1996 HSC

EXAMINATION REPORT

General Studies

1996 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

GENERAL STUDIES

In 1996, a total of 17 143 candidates presented for the examination in General Studies, indicating the relevance of issues raised in this subject.

It is pleasing to note that a large number of candidates possessed a detailed understanding of the General Studies Syllabus. Many wrote convincingly on three questions, supporting their responses with relevant information. The questions in this year's paper were especially directed towards testing the candidates' achievement of the Outcomes of the 1991 Syllabus. Although the ten Syllabus Topic Areas were specifically covered by the examination, the questions asked students to apply interdisciplinary perspectives. They were structured in a way that facilitated discrimination between prepared responses and those that indicated a critical and balanced approach to complex contemporary issues on the part of the candidate.

Although the paper, as a whole, provided an efficient discriminating tool, many questions were general enough to enable all candidates to make a genuine attempt at answering them.

This report is compiled in an effort to assist candidates and teachers preparing for the 1997 General Studies examination.

Question 1

"It has been claimed that individual rights are being limited for the sake of the public good."

Examine this claim, and in your answer refer to at least TWO of the following:
- *euthanasia*
- *compulsory wearing of seat-belts*
- *smoking bans in certain public areas*
- *control of gun ownership*
- *illegality of particular drugs*
- *alcohol-free zones*

This question, which focussed on Syllabus Topic 10, *Society and the Individual*, proved to be very popular. It produced a range of responses both in terms of quality of discussion of the claim made and also of the issues which candidates chose to address. The majority possessed a wide knowledge of a range of contemporary issues in Australia, especially euthanasia, and control of gun ownership; the better responses revealed an ability to recognise the complexity of the issues and assess their significance.

Excellent responses carefully analysed the claim that *individual rights are being limited for the sake of the public good*. They revealed a clear understanding of the notion of *public good* and its relationship to individual rights, debating the positive and negative sides of both. Many responses at this level based their discussion within the context of a democratic society, while acknowledging other socio-political systems. Selective and broad-reaching supporting evidence was used to illustrate arguments, rather than as a substitute for analysis and discussion. Specific knowledge of current events such as the Northern Territory's euthanasia legislation, the Federal gun debate, and the public cost of smoking-related diseases was evident and, here, candidates showed their ability to take a detached view in discussing the positions of various interest groups. These responses were articulate and well structured and presented their author's case without unnecessary repetition or excessive anecdotal material.

In above average responses, candidates showed an implied understanding of the claim; there was, however, little attempt to address specifically the notion of public good. These responses were based on a broad knowledge of several of the issues listed, but often the essay included material of peripheral relevance as a substitute for an in-depth examination of the claim. Here students showed some competence in recognising the complexity of the issues under discussion; frequently the evidence chosen represented only one side of the issue. Although knowledge of current events was apparent, so was evidence of thoughtful essay structure, but not at the level which characterised the excellent responses.

In average responses, candidates made little attempt to examine the claim other than by mentioning it in an introductory paragraph. Rather, they tended to acknowledge that the issues under discussion were *rights issues* only and followed this with lengthy, often purely anecdotal, evidence to support their position on the issue raised. Many of these responses were lengthy but, here, students failed to use length to sustain any argument, frequently ignoring the phrase *public good*. Responses at this level were often emotive and extremely personal but reflected an inability to perceive the complexities of the issues under discussion. In them, students showed some knowledge of one of the issues for discussion but merely discussed the second issues in passing.

Question 2

A cartoon dealing with the ethnic problems was inserted here.

Many modern nations are divided by civil war or ethnic conflict.
Discuss the success strategies used to resolve such conflicts.
Support your conclusions by referring to at least TWO such conflicts.

This question relates to Topic 8, *Conflict and Conflict Resolution*. The outcomes particularly relevant to the question were: identification of salient features of a contemporary issue. Responses reflected the interdisciplinary nature of the question by drawing on information from English, History and other courses in the *Human Society and Its Environment* Key Learning Area. Although the question did not attract a large number of responses, those submitted were varied, attracting a wide cross-section of the candidature.

