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Notes from the Examination Centre

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1999 Higher School Certificate General Studies Notes from the Examination Centre

Introduction

In 1999 a total of 14 532 candidates presented for the Higher School Certificate General Studies Examination, representing a decrease of approximately 4% on the 1998 candidature.

The improvement in the standard of literacy and preparedness which has been noticeable in recent years continued, with the majority of candidates writing responses of considerable length. On the whole, candidates were able to identify the issues raised in the questions, with which they were able to deal in a mature and balanced way, using a wide variety of examples to support their opinions and arguments. This was particularly so in the case of Question 2 which was concerned with the current status of women, and Question 12 which addressed the role of governments in environmental issues. The majority of candidates appeared to have little difficulty in finding three questions to which they could satisfactorily apply themselves. There were considerably fewer candidates attempting to answer only one or two questions, while only a couple attempted to answer every question on the paper. In the preparation of candidates the fact that three questions only are to be attempted should be stressed. The careful reading of the wording of the question also needs to be stressed, as a significant number of candidates misread Question 3 and turned an essay on the impact of technological change on the nature of work into an essay on the impact of technology on nature. It was obvious that some competent candidates had seriously disadvantaged themselves by a hurried reading of the question.

Questions on the examination paper were directed towards testing the issues raised in the Syllabus Topics and the skills set out in the Outcomes of the Syllabus of 1991. Each Syllabus Topic was covered by at least one question on the examination paper. Most questions allowed candidates to integrate material from several topic areas or other subject areas into their responses. This is in keeping with the interdisciplinary nature of the subject, General Studies. The ability to identify issues, think critically about them and understand the complexity of those issues were the skills most commonly tested. There were some excellent examples of lateral thinking, broad knowledge and sustained argument among the top candidates. Occasionally candidates ignored the focus of the question and presented prepared answers on certain Syllabus Topics such as the Environment, or Science and Technology. Such responses gained low marks – although some were quite lengthy and well written – because they indicated that the candidates had failed to master the most basic General Studies skills (ie to identify a particular issue, think critically about it and recognise its salient features).

The most popular questions on the 1999 paper were Question 3 and Question 5, with more than 13% of the candidature attempting each question.

Specific Comments

Question 1

'The mass media are more concerned with marketing and advertising than presenting information and entertainment.'

Is this statement an accurate description of the role of today's mass media?

This question focused on Syllabus Topic 4, Language and Communication, and was one of the less popular questions, with only 7% of the candidature attempting it. Candidates were asked to assess the accuracy of a statement relating to the relative priorities attached to the various roles of the mass media. Specifically, the roles were marketing and advertising on the one hand, and providing entertainment and information on the other.

Syllabus Outcomes particularly addressed by this question were:

- to think critically about contemporary issues and problems;
- to determine items of knowledge relevant to an issue;
- to define terms accurately, and
- to support arguments with relevant evidence.

Excellent responses

Candidates showed a sound understanding of the roles of the mass media, often acknowledging that some roles may conflict with others. There was recognition of commercial, profit-oriented media and government-funded media in Australia, and there was awareness of a variety of media across the electronic, print and other visual domains. Excellent responses showed an appreciation of the reality of advertising as the main source of revenue in commercial media and the increasing trend toward marketing and advertising masked as media content. Concepts such as infotainment and telemarketing were often used to highlight such trends. Candidates in the excellent range made a genuine assessment of the accuracy of the statement, using a range of domestic and international cross media examples for analysis and support of their arguments.

Above Average responses

Candidates showed an awareness of the various roles in the mass media, often accompanied by a detailed examination of the features and influences of advertising in commercial television and radio. Numerous examples of marketing and advertising were used, and many responses briefly acknowledged the problems that may arise when media content is compromised by conflicting roles. References were made to sponsorship deals in sport, the 'cash for comments' affair in radio, and the increasing share of air time occupied by advertising in the electronic media. Limited reference was made to the role of providing information, often linking this to biased reporting. However, these comments generally did not analyse the nexus between the problems of media bias and conflicting roles, as was done in excellent responses. Sometimes, the discussion of bias was no more than marginally relevant to the question.

Average responses

Most candidates in the average range reacted to trigger words in the statement rather than analysing the role of today's media. These candidates tended to concentrate on a superficial discussion of media advertising and marketing, giving some examples, especially from television. There was little meaningful examination of the roles of today's mass media.

Some attempt was made to widen the scope of the discussion by referring to the print media. However, examples used were generally still limited to advertising techniques in magazines, with rare reference being made to newspapers.

Average responses described how television entertains, and how ratings are linked to the entertainment industry. However, they generally did not comment on the media's role of providing information.

