful have Australian Governments been in addressing environmental concerns in recent years? Discuss specific examples in your answer.*

This question focussed on Topic 2 of the Syllabus with reference to Topic 7. Candidates were required to integrate their understanding of policy development in the light of conflicting pressures and with evaluation of government actions through appropriate examples. There was strong evidence of candidates' being well prepared about the subject of environmental issues. They were equally successful in considering the issues, using examples drawn from the global to the local. On the whole, candidates understood *government* only in the most general terms and did not readily distinguish between the various levels of government in Australia, and their specific areas of responsibility. As a result, the discussion of government strategies was treated only in the most generalised terms.

In spite of the focus on conflict in the stimulus material, the idea of government policy resolving the tensions between competing interests was discussed by only a minority of

## 1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

candidates. A majority omitted any discussion of conflict at all. On the other hand, a good understanding of an extensive range of environmental issues was shown and these were discussed competently. These included:

- forestry - woodchipping, logging, loss of flora and fauna;
- air, water and noise pollution;
- threats to the environment;
- nuclear testing;
- the ozone layer;
- soil degradation, and
- the greenhouse effect.

Where there were conflicting interests, many candidates failed to present a full explanation of either side of an issue, although the area where such tension was best understood was that of jobs versus forest preservation. In assessing whether government policies had been successful, the majority failed to link evidence to their conclusions, instead they limited their discussion to examples of environmental action.

The better candidates identified the key issues *conflict between environmental and other interests* and related this clearly to the need for and the place of government policy in resolving that conflict. These responses accurately linked policy initiatives with the appropriate level of Australian government. They showed an awareness of the potential impact of international accords such as that reached in the Rio Environment Summit and Australia's failure to act decisively in relation to the French test in the Pacific.

In average responses candidates discussed two or three specific examples but tended to disregard the conflict dimension. Their discussion of Government policy was generalised, and in a majority of these responses, candidates tended to confine their treatment to environmental issues without reference to either conflict of interest or government policy.

Most weaker responses listed environmental problems, or causes, rather than potential solutions. They showed no awareness of government intervention, often relating success to the actions of Greenpeace or Clean-Up Australia. Here candidates made little or no attempt to evaluate the success of government policy, and often expressed their comments in terms of *what should be done* and not even of what the government *should* do.

### Question 12

*'The media's disregard of the right to privacy has reached unacceptable proportions. Individuals have a right to a private life'.*

*Do you agree with these statements? Support your viewpoint with examples.*

This question related specifically to Syllabus Topics 4 and 10 and required candidates to integrate the issue of privacy with the role and influence of mass media. The question attracted a large number of candidates and provided the opportunity for them to present a critical review of a contemporary issue.

## 1995 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

Most candidates supported the concept of privacy, although few managed to discuss the dichotomy between people holding a public position and their private life. Similarly, those who merely presented a prepared response to the stimulus word *media* produced an average or below average response.

Excellent responses showed an ability to extend beyond the single issue and to grapple with the broader aspects of privacy. They presented an appropriate range of examples which were discerning and relevant in supporting a well-constructed argument. Having adequately defined the terminology used, many candidates were able to present and acknowledge both the positive and negative aspects involved in the question. The better students presented evidence which stated that, in some instances, intrusion into private matters was justifiable when such matters needed to be brought to public notice. A typical example was the exposé by the media of actions by members of certain religious sects. Others balanced this by illustrating unfair *trial by media* of public figures who were found *guilty* without having any opportunity to defend themselves.

The average response became consumed by the specific example given and failed to extend an argument fully. This use of example was often incorrect or trite and appeared to be centred mainly on a narrow range of movie stars, the Royal family and O J Simpson.

The weaker candidates tended to react to the focal point, viz *media*, and presented minimal argument and/or fact. A number of these candidates failed to grasp fully the concept of privacy and extolled the virtues of human rights.