A common fault in many responses was an inability to provide examples of civil war or ethnic conflict. Few students referred to the cartoon provided as stimulus for the question, while many failed to take account of the limits placed by the question on *civil war or ethnic conflict* and did not discuss the success of strategies to resolve the conflict.

In excellent responses, candidates addressed all parts of the question and selected appropriate examples, such as Cambodia, Cyprus, Rwanda, South Africa, Bosnia and Northern Ireland. They provided a planned and coherent structure, often using sophisticated vocabulary and quotations to express competently their mature analysis of the issues and achieved most of the Knowledge and Understanding Outcomes. In these responses, candidates showed an ability to analyse issues and problems, interpret a pictorial form, apply an interdisciplinary perspective, determine effectiveness of policies, support arguments with relevant evidence, and draw conclusions based on reasoned arguments. The Values and Attitudes Outcomes were also clearly addressed. Such responses were well structured and logical, with a brief yet concise introduction and a clear line of argument running through the essay and culminating in a well-rounded conclusion.

In responses in the above average category, candidates often provided good detailed descriptions of ethnic conflicts and/or civil wars. The distinguishing feature of this group, in comparison with the excellent responses, was a briefer discussion of strategies and their successes and this, at times, resulted in unbalanced responses. They achieved most of the Knowledge and Understanding Outcomes and often adopted an interdisciplinary perspective to the question. In addressing the Values and Attitudes Outcomes, however, the strategies that were proposed often reflected a less mature approach.

Average responses fulfilled fewer of the Knowledge, Skills, Values and Attitudes Outcomes. These responses presented a brief description of the conflicts, used a limited range of examples and, in the main, focussed on one part of the question which was usually a description of certain conflicts. Some relied heavily on prepared answers about the United Nations. In this category, arguments were not sustained throughout the essay and strategies were often broached only in the conclusion.

Question 3

Describe how television presents human communication and relationships.

How accurate are these images, and do they influence everyday life?

In your answer, refer to at least TWO of the following:

- *advertising*
- *'soapies'*
- *current affairs programs*
- *documentaries*
- *children's programs*
- *cartoons*

This question related to most issues raised in Topic 4, *Language and Communication*, as well as some issues raised in Topics 8 and 10. Syllabus Outcomes particularly relevant to this question were: identification of salient features of a contemporary issue, and the ability to think critically and draw conclusions based on a reasoned argument.

This was a popular question, with a wide range of responses, which allowed accurate discrimination of good and bad candidates. While a number had thought carefully about the issue and showed signs of research, others were attracted to the question as one of which they had general knowledge and could express a point of view.

The question was highly structured, enabling candidates to identify clearly what was required. Three sub-questions were to be addressed, with reference to at least two television programming areas. Discussion of the descriptive aspect of television and its presentation of *human relationships* required students to address the portrayal of emotions or areas such as love, hate, romance, violence, family and work communication, as well as the stereotyped presentation of gender, class, race and age.

The above average responses focussed on some of these directly, while those in the average range and below tended to cover them more by implication. The most popular areas for close discussion were advertising, *soapies* and current affairs programs.

The best responses were characterised by an understanding of the fact that television images are a construction of reality and not just a reflection. They analysed the way in which program images are constructed and the motives for doing so, seeing elements of emotional manipulation in the structure.

They recognised the range of stereotypes involved and contrasted this with our diverse and multicultural society. Some candidates implied that television might be a factor in the alienation of the individual in society.

Middle range responses tended to address all three issues, but placed most emphasis on the descriptive aspect. Although many candidates described at length particular programs, cartoons or advertisements, the questions dealing with *accuracy* and *influence* were not dealt with in detail. The average and below average responses tended to be highly judgmental, and appeared to assess all television images in negative terms. Such responses tended to be emotional.

In below average responses, candidates wrote at some length, but tended to outline the themes of *soapies*, especially the storylines, with limited reference to the other areas. Points about *accuracy* and *influence* were often made but lacked both qualification and explanation, eg *current affairs programs have a true meaning as they show what happens in real life*.

It was obvious that all candidates drew on a good deal of television viewing; the level of thoughtful analysis, however, was what distinguished the excellent from the mediocre and ordinary responses.

Question 4

"Economic development is another name for westernisation."