Below Average responses

These were usually linked to anecdotal comments, almost exclusively limited to advertising, especially in television. There was little or no recognition of other roles.

Question 2

Approximately seventy years ago, a famous Australian opera singer, Dame Nellie Melba stated: 'Woman never has and woman never will be man's equal'.

Do you believe the statement by Melba and the cartoon [see exam paper for cartoon] apply to the current status of women?

Support your answer with relevant examples.

This question reflected the interdisciplinary nature of General Studies, focusing on Syllabus Topic 5, Prejudice and Discrimination, with links to other topics, including Topic 7, Social and Political Institutions, and Topic 10, Society and the Individual. This was a popular question, answered by approximately 12% of the candidature.

Candidates were asked to respond to a quotation by Dame Nellie Melba and a Tandberg cartoon, both of which commented on the relative power and status of women in contemporary society. In their answer, candidates were asked to consider the current status of women and, using relevant examples, to assess the relevance of the claims made in the quotation and the cartoon. Candidates produced a wide range of responses to this question.

Syllabus outcomes particularly crucial to Question 2 were the ability to:

- think critically about contemporary issues and problems
- infer meaning from information presented in pictorial form
- support arguments with relevant evidence
- recognise the complexity of current issues in the world.

Excellent responses

In these, candidates usually identified the different messages of equality and power expressed in the two stimuli. These responses used the historical position of women as evidence against which to juxtapose the current status of women. Using a wide range of documented examples from law,

business, politics, sport, culture and religion, these candidates explored areas of equality for women, as well as pointing out the inequalities that do currently exist. Many were able to draw on international examples to illustrate the current status of women, particularly the gap in status between men and women in the developed and the developing world. These were lengthy and well-constructed responses.

Above Average responses

Candidates used the stimulus material to advance an argument but often saw the cartoon and the quotation as communicating the same message. These responses were characterised by the use of a more limited range of examples than the excellent responses, often concentrating in detail on only one area such as home or workplace. The construction of a well-considered argument was not as clear in these responses as it was in those in the excellent range, however candidates were still able to write at length on the subject.

Average responses

Candidates tended to acknowledge the stimuli in introductory and concluding paragraphs, but did not engage in any real discussion of their relevance to the current status of women. Examples in these responses tended to be limited, often referring only to woman's role as housewife and mother, or relying on one or two barely relevant pieces of evidence. When examples were cited they often inferred that because one woman in the public spotlight had achieved equality, then all women had done so. Some responses in this range were prepared responses on discrimination and candidates wasted valuable time in including irrelevant detail on other minority groups.

Below Average responses

These responses were characterised by the shallowness of evidence used in the response, reliance on stereotypical and anecdotal evidence, and candidates often ignoring the stimuli altogether. They were poorly constructed and poorly expressed.

Question 3

'Technological change has had minimal impact on both the nature and the purpose of work in our society.'

Do you agree? Support your answer with relevant examples.

This question focused on Syllabus Topic 1: Science, Technology and Society, and Topic 10: Society and the Individual. There were also links with Topics 3, 4 and 7. The question was fairly popular, being attempted by approximately 13% of the candidature. Candidates were asked to give their opinion on, and their assessment of, the impact that modern technology has had on two things – the nature of work and the purpose of work in our society. There was a large range of responses to the question, with the better candidates analysing all aspects of the issue and explaining what they meant by the term 'technological change'; they related such changes to both the nature and the purpose of work. Unfortunately, many candidates focused on the trigger words 'technology' and 'nature' and proceeded to write an environmental essay about the impact of technology on nature. Such failure to read the question carefully relegated some candidates – who presumably would otherwise have answered the question very adequately – to the bottom range of marks.

Syllabus Outcomes particularly addressed by Question 3 were:

- to recognise the importance of problems confronting society
- to identify the salient features of a contemporary issue
- to assess the significance of an issue
- to support arguments with relevant evidence
- to express a personal viewpoint about a contemporary issue.

Many candidates combined the effect of technological change on the nature and the purpose of work, thus confusing two separate yet related issues. Many otherwise competent candidates failed to deal with the issue of why people work and whether technology has affected the reasons. The number of misinterpretations of the wording of this question indicate that candidates need continual reminders to read questions carefully, especially those relating to areas for which they feel well prepared and confident.

Excellent responses

These responses contained the expression of a very clear opinion on both issues involved. They dealt with the question directly and provided detailed examples of work places and work practices that have been affected by technological changes. These responses dealt with the issues of both the nature and the purpose of work. It was generally argued that technological change has had a major effect on the nature of work. Examples used were computerisation, mechanisation, the use of the Internet and E-mail, and use of fax machines.

