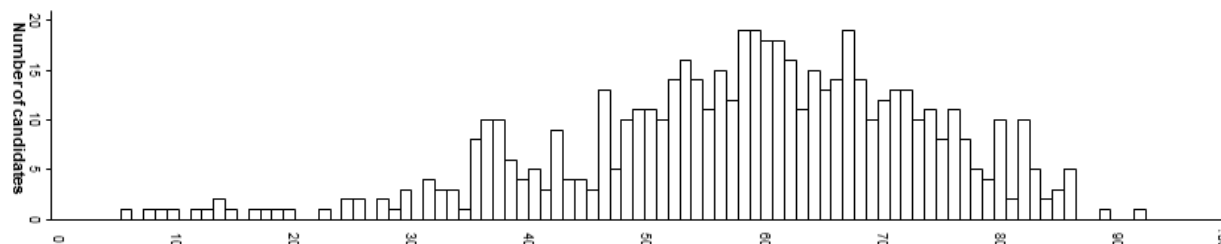




Report on the 2014 WACE examination in Politics and Law Stage 3

Year	Number who sat	Number of absentees
2014	563	6
2013	887	13
2012	901	11

Examination score distribution



Summary

Candidates completed a written examination consisting of three separate sections. The overall mean of the paper was 58.87% with the total scores ranging from a minimum of 5.50% to a maximum of 93.0%. In Section One: Short response candidates were required to answer three out of four questions with two questions from Unit 3A and two questions from Unit 3B. The overall mean for this section was 59.84%. In Section Two: Source analysis candidates answered either the question from Unit 3A or the question from Unit 3B. The Source analysis mean was 64.07%. In Section Three: Extended response there were two questions from each of Unit 3A and 3B and candidates were required to respond to one from each unit. The Unit 3A mean was 58.08% and the Unit 3B mean was 56.07%. There was a high correlation between questions across all sections of the paper and the standard deviation of the paper was 15.87%.

General comments

Candidates were well prepared for the examination and this is reflected in the much higher mean for the paper overall and individual questions, than in the previous years. More relevant knowledge was apparent in many responses but there are still issues of candidates not using the evidence to answer the question asked and making general assertions without supporting evidence. There are still too many pre-prepared responses, which was especially evident in Questions 7 and 8.

Advice for candidates

- Read the question carefully and do not focus on a particular word or phrase.
- A shorter response that is directly related to the question will score more highly than a response that contains information about the overall topic.
- Revise for the examination using the dot points of the syllabus as all questions are related directly to the syllabus.
- Ensure that up to date examples are known and used where appropriate.
- Avoid generalisations, use specific examples and information.

Advice for teachers

- Be guided by the syllabus rather than a text book for a teaching program.
- Ensure that contemporary (three years) and recent (10 years) issues/examples are used.
- Demand specific information rather than generalisations in any discussion or explanation.

Question 4 Attempted by 407 Candidates Mean 6.61(/10) Max 10 Min 0.5

Part 4 (a) Attempted by 405 Candidates Mean 1.49 Max 2 Min 0

This was a specific question seeking a definition of a cultural right and an economic right. Most candidates were able to explain a cultural right but not an economic one. Social rights were confused with economic rights and there were too many general responses of a circular nature.

Part 4 (b) Attempted by 396 Candidates Mean: 2.07 Max: 3 Min 0

Too many responses lacked precise information concerning international covenants and protocols as well as their status in the Australian legal system. Too many candidates seem to believe that international covenants and protocols are only ever drafted about matters affecting human rights.

Part 4 (c) Attempted by 405 Candidates Mean: 3.13 Max 5 Min 0

Although the best part (c) response in Section One it is disappointing to note how many candidates could not identify a particular right that exists in Australia and how it is protected in the Australian legal system. It is a concern that s.116 of the Constitution is being taught as a clause that guarantees freedom of religion, rather than a guarantee that the Commonwealth government will not fuse Church and State by making a law to establish a State endorsed religion or require religious observance for holders of Commonwealth office. The *Dietrich* decision of the High Court is misunderstood in terms of what was established by the judgement as are the implications of s.80 of the Constitution. Common law rights are still being confused with constitutional rights.

Section Two: Source analysis

Attempted by 563 Candidates Mean 12.81/(20) Max 20 Min 0

Question 5 Attempted by 305 Candidates Mean 12.83(/20) Max 20 Min 3

Part 5 (a) Attempted by 305 Candidates Mean 1.81 Max 2 Min 0
Easily understood and done well by most candidates.

Part 5 (b) Attempted by 304 Candidates Mean 3.47 Max 4 Min 0

The source provided ample evidence for candidates to achieve full marks.

Part 5 (c) Attempted by 299 Candidates Mean 3.06 Max 6 Min 0

Most candidates could identify a relevant pressure group but tended to ignore that their role and impact had to be discussed in terms of the lawmaking process of the Commonwealth Parliament. There were far too many general responses dealing with the role of pressure groups in a general way.

Part 5 (d) Attempted by 296 Candidates Mean 4.70 Max 8 Min 0

Candidates had much to draw on to answer this question and most were able to relate the actions and impact of minor parties and/or independents in the last 10 years. Surprisingly there were very few who actually evaluated the significance of minor parties/independents in the lawmaking process over the last 10 years, despite the heightened significance of minor parties and independents in this period.