Evaluate this claim in terms of the social and political consequences in developing countries.

This question related to most issues raised in Topic 9, *World Development and Inequality*. Syllabus Outcomes particularly relevant to this question were: identification of key issues confronting the world today; and recognition of the values and assumptions behind different approaches to the analysis of issues.

The question was less popular than those on this topic in recent years, possibly because candidates were required to evaluate the claim in terms of *the social and political consequences in developing countries*. Many discerning students, having prepared for a more direct question on development might have been deterred by the quotation, *viz economic development is another name for westernisation*.

Those who did choose the question, however, possessed a thorough grounding in the relevant topic from the General Studies Syllabus or from adopting a multi-disciplinary approach. Unfortunately, this led some to write a response using prepared material, rather than a critical appraisal of the statement in support of their evaluation. The question did discriminate excellent responses from more average responses on the basis of the reference to the link between *development* and *westernisation* and an attempt to define these terms.

Weaker candidates were confused by the concepts of *westernisation* and *economic development*, or gave only simple explanations for the terms. Many wrote lengthy responses which, unfortunately, did not focus on the question.

Excellent responses clearly established the link between the two concepts or challenged the assumption that one led to the other. These showed that candidates understood the terminology and were also able to differentiate between economic growth as an increase in real GDP per capita and economic development as an increase in the living standards of the people. These excellent responses focussed on the political, as well as the social, consequences of development as a *euphemism* for westernisation. The impact of economic development on indigenous cultures in particular was a feature of stronger responses which used a variety of examples such as cash-cropping, the intrusion of Coca-Cola and Nike, the move to free market economics and the adoption of Western values, and so on, to support their analysis. The best responses also gave examples of countries in which economic development had occurred without automatic westernisation.

Above average candidates tended to restrict their discussion to social or economic consequences, with little or no reference to political changes which might accompany economic development. Such candidates tended to be less critical of the statement and used fewer case studies or examples.

Average candidates tended to make vague connections (if at all) between westernisation and development, assuming, or implying, also that this was inevitable and positive.

Below average candidates referred to development in general, used few examples, made little reference to the statement but, instead, wrote general responses on development.

Question 5

Study the following table: "Social Conditions in Australia".

	Conditions	*Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders*	*Total population*
Health	*Life expectancy*		
	•*men*	*57 years*	*74 years*
	•*women*	*65 years*	*80 years*
	Infant mortality	*17.7 per 1000 live births*	*6.9 per 1000 live births*
Education	*High school retention rate*	*25.2%*	*77.5%*
Household	*People per house*	*4.6*	*2.6*
	Homes ownership rate	*28%*	*67%*
Income	*Median family income*	*$24 600*	*$34 800*
Jobs	*Jobless rate*	*38%*	*8.5%*
	Percentage of jobless who are long-term unemployed	*60-70%*	*46%*
The law	*In custody*	*1878 per 100 000*	*114 per 100 000*

What does the table indicate about the social conditions of Australian Aborigines and Torres strait Islanders compared with the total population?

Suggest reasons for their differences.

A popular question, attracting 13% of the candidature, this related mainly to Topic 5, *Prejudice and Discrimination,* and to some aspects of Topic 10, *Society and the Individual.* Syllabus Outcomes particularly relevant to this question were: deduction of information from charts, identification of the salient features of contemporary issues and problems, assessment of the complexity of such issues, and the effectiveness of policies. The majority of the responses comprised three or more pages of discussion of the reasons for the plight of the indigenous population. Candidates showed an understanding of the inter-relationship between the various indicators, such as education and jobs or jobs and income, shown in the table.

Excellent responses presented a wide range of reasons for the differences. These included historical factors, attempts to assimilate Aborigines into the wider community with the resultant breakdown of cultural identity, loss of self-esteem, stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination. Such responses also drew on supplementary material to support their arguments. They were couched in sophisticated language, their arguments were coherent and well balanced, and an impressive array of relevant factual information was cited in support.

Average responses referred to the table, showed an understanding of what it indicated about the conditions of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, and included some understanding of the relationship between the various indicators. These responses referred briefly to one or two of the reasons for their differences.