The effect of technology on the purpose of work, however, was not treated uniformly. Some candidates argued that modern technology has had little effect on this, as the purpose of work is to earn a living and support a certain lifestyle. Others argued that, owing to the efficiency of technology, greater leisure time has been created, and so, in society today, the purpose of work is to provide finance to enjoy such leisure. Some candidates adopted the view that, traditionally, many occupations have been a lifestyle in themselves, and people took more pride in their jobs before technology reduced the skills and craftsmanship required.

Above Average responses

These responses were distinguished from excellent responses by the more limited examination of the purpose of work and the use of less detail in the examples given which dealt mainly with computers and production line machinery. Many candidates used changes in the manufacture of automobiles as their main example. The development of robots in the manufacturing process has developed a work culture in which human beings become less significant than the machinery involved.

Average responses

In these responses, candidates did not deal with the issues involved in the quotation and embarked on a narrative description of how technology has changed the workplace and/or business practice. The examples given were confined mainly to the Internet and computers. Candidates in this range often failed to differentiate between the nature and the purpose of work.

Below Average responses

These responses were either very superficial or were the result of linking ‘technology’ and ‘nature’ as trigger words, resulting in an essay on the environment. Some were lengthy and well written, but as they did not deal with the question, they were unable to gain significant marks. Many of the responses in this range completely ignored any mention of the purpose of work.

Question 4

‘As the world community becomes more global, obstacles to development for many poorer countries become even greater.’

Evaluate this statement and discuss the main obstacles to the development of poorer countries.

This was a moderately popular question attempted by 7% of candidates and attracting those who had specifically studied Topic 9, World Development and Inequality, or who had a strong Geography/Economics background. The majority were of good length, outlining a number of obstacles.

The Syllabus Outcomes most relevant to the question were:

- to identify the key issues confronting the world today
- to identify the salient features of contemporary issues and problems
- to assess the significance of these issues and problems
- to recognise the complexity of current issues and problems
- to communicate ideas, arguments and conclusions
- to support arguments with relevant evidence.

A significant discriminator in ranking responses was the extent to which candidates addressed the first part of the question in which they were asked to evaluate the statement, then to discuss the main obstacles to development.

Excellent responses

Candidates in this range explored the concept of ‘globalisation’ before examining its impact on developing countries. They made a serious effort to ‘evaluate’ the statement, rather than simply referring to it in passing. They showed an awareness of the changing dynamics of the modern world, with its increased emphasis on open markets and free trade, thus creating a context for discussing the obstacles to development.

The responses in this range were generally quite long, often extending into a second book. A wide range of obstacles drawn from the following was observed:

- the effects of a large population and growth rate
- the lack of educational skills
- poor health facilities
- the uneven distribution of wealth in the country
- the low tax base and the lack of investment capital

- the dependence of many developing countries on loans from the World Bank, with the requirement that governments cut back their spending on social policies
- the debt burden in meeting payments on loans
- the continuing emphasis, since colonial times, on cash crops for export
- the role of the trans-national corporations with their emphasis on moving from country to country to achieve the lowest cost structure in terms of government incentives and low wages
- the vertical integration of industries, especially in agriculture, where large international holdings make small farms non-viable
- the drift to cities and resultant dependency
- the idea that those economic benefits that do occur accrue to governments that are often corrupt, or spend excessive amounts on the military.

The excellent responses had a tightly structured argument showing the interconnectedness of a number of these factors and they displayed a sense of the complexity of the problem. The argument was well-sustained, with examples from a variety of specific countries.

Above Average responses

In these responses, discussion of globalisation was more sketchy. They showed detailed knowledge but their focus was narrower, missing some of the scope of the big picture.

Average responses

Candidates acknowledged globalisation only marginally, often by implication rather than by direct comment. They concentrated on the obstacles to development. They dealt with three or four points, but in a listing process rather than as a line of argument, sometimes failing to concentrate on the question asked. Rarely did any in this range refer to specific examples, choosing, instead, broad generalisations.

Below Average responses

Although many of these responses were of reasonable length, they focused largely on the amount of foreign aid available, tending to see it as a cure. They sometimes listed features of developed and developing countries, but did not link them to obstacles to development. In many responses candidates appeared to be presenting prepared material without making it part of a line of argument. The main features of these responses were sweeping generalisations and very basic argument, especially in the briefer responses.

Question 5

'People, purely because of the colour of my skin and people who I have had no interaction with whatsoever, will refuse to get into a lift with me.'

Cathy Freeman, The Daily Telegraph, 20 November 1998

- What issues are raised in the quotation?*
- To what extent has Australia been successful in dealing with issues of racism?*

This question focused on Syllabus Topic 5, Prejudice and Discrimination, and attracted a high percentage of the candidature. Candidates were asked to respond to the above quotation by Cathy Freeman, which immediately directed the majority to a response on the status of the Aboriginal situation in Australia. The majority showed a good grasp of the issues of racism and discrimination, but the weaker candidates failed to evaluate part (b) of the question.