Question 6 Attempted by 258 Candidates Mean 12.79(/20) Max 19 Min 0

Part 6 (a) Attempted by 258 Candidates Mean 1.61 Max 2 Min 0

Most understood that the franchise referred to those eligible to vote and participate in the Australian political system.

Part 6 (b) Attempted by 257 Candidates Mean 3.54 Max 4 Min 2

The source provided ample evidence for candidates to achieve full marks.

Part 6 (c) Attempted by 257 Candidates Mean 3.07 Max 6 Min 0
Responses tended to be too general and/or making unfounded assertions especially in terms of voluntary voting in the United States (US). Very few mentioned the regulations in some American States that makes voter registration so difficult for particular groups within society. There was a general need for more precise information. Candidates who chose to discuss countries other than the US, such as North Korea, Fiji, Thailand or Singapore tended to be more direct and informative in their responses.

Part 6 (d) Attempted by 254 Candidates Mean 4.66 Max 8 Min 0
Most students identified a relevant group or individual but few candidates offered more than a general narrative about history and experience. The question required a discussion of specific and particular aspects of their experience in the Australian political and legal system and an evaluation of each aspect. Too many responses were a generalised discussion about a group in society.

Section Three: Extended response Part A: Unit 3A

Attempted by 559 Candidates Mean 14.52(/25) Max 24 Min 1

Question 7 Attempted by 361 Candidates Mean 15.13(/25) Max 24 Min 1.5
Candidates found this a straightforward question, recognising that it required a discussion of the factors affecting the federal balance of the nation's federalism. Responses reflected a depth of knowledge of federalism and the factors associated with the increasing dominance of the Commonwealth government within the federation, which is reflected in the relatively high mean. The main problem associated with many responses was the failure to use the information well in terms of the claim or question at issue. It is essential to use all information in context and make evaluation in terms of the claim under review. There were too many pre-prepared essays on federalism and/or the federal balance, which tended to ignore the immediate focus of the claim. Generalisations should be avoided and specific, relevant and accurate information is essential in an essay. Even the strongest answers failed to make critical observations about how growth in Commonwealth government powers had enabled the Commonwealth to assume control, either directly or indirectly, over State residual powers.

Question 8 Attempted by 198 Candidates Mean 13.41(/25) Max 23.5 Min 1
Overall candidates seemed to be comfortable with this topic however many should have read it more carefully. Many saw the words Prime Minister and power and then proceeded to write about sources of prime ministerial power, which is not the same as the powers of the Prime Minister. As a consequence some candidates did not do as well as they might have. The past three Prime Ministers tended to be ignored in terms of examples although many used the Rudd/Gillard conflict well in terms of limits on the power of a Prime Minister. Again, few candidates offered an evaluation of the relative strength of the powers and limits of the office.

Section Three: Extended response Part B: Unit 3B

Attempted by 550 Candidates Mean 14.02(/25) Max 23.00 Min 0

Question 9 Attempted by 377 Candidates Mean 13.90(/25) Max 23 Min 0
The powers that the Governor-General may exercise and how Ministers are held accountable were well discussed by most candidates, but many overlooked the accountability of the Governor-General and the powers that a Minister may exercise. Most resorted to a general statement that a Minister heads a department and exercises power but gave no specific information. In particular, few responses discussed the Prime Minister's ability to hold a Governor-General accountable and omitted to mention that much of the Prime Minister's restraint of a Governor-General rests upon the upholding of the convention of express powers. In relation to individual ministerial responsibility too many candidates used very old examples (Hawke/Keating era) of Ministers being held accountable.

Too many candidates incorrectly identified Craig Thomson and Peter Slipper as Ministers which was never the case although Slipper was a Parliamentary Secretary and a Speaker. Most candidates did use the '1975 Crisis'. Better candidates argued that the very nature of reserve powers meant that the Governor-General did not have to be accountable to the Prime Minister in 1975 otherwise the Governor-General could not have been free to resolve the crisis. And that the Prime Minister's only sanction over the Governor-General was to sack the Governor-General before the Governor-General sacked him. Some used Peter Hollingworth's resignation in terms of public pressure on performance and perceptions being crucial in the Office of Governor-General. Far too many essays did not refer to any Governor-General and/or particular Minister.

Question 10 Attempted by 173 Candidates Mean 14.27(/25) Max 23 Min 0.5

This was the least popular question in Section Three. It was disappointing that more candidates did not refer to the recent Royal Commission into the Home Insulation programme as it was a Royal Commission that specifically concerned the accountability of the executive including both Ministers and public servants. Candidates were expected to write about the actions of the executive and/or public servants that were reviewed by the High Court and either the AAT or Royal Commissions which could have included the Pink Batt scheme, the 'oil for food' program, the Malaysia solution, or the legality of executive funding of the School Chaplaincy program.

Many candidates wrote too generally about the courts having a role to play in enforcing and interpreting and hence reviewing legislation. This is the general role of the Courts and does not necessarily pertain to decisions or actions of the executive. A challenge mounted in the High Court to the constitutional validity of legislation is not a review of the executive per se, but is a challenge to the legality of an Act passed by the legislature. Similarly, too many candidates wrote generally about Royal Commissions and did not focus on those specifically addressing perceived errors of the executive, but rather commented on, for example, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Allegations of Sexual Abuse without making necessary links to actions of the executive. The best essays did deal with all aspects of the question including 'open government' and were awarded high marks.