Weaker responses simply reiterated the figures presented in the table. Reasons were either omitted or were replaced by a biased, stereotyped point of view, which referred to Pauline Hanson's recent comments.

Question 6

1996 is the International Year for Eradication of Poverty.

What is being done to eradicate poverty in the world?
Refer to the United Nations (UN) and at least TWO other organisations.

This question related to Topic 9, *World Development and Inequality.* Here, candidates were required to know about a contemporary issue on a national or international level, to be able to think critically about the issue, to understand its complexities and determine the effectiveness of policies to eradicate poverty in the world. It consisted of two parts, with the second part frequently being inadequately dealt with or totally ignored. In this International Year for Eradication of Poverty, it was surprising that this question attracted only a small number of responses. Of these, many were prepared essays on the causes of poverty.

Excellent responses showed the benefits of an interdisciplinary approach. Students who might have studied Development Economics or Political Geography had insight into terminology and detail concerning agencies and development strategies. Other excellent responses considered both short and long term goals for the eradication of poverty and possessed specific knowledge of the programs of a number of Aid organisations. Although the question did not specifically ask for an evaluation of the success of Aid programs, many of the better responses did comment on their effectiveness.

For a response to be considered in the average range, it needed at least to discuss what is being done to eradicate poverty in the world and to refer to three Aid organisations. Such responses,

however, were often vague about the correct operations and procedures carried out by these organisations. In them, students tended to generalise about their nature and work, and wrote rather superficially about poverty. There was also a lack of understanding about the role of Amnesty International.

Many of the weaker responses were prepared essays on the causes of poverty in less developed countries. In many cases, these responses did not present any information about what is being done to eradicate poverty in the world, and completely ignored the second part of the question. Many made little reference to the United Nations and, if it were mentioned, candidates displayed very limited understanding of its role in attempting to eradicate poverty. Other weaker responses considered only the provision of food parcels by international agencies, while others were restricted to the role of organisations such as St Vincent de Paul, the Salvation Army, and the Smith Family, within Australia.

Question 7

Consider whether countries achieve greater national strength by emphasising cultural unity or cultural diversity.

Outline your position on this issue, giving your reasons.

This question dealt specifically with Topic 3, *Culture.* It appeared to be one of the least popular on the paper and many responses were brief. The concept of *national strength* proved difficult and lack of definition hampered the line of argument in a number of responses. Those which did attempt a definition focussed on political power, trade, economic links, weaponry, technological advance, and wealth.

Many of the better responses included a strong discussion or argument and frequently referred to countries such as Japan, the United States, and Germany as well as Australia. The argument correctly pointed out their varied approaches and similar strengths; some responses showed that unity often comes from recognition of diversity.

The benefits of cultural unity and/or cultural diversity were sometimes examined in relation to specific examples, the most common being Australia's policy of multiculturalism. Often this involved adopting an historical perspective as well as a contemporary approach. With recent media attention focussed on comments on Australia's immigration policy and Aboriginal welfare programs, some candidates incorporated this in support of the argument without making it the main feature. In the better responses, candidates spoke of the cultural unity of countries like Japan as being a strength and the cultural diversity of countries such as Australia and the United States as being, likewise, a strength. The issues were thoroughly examined and logical conclusions were drawn.

Average responses indicated some students' difficulty in coming to terms with cultural diversity and often equated it to multiculturalism. This resulted in a one-sided argument, since any reference to cultural unity was usually made in passing or omitted completely. Rarely did these responses outline a particular position; instead, they often referred to only one reason for this. Very few compared cultural unity and diversity and the problem that this diversity creates in Australia. Some tended to confuse national strength with patriotism without any clear understanding of how these two concepts might be linked.

In general, weaker responses failed to come to grips with the terminology of the question and showed little comprehension of what was being asked. Many appeared to be prepared answers on multiculturalism or prejudice and discrimination, rarely referring to cultural unity, cultural diversity or national strength. In some cases, such responses confused cultural unity (and diversity) with cultural identity. This was evident, particularly when the question was seen to relate to the Aboriginal culture. Numerous responses centred around a perceived trigger word — culture — and then discussed the benefits (or otherwise) of high and low culture. Some responses were very brief, showing little, if any, evidence of an argument or any analysis of the components of the question.