Syllabus Outcomes addressed by Question 5 included:

- knowledge of contemporary issues and problems
- interpretation of information
- a sense of the complexity of contemporary issues
- an ability to express arguments clearly
- an ability to support arguments with evidence.

Excellent responses

In these responses candidates demonstrated a good understanding of prejudice and discrimination, and both parts of the question were answered fully, although not always equally. In part (a), issues were identified and clearly defined, showing strong analytical skills, together with clarity of expression and a wider vocabulary. In part (b), candidates cited a variety of relevant examples, eg. the Anti-Discrimination Law and the Mabo decision, or launched into a chronological approach from assimilation to integration to show the changes made by Australia to overcome racism. Some judgement in evaluating the effectiveness of these changes, and an ability to distinguish between what was being achieved theoretically and what is actually happening, allowed these candidates to explore fully Australia's response to racism and prejudice.

Above Average responses

Here candidates showed a sound understanding of the terms and concepts of this topic in answering both parts of the question. They used relevant examples to support their point of view, but presented a limited evaluation of the changes in attitude to racism in Australia. These responses were often characterised by very basic comment about Australia now being a multicultural country, and, therefore, no longer racist.

Average responses

Candidates addressed both parts of the question, but failed to show an understanding of the complexity of the issues. Although examples of responses dealing with racism were provided, they were often part of a description or narrative, and included little analysis. Problems being faced by Aborigines in relation to health and living conditions were often described superficially, with little acknowledgment of the involvement of racism in these problems.

Below Average responses

These responses were often very short and answered only one part of the question. Candidates had difficulty in recognising the issues, and lacked the appropriate language or the skills to develop a reasoned argument. Anecdotal evidence frequently provided the basis for an opinion, or there was a focus solely on Cathy Freeman, with both approaches failing to mention the broader issues involved.

Question 6

How effective has negotiation been in recent years in helping to resolve international conflicts?

This question focused on Topic 8, Conflict and Conflict Resolution, and was attempted by a small number of candidates. There was a range of responses, with the majority of candidates showing that they were prepared for such a question, while the weaker responses demonstrated only an awareness of the events in East Timor and Kosovo or the Middle East, without responding directly to the question. Many did not pay adequate attention to the word ‘international’ in the question. They needed to focus on the role of negotiation in helping to resolve conflicts between individual nations, or to acknowledge the role of international bodies in negotiation in internal conflicts that had implications for several nations. For this reason Kosovo was seen as a relevant example when the international implications of the conflict were taken into account.

Syllabus Outcomes particularly addressed by this question include:

- knowledge of contemporary issues and problems, both national and international
- an ability to analyse issues and problems
- an ability to evaluate options
- an ability to communicate ideas and arguments, and to formulate conclusions.

Excellent responses

These responses were those in which candidates not only showed an in-depth knowledge of areas of conflict, but were able to discuss the issue of negotiation. They explained the background to specific negotiations and the difficulties involved in making them work. These candidates also showed an understanding of the complexities of diplomacy, negotiation, and U.N., U.S. and NATO involvement in current conflicts. Skills in analysis and logical thinking were shown by some lateral thinkers who discussed other international conflicts involving issues such as global warming, Blue Fin Tuna fishing, and water usage.

Above Average responses

Candidates here were able to show a sound knowledge of global conflicts. Their responses were wellbalanced, with a good introduction and conclusion and often discussed the conflicts in the Middle East or East Timor, and the roles of the U.S.A. and the U.N. as negotiators; they failed, however, to provide critical analysis of the negotiation processes involved.

Average responses

These responses were frequently descriptive or narrative accounts of conflicts in East Timor and Kosovo. In them candidates provided graphic details of the conflicts, but failed to come to terms with the question set. They indicated a limited understanding of the complexity of the issues and thus failed to deal with the question adequately.

Below Average responses

They were often very short and lacked both content and a logical sequence of ideas. They gave descriptions of one or two war zones, but made little attempt to analyse negotiations. Some of these candidates in this category seemed unsure of how to respond to the question, choosing to describe national or local rather than international, conflicts.

Question 7

'Our increasing appetite for graphic depictions of violence in films, videos and computer games leads to greater feelings of aggression in individuals and the desire to act violently.'

Is this an accurate portrayal of today's society?

This question focused on Syllabus Topic 4, Language and Communication, and contained elements of Topics 3, 7, 8 and 10. It was one of the most popular questions in this year's examination, being attempted by more than 10% of the candidature, but while there was a significant number of outstanding responses, it would appear that, in general, it attracted the weaker candidates. The majority of candidates were able to produce a response of reasonable length.