Question 8

Read the following newspaper extract.

> *Youth violence and lawlessness are daily occurrences in some areas.*
>
> *The new Director General of the Juvenile Justice Department, Ken Buttrum, said 'Authorities should address the cause of the problems. Too often we spend our time looking at punishment rather than cause.'*
>
> *'When things like this happen we look at knee-jerk control issues rather than the social factors leading to this problem. Unemployment, family breakdowns, poverty, and drug abuse — these are the critical issues.'*

Outline what you think are the critical issues relating to youth violence.

What are the best ways to reduce youth violence?

This question related to Topic 7, *Conflict and Conflict Resolution*, and Topic 10, *Society and the Individual*. It was a question designed to test the students' knowledge of a contemporary issue — in this case, *Youth Violence,* and specifically targets the Outcomes; namely recognition of the importance of this issue to society, and possible solutions to problems arising from the issue.

It was a fairly popular question, chosen because the critical issues — unemployment, family breakdown, poverty and drug abuse — were mentioned in the stimulus material. It appealed to most candidates as they believed that these were the critical issues rather than thinking of others. The majority offered some comment on these issues, even if their response did not develop into an analysis of them. Many, however, did not adequately address the second part of the question, thus limiting their answer.

In the above average and superior responses, students showed the links between many of the causes and they usually discussed additional causes as well as those quoted. These included peer pressure and role models, with a heavy emphasis on media violence, both in cartoons and in high profile movies. These candidates realised the complexity of the task they were being asked to solve, and discussed such things as the self-perpetuating circle of domestic violence and the problems of providing adequate intervention services. Some questioned the cost and who would pay.

In average responses, most candidates discussed quite adequately the four quoted causes, while a few gave additional reasons. These candidates did not integrate the causes, but usually dealt with each in separate paragraphs. Solutions offered included more educational training or better schooling, without any indication of what this was meant to achieve; other solutions

were suggestions that the Government would *make more jobs*, and counselling, the latter being offered as a *quick-fix* for society's ills. No mention was made of how this would happen or who would fund it.

In below average responses, candidates reacted to the trigger words *youth violence* and *lawlessness.* This was followed by lists of violent episodes caused by youths and drawn mostly from recent news reports. The stabbing of a teacher by a student was often quoted. Many simply assumed or implied that violence was on the increase, without noting the words in *some areas.* The majority thought that something should be done but suggested only *education* or all purpose *counselling*.

Question 9

Read the following two statements about technology.
- *'I believe that the technology revolution is basically going to cause more problems than it solves. It isolates people.'*
- *'The technology revolution has injected a degree of optimism into the contemporary world.'*

Which statement do you most support?
Give reasons for your answer and refer to recent technological advances.

This question focussed on Topic 1, *Science, Technology and Society*, and dealt particularly with the following Outcomes: the salient features of contemporary issues and problems; the significance of these issues and problems; provision of arguments based on relevant evidence; and realisation that only partial solutions may be found to some problems.

The question comprised two statements giving conflicting views about technology. The first stated that the technology revolution is going to cause *more problems than it solves,* since *it isolates people*. This latter statement called for an analysis of relevant aspects of the technological revolution and an understanding of the *isolation* caused.

The ability to generalise and make deductions, thus presenting a feasible argument, was what characterised the excellent and, to a lesser extent, the above average responses. The average and below average responses used the trigger of *problems* to present the well-rehearsed clichés of the technological society, or often concentrated solely on the environment.

The second statement, while not explicitly extolling the benefits of the technology revolution, called for an assessment of the *degree of optimism injected into the contemporary world.* Most candidates appeared to possess a wide knowledge of a diversity of technology and those who chose to support the second statement could generally analyse the issues of the question, whilst not necessarily equating the advantages of technological development with optimism. Those responses which addressed this aspect of the question indicated medical advances and the information explosion as a basis for optimism. In general, those who chose this statement tended to display their knowledge rather than attempting an in-depth analysis. In the excellent responses, candidates showed an ability to analyse critically, and to recognise and argue moral issues on both a local and a worldwide scale.