Syllabus Outcomes particularly dealt with by this question were:

- to think critically about contemporary issues and problems
- to communicate ideas, arguments and conclusions
- to recognise the complexity of current issues of the world
- to express arguments clearly and succinctly in written form
- to support arguments with relevant evidence
- to draw conclusions based on reasoned arguments
- to acknowledge that many problems remain open questions.

Excellent responses

Excellent quality of expression and structure was characteristic of these responses.

In the majority of these responses, the candidates disagreed with the quotation. They considered a range of other factors likely to be responsible for violence. Factors such as violent parental behaviour, psychoses, drug addiction, unemployment and social isolation were discussed. These responses also considered the effects of portrayal of violence in videos and video games on individuals already showing evidence of psychotic behaviour, and compared it to the effects on the rest of society.

Some of the excellent responses reflected a significant knowledge of contemporary research in this field, and discussed this research in some detail. In other excellent responses a comparison was made of current violence and violence in pre-modern society.

Above Average responses

Here candidates dealt with some of the factors mentioned above, but their responses were characterised by somewhat more limited analysis and argument, and a poorer quality of expression and essay structure. The majority of these responses at least considered how portrayal of violence on videos and in video games might affect members of society in different ways.

Average responses

The typical average response agreed with the quotation, and gave a detailed description of violence as portrayed in films, videos and video games. They then outlined recent more horrific instances of violence, including the Port Arthur massacre, and the Columbine High School incident in the USA (April 20, 1999). In most cases these candidates made a superficial attempt to analyse whether the violence was a consequence of viewing videos and playing violent video games or if it was a consequence of other factors.

Below Average responses

These responses were characterised by a presentation of lists and descriptions of violent films, videos and video games, and a description of well-known instances of violence. No attempt was made to discuss the quotation.

It would appear that most of the candidates in this category had not studied the topic area, and were basing their responses on a detailed knowledge of violent films, videos, and video games, and a superficial knowledge of contemporary acts of extreme violence.

Question 8

'Australia does not possess an identifiable culture. Sadly, we borrow too much from other countries.'

Do you agree with this statement? In your response, refer to at least TWO of the following:

- *multicultural influences*
- *sporting events*
- *indigenous culture*
- *community celebrations*

Support your response with appropriate examples.

This question, which focused on Syllabus Topic 3, was attempted by 10% of the candidates and was thus one of the more popular questions on the paper. This relatively large number of responses no doubt reflected the accessibility of the question with its clear cut issues and prescriptive layout. Its straightforward nature ensured a reasonable standard of response with the majority of candidates writing a response of considerable length.

Syllabus Outcomes specifically addressed by Question 8 were:

- to think critically about contemporary issues and problems
- to communicate ideas, arguments and conclusions
- to express arguments clearly and succinctly in written form
- to draw conclusions based on reasoned arguments
- express a personal viewpoint about contemporary issues.

Excellent responses

These responses demonstrated a sound understanding of the implications of 'identifiable' and 'sadly'. They grappled effectively with the complexity of ideas and issues that underpin the notion of an Australian identity. While some candidates agreed with the proposition, citing evidence such as Americanisation of media and ready acceptance of exotic festivals, most of these excellent responses took the statement to task and argued that the borrowing was inevitable in a young country invaded and populated by immigrants. In addition they applauded our multicultural nature and pointed, somewhat optimistically perhaps, to qualities of tolerance, acceptance and a 'fair go for all', as being identifiable Australian characteristics. When these excellent responses referred to sport, they did so in terms of our perceived pre-occupation with it rather than our relatively outstanding prowess ie. the fact that the country literally stops for a horse race. Treatment of indigenous culture was more than merely token, with many responses suggesting that it was presumptuous of Australia as a nation to claim indigenous art and culture as our own, considering the shameful

history of White occupation. Festivals proved problematic, even for these excellent responses, with the attempt to find an identifiably Australian celebration often culminating in Anzac Day or Australia Day being chosen by default.

Above Average responses

These responses were distinguished from excellent responses by a more limited examination of the issues involved and a more frequent substitution of narrative for analysis. Detailed listings of multicultural influences were accompanied by weaker linking of these influences to the identity of our culture. Often there was a bland assertion that Australia was multicultural, with little attempt made to separate it from other comparable nations. Treatment of sporting events tended to focus on our success rather than our obsession. Indigenous culture was lauded and well described, but there were fewer responses in this band that questioned the legitimacy of our use of indigenous culture as a national hallmark. Community celebrations were chronicled and a good selection of examples were used but these responses, whilst very good at deploring our ready acceptance of U.S. festivals, were less adept at indicating any uniqueness in our celebrations.

Average responses

These responses tended to be descriptive and told of our multicultural, sporting, indigenous and celebratory practices, without arguing any discernibly Australian identity. It was taken for granted that winning sporting events made Australia unique, but very little analysis was made of why this should be. Similarly, lists of overseas festivals practised here, together with menus from a wide variety of restaurants, were offered as evidence of the multicultural nature of Australian society without any further analysis. Indigenous cultural influences were restricted to art, dance and entertainment of tourists and tended to be superficial and mere tokens. Many of these average responses also mentioned the landscape, but made only the faintest of attempts to tie our unique physical environment to any cultural identity.

Below Average responses

These responses were brief and interpreted the question too literally. They were restricted to pure description of the nature of Australia's immigration, a list of British and non-British sports played, and an acknowledgment of the fact that many people watch the Lion Dancers and love Aboriginal art.

Question 9

[Stimulus material was a Moir cartoon in which religion was portrayed as one of the pillars of society. See examination paper.]

- (a) *In what ways can religion be regarded as a pillar of society?*
- (b) *Can religion satisfy the spiritual needs of a materialistic society?*

Support your response with appropriate examples.

This question focused on Syllabus Topic 6, Religion and Society. It was not a popular question and attracted less than 5% of the candidature. As this was a two part question, candidates could choose to treat parts (a) and (b) as being two distinct sections, or could respond in an integrated manner. Arguably those who chose the latter approach produced a more sophisticated response.

The question required students to show an understanding of terms such as; 'pillar of society', 'spiritual needs' and 'materialistic society'. The ability to define these terms proved a discriminator.

Candidates were further required to produce appropriate examples in support of their argument. Many candidates were unable to support their response with relevant examples and relied on generalised discussion.

Syllabus Outcomes addressed included:

- thinking critically about contemporary issues
- communicating ideas, arguments and conclusions
- determining items of knowledge relevant to an issue.

Excellent responses

These demonstrated an ability to interpret (critically) and evaluate both sections of the question. In them candidates correctly interpreted ‘pillar of society’ as being distinct from religious practices in society. This was supported by reference to religious involvement in debates on euthanasia, abortion, the GST and heroin injecting rooms. Religion’s role in social welfare, justice and succour in times of tragedy eg. the Port Arthur massacre, was also discussed.

Many also considered the influence of religion from an historical perspective, for example, the influence of the Catholic Church through the ages, and the inclusion of basic religious tenets which have become intrinsic to modern law.

These candidates showed an ability to discuss spiritual needs and spirituality in a materialistic society. Arguments raised included the rise in popularity of Eastern religions and practices, and the need for belonging and acceptance through group identity. The changing nature of spirituality was acknowledged through discussion of changes in conventional religious practices. Society’s dependence on religious institutions such as St. Vincent de Paul, the Salvation Army and Anglicare for the provision of a wide range of welfare services was referred to.

Above Average responses

Responses in this group provided a less thorough analysis of the issues and failed to provide a sustained argument compared with those responses assessed as excellent.

Candidates tended to focus on one issue at the expense of others, usually concentrating on the first part of the question. Some of the following points were mentioned: religion, in particular the Ten Commandments, as the basis for Western law, morality and ethics; the acknowledged decline of the principal Western religions, and the rise of alternate religions such as Buddhism and Scientology. Statistics on religious attendance were used to support this argument. Materialism was acknowledged but tended to generate a discussion of people turning to religion only in times of trouble, and a change in how the traditional Sabbath Day is spent. It was generally agreed that spirituality is still an important element even if its role in society is not immediately obvious.

Average responses

These tended to present a more limited understanding of the key terms of the question and were focused on describing religious beliefs. Discussion was limited to Western religions. Candidates had difficulty in explaining the concept of a materialistic society and very little supporting material was provided. Many, however, also showed why religion is no longer a ‘pillar of society’. ‘Spirituality’ was defined simply as ‘church attendance’.

Part (a) of the question was discussed at the expense of part (b) and responses tended to be very general and based on anecdotal evidence.

Below Average responses

These responses either failed to provide any analysis of the question or presented a prepared answer that did not answer the question. Some simply presented a biased diatribe based on their personal religious views.

Question 10

[Stimulus material was a Coopes cartoon in which one character asks ‘Why won’t politicians support the legalisation of euthanasia?’ and another character replies ‘It’d be suicide, mate!’ See examination paper.]

(a) *What issues are raised in the cartoon?*

(b) *Should individuals or politicians have the right to make life and death decisions?*

Support your response with appropriate examples.