The majority of those who chose to discuss the first statement rarely came to grips with the *isolation* aspect of the question, or made only a cursory reference to the obvious — the physical isolation of the computer/Internet.

In the excellent responses, candidates showed a sophisticated understanding of the many facets of *isolation,* with well supported argument and mature discussion that were well expressed. The lack of social interaction caused by the technological era epitomised by the Internet, education by computer, television and its advertisements aimed at *individual sovereignty rather than interpersonal understanding and relationship* (eg *the most important person in the world — YOU),* etc, were cited as a paradox — superficially seen as a means of unification, but rather isolating the individual from society and his/her peers.

The middle range of responses tended to be more pedestrian in scope, language and argument. The above average, while using the Industrial Revolution as a starting point, discussed the effect of technology, basing their arguments on a sound knowledge of the topic. Medical research, transport and communication, as well as social and leisure activities, were cited as examples of the benefits or disadvantages of technological development and its effects on society, while treating the *isolation* or *optimism* aspects only superficially.

In average responses, candidates tended to deal disproportionately with *Surfing the Internet* and its advantages or disadvantages, so that depth of argument was lacking, as was originality of expression. *Optimism* was seen as *being a good thing*, and *isolation* was dismissed as being the undesirability of children's being shut in alone with their computer. Often, both statements in the question were discussed equally, although the rider *Which statement do you most support?* was ignored.

Below average responses were very basic and generalised in their approach. They often appeared to be prepared answers on technology that largely ignored the implications of the given statements. As a result, the response was a rambling, often incoherent discussion of the pros and cons of communication technology. While the catch-phrases of computer technology had been well learned, an ability to write in an informed way was generally lacking. The weaker candidates were unable to link their examples with the major issues of the question and tended to present an irrelevant list of technological or environmental developments.

Question 10

In recent years, religion has been linked with sport.
Is sport becoming a substitute for religion in Australia today?

Give reasons and examples to support your answer.

The dual triggers of sport and religion proved to be successful in persuading a reasonable percentage of the candidature into attempting this question. This was possibly diminished by a juxtaposition of two areas whose debatable issues do not generally include each other. The use of the word *substitute* in the question left many candidates floundering. While they were happy to acknowledge the smaller congregations in churches and the greater interest in sport, they were generally at a loss to make any convincing link.

In answering, candidates were able to draw from their studies of Topic 6, *Religion and Society,* Topic 3, *Culture* and from their own extensive knowledge of sport. Excellent responses included convincing reasons for the apparent decline in religious observance. The main arguments given for this were the perceived failure of religion to remain relevant in today's society — moral lapses on the part of the clergy and the non-ordination of women. On the other hand, sport was offered as a social and spiritual panacea, with references being made to

allegiance, idolatry, fanaticisms, and communality. Humour was used to good effect, *Tony Lockett feed the 5000? — I'd like to see that!*, as was the judicious use of material from Bruce Dawe's poem, 'Life-cycle'. A common argument in such responses challenged the terms of the question and showed quite convincingly that sport has none of the spiritual qualities of religion, although comparisons can be drawn between the two. In these responses, students took exception to the word *substitute* and argued that shifts in relative popularity between religion and sport were unconnected.

Average responses made largely unsubstantiated links between dwindling church attendance and the increasing enthusiasm for sport. These responses tended to dwell on the *sports idol = God* scenario, basing their remarks on the imbalance in media coverage between the two activities. Reasons given for the apparent religious decline were less cogent than those in the better responses and were often based on the premise that sport is more fun.

Below average responses were short and lacked any real analysis of the relevant issues. Argument was frequently tautological, eg fewer people are going to church because it is less popular, and responses often degenerated into a geographical listing of sporting alliances and a discussion of the relative merits of individual sporting activities.

Some Syllabus Outcomes targeted by this question were: identification of the salient features of contemporary issues and problems, and assessment of the significance of these issues and problems.

Addressing these Outcomes was an important feature of the above average and excellent responses; clear understanding of the issues raised by the question laid the foundation for a superior response in which candidates, having determined items of knowledge relevant to an issue, could support their arguments with relevant evidence.