This question focused on Syllabus Topic 10, *Society and the Individual*, as well as incorporating many parts of Topic 7, *Social and Political Institutions*.

Syllabus Outcomes particularly addressed were:

- to identify key issues confronting the world today
- to recognise the importance of these problems for society
- to infer meaning from information in pictorial form.

This was not a particularly popular question, attracting less than 5% of the candidature.

Unfortunately, many candidates were attracted by the emotional issue involved, namely euthanasia, and their responses contained significant anecdotal evidence and personal experiences. In addition, the majority failed to recognise the irony contained in the stimulus material, ie. the political suicide that could be associated with the legalisation of euthanasia.

It was expected that candidates would consider a range of other ‘life and death situations’; those who did so tended to submit responses in the upper range of marks, whilst responses that were limited to an examination or evaluation of the ‘pros’ and ‘cons’ of euthanasia tended to be in the average range. Most candidates also had a very restricted range of ‘appropriate examples’.

The question consisted of two parts for which the better candidates integrated their information, which produced more sophisticated responses. Candidates were required to interpret the stimulus material, identify the issues raised and develop a response based on their interpretation of the same.

Excellent responses

In these, candidates were able to define euthanasia clearly, recognise the irony in the cartoon, show an understanding of political processes and recognise the rights of the individual as opposed to those of society. They conceded that, on many issues, community rights must override individual rights. These candidates also recognised the moral and ethical dilemmas faced by those involved in euthanasia legislation and practice, eg politicians, medical personnel, religious institutions and families. Supportive material included the Northern Territory trials, current practice in the

Netherlands and the experiences of practitioners such as Dr Kervorkian and Dr Nitschke. They also discussed in some detail other 'life and death' decisions such as abortion, capital punishment and gun laws.

Above Average responses

Candidates in this range were able to introduce many of the issues raised by candidates in the excellent range, but their responses lacked their sophistication and depth of analysis. They did not explore as many 'life and death' situations, with discussion being confined almost exclusively to euthanasia. They largely overlooked the rights of the wider community as opposed to the rights of the individual. Many recognised the irony involved in the cartoon, but gave only limited discussion to political processes and responsibilities. Many simply argued that euthanasia was a more moral form of suicide.

Average responses

Although these candidates, in the main, responded to the stimulus material, their interpretation was literal and they failed to understand the distinction between euthanasia and suicide. This limited understanding of the complexities of the issues involved meant that a generalised rather than reasoned argument was produced. Poor analogies linking human to animal suffering, and the moral obligation to put people out of their misery were cited as sufficient argument for legalisation of euthanasia.

Below Average responses

Candidates in this range tended to limit their responses to a description of the cartoon – the setting and the dialogue in particular. Usually an emotional reaction based purely on anecdotal evidence was presented. These responses were often very brief.

Question 11

'No government can be secure without a formidable opposition.'

Benjamin Franklin

Do you agree with this statement?

Support your answer with relevant examples.

This question addressed Syllabus Topic 3, Social and Political Institutions, and to a lesser extent Topics 4 and 10. The question was attempted by very few candidates, just over 1% of the candidature. While there were some excellent responses, many of those who attempted this question produced very weak answers. The question required candidates to express an opinion on the role played by a formidable opposition in ensuring the security of a government. The 'opposition' discussed by candidates involved a range of interpretations from within and without government, national and international, current and historical. In many cases responses showed a lack of in-depth knowledge and understanding of the nature of various forms of government and discussion contained little substantial support for reasoned argument. Many candidates, purporting to support the statement, found it difficult to maintain their stance throughout the discussion.

Specific Syllabus Outcomes addressed by this question included an ability to:

- determine items of knowledge relevant to an issue
- think critically about contemporary issues and problems
- communicate ideas, arguments and conclusions
- express arguments succinctly and clearly
- support arguments with relevant evidence
- draw conclusions based on reasoned argument.

Excellent responses

Though few in number, these responses were often quite exceptional in quality. Candidates came to a clearly stated decision as to whether or not they agreed with the quotation from Benjamin Franklin. Many examined the idea that different circumstances or political systems could lead to different outcomes in relation to strong oppositions. Excellent responses indicated that some candidates had a thorough understanding of political structures and they were able to compare different current or historical political systems from a variety of countries. Such responses analysed the complexities of the various types of opposition to government and were able to appreciate the impact of these on the country and its citizens.

The majority of these responses tended to agree with the quotation, arguing in a very articulate manner that formidable opposition ensured the security of the government, especially in a democracy, by keeping politicians honest, in touch with the needs of people, providing stability for the country and raising the quality of government in all aspects of its performance. Some of the very best candidates, however, disagreed with the statement, successfully demonstrating that many governments have become secure only when formidable opposition has been eliminated.