Selection of appropriate factual data provided candidates with the means to reach a reasoned conclusion. The use of irrelevant or unsubstantiated material often prevented the average candidates from achieving a better result in their responses. They were unable to think critically about contemporary issues or problems, to communicate ideas, arguments and conclusion, or to draw conclusions based on reasoned arguments.

Weaker candidates failed to discuss these outcomes fully and merely extolled the virtues of religion or sport without any analysis of the issues raised; neither did they integrate information from different disciplines. Many students attempted to respond by referring to Bruce Dawe's poetry. Sometimes this was well used, but frequently it degenerated into a narrative account of the relevant poem and the poem itself became the major issue in the response.

Question 11

At a number of recent youth forums there have been calls for lowering the voting age to sixteen.

Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of such a move in Australia.

This question related to Topic 7, *Social and Political Institutions*, and Topic 10, *Society and the Individual*. Few candidates attempted it and the majority of those who did so were very weak.

The attraction of this question was the focus on youth issues and events relevant to the age group of the majority of candidates. It required students to recognise the fact that the given statement was proposed by youth forums, and to evaluate the consequences of lowering the

voting age. In it, candidates were required to discuss both sides of the argument. A number of candidates, however, failed to apply any interdisciplinary perspective to the question, which resulted in many stereotyped responses, lacking depth of argument.

In excellent responses, candidates related the purpose of youth forums and presented well substantiated arguments, giving the positive and negative results of maintaining the status quo or altering the current situation. Such candidates argued about maturity, naivety and manipulation, recognising the fact that the right to vote bestows influence. They also discussed concisely issues pertinent to youth, eg HECS and unemployment, as well as the future of the environment, considering the idealism of youth to be a catalyst for change.

In average responses, students showed a clear perception of the concept of age and related interests, but did not produce a range of advantages and disadvantages. Few recognised the opportunities inherent in discussion of youth forums. These responses generally comprised a mere listing, and lacked discussion of the short and long term implications for the political process.

In the weaker responses, there was a general lack of understanding of the implications of the question; the advantages and disadvantages of lowering the voting age to sixteen in Australia were simply listed. They were superficial, containing few examples but little or no genuine argument. The obvious examples quoted included the superficial lowering of age limits for alcohol consumption, engaging in sexual activities, marriage, and, perhaps, the improvement to a person's self-esteem on being elevated to perceived adulthood. Typical responses in this category presented emotional arguments relating to their own level of maturity and interest, but making no reference to the electoral process.

Question 12

A cartoon dealing with pollution was inserted here.

Explain what this cartoon suggests about the problems of pollution.

Who should be responsible for the control of pollution? Why?

This question related to Topic 2, *The Environment*. Issues specifically referred to were environmental pollution, the effectiveness of pollution controls, and the respective roles of governments, organisations and individuals in addressing environmental issues.

The question was popular with more than 10% of candidates, particularly those who had studied subjects from the *Human Society and Its Environment* Key Learning Area. Although many of those attempting the question had been well prepared, a significant number failed to address **all** parts of the question.

The question elicited a diversity of responses ranging from those assessed as being below average and which simply described the content of the stimulus material, ie the cartoon, to those which perceived the necessity for identifying and remedying what is essentially a global problem and responsibility.

Above average responses were characterised by reference to a variety of pollution issues ranging from litter in the local community to contamination of national waterways to global atmospheric decline. Such information was supported by statistical evidence and was often developed from a historical perspective.

Candidates in this category acknowledged that responsibility exists at a variety of levels including individuals, communities, consumers, manufacturers, TNCs, governments (local, state and national), and international agencies ranging from the United Nations to committed non-government organisations such as Greenpeace. They then explained why each of the aforementioned has a role to play in improving environmental quality, and the fact that not one can be significantly successful without the cooperation of each of the others.

Most average responses were either prepared *environmental papers* which identified pollution problems and attributed the situation to ignorance and selfishness, or focussed on analysis of the stimulus material, making incidental reference to the *responsibility* and *why* components of the question, simply blaming individuals and/or governments.

The weaker responses were often brief, referring to immediate, visual and trivial aspects of pollution, or gave very basic responses in which they moralised about responsibility.