Above Average responses

Although adequately interpreting ‘security of government’ and ‘opposition’, these responses tended to lack the fluency and sophistication of the excellent responses. Supporting evidence was varied, but generally appropriate.

Average responses

These responses were inclined to deal with this complex issue in a basic manner. Some candidates attempted to apply this question to a prepared response on the role of government, or the Republican Issue, the emergence of the One Nation/Hanson phenomenon or the GST debate with less than satisfactory results. Lack of both relevance and any strong supporting evidence placed these responses in the average to below average band.

Below Average responses

In these responses, candidates failed to interpret the question adequately. Mention of ‘government’ was made, but little attempt was made to address any issues associated with ‘government’. These responses tended to be both superficial and brief. Reference to the Republican debate was common but not linked to the focus of the question.

Question 12

[Stimulus material was a Moir cartoon showing a large wave labelled ‘Greenhouse’ about to crash over and engulf a caricature of Prime Minister Howard who, with an outstretched arm, is commanding the wave to stop. See examination paper.]

- (a) *What are the key issues presented by the cartoonist?*
(b) *What roles do governments have in addressing national and global environment problems?*

This question, which focused on Syllabus Topic 2, The Environment, but included aspects of Topic 7, was one of the less popular questions, with fewer than 10% of the candidature attempting it. The two-part question required candidates to identify and interpret the cartoon and to explore governmental roles, nationally and globally, in their response to environmental concerns.

There was a wide range of responses to this question, with most candidates showing evidence of having studied the topic and an ability to cite examples from a broad and varied base. However, some merely produced a litany of examples of environmental problems with little regard for the question, while others simply tried to give a literal explanation of the cartoon. In both cases the marks awarded reflected this very basic treatment.

Some Syllabus Outcomes specifically targeted by this question were:

- to identify the key issues confronting the world today
- to recognise possible solutions to problems arising from these issues
- to think critically about contemporary issues and problems
- to support arguments with relevant evidence
- to infer meaning from information presented in pictorial form.

Excellent responses

These showed ability to provide a critical analysis of the problem presented in the cartoon. In them, candidates endeavoured to showcase governments’ failures and successes in dealing with environmental problems and their difficulties in addressing obvious global concerns because of the limitations of national governments. Most responses drew on Australia as source for their supporting evidence, with recent international conventions providing examples for the development of strong globally-based arguments.

Above Average responses

These responses were distinguished from excellent responses by their limited analysis of the roles and responsibilities of government. In this regard, while they showed an understanding of environmental issues, often their arguments were supported by merely citing relevant examples but failing to use them to support a critical analysis of the argument.

Average responses

Candidates who wrote average responses generally wrote descriptively, emphasising the narration of examples, which were often either of little consequence and limited to local issues or over-generalisations about ‘Clean-up Australia’ and local government per se and a very over-simplified view of international affairs. Many candidates took the opportunity to provide numerous examples without any argument or addressing the question.

Below Average responses

Too often, in identifying the key issues raised by the cartoon, candidates in this range simply provided a descriptive narrative which failed to acknowledge the question or provide any analysis. In such responses they sought to provide a literal interpretation of the cartoon and occasionally quoted examples that were not relevant. Many failed to deal with the second part of the question and reacted only to the word 'Greenhouse'.

Marking Guidelines for 1 Unit General Studies

The mark is awarded on the basis of the candidate's response relative to the quality of other responses. The following guidelines were employed when assessing responses.

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| <p>9 - 10</p> | <p>Evaluation/logical argument and valid interpretation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - answers total question - critical analysis of problem or issue (if required) - recognition of issue involved - supports arguments with adequate range of relevant examples - logical development of argument - clarity of expression - reasonable length - critically evaluates opinions (if required) - degree to which targeted outcomes are achieved |
| <p>7 - 8</p> | <p>Limited Analysis and Argument</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - attempts to analyse problem or issue - uses relevant and accurate examples to support point of view - attempts to argue points and develop argument - good understanding of terms and concepts - reasonable length - clear use of language |
| <p>5 - 6</p> | <p>Some Analysis and Relevant and Accurate Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - some analysis of problem or issue - description and narration of examples tend to predominate - limited understanding of the complexity of an issue - limited understanding of alternative points of view - addresses most of the question - presents answer with relevance |
| <p>3 - 4</p> | <p>Relevant Information/No Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - description or narration of information only - no analysis - limited relevant or factual information - does not address the issue involved - does not answer the question - no coherent or developed argument - very basic examples |

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| 1 - 2 | Irrelevant Information <ul style="list-style-type: none">- one or two disjointed points- prepared answers which are not relevant (to topic, issue or question)- incomplete too short to warrant sound treatment |
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