

2000 HSC Notes from the Examination Centre General Studies

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General Studies

In 2000 a total of 11 356 candidates presented for the Higher School Certificate Examination in General Studies.

A wide range of ability was evident among the candidates who presented for the examination. Even among weaker candidates, there was a commendable effort to come to terms with the issues raised in the questions, and to use their knowledge of current events to support their arguments. As has been the trend in recent years, the responses of the middle and top range candidates displayed a high standard of preparedness. Across the entire candidature an improving standard of literacy and expression has been noted.

The 2000 Examination paper successfully addressed the aims of the General Studies syllabus and each topic area of the syllabus was covered by at least one question. The questions involved a diverse range of issues and gave no unfair advantage to candidates studying related fields, as it was the identification of issues, the recognition of their complexity and the candidate's ability to mount and sustain an argument that was being tested rather than a specific prepared body of content. As a result, candidates used information from a wide range of subjects and sources in their responses, the most important criteria being relevance and logical use of material. The majority of candidates were able to write responses of considerable length. They were able to deal, in a mature and balanced manner, with such topics as the prevalence of prejudice and discrimination in society as in Question 4, and the future of the family as in Question 2.

The Examination Paper required candidates to interpret data in literacy, visual and statistical form. Some questions, such as Question 6 on the role of religion, Question 7 on the relationship of the Olympic Games and Australian cultural identity, and Question 1 on governments and legislation, required candidates to give a personal opinion and be able to support that opinion with reasoned argument and relevant examples. Weaker candidates were able to give opinions but were not able to support those opinions with developed examples. Their marks reflected this.

The most popular questions on the paper were Question 7 on the Olympic Games and cultural identity, and Question 8 on the Environment. Many candidates who attempted Question 7 felt that it was an easy option as all felt they knew 'something' about the Olympic Games. However, a large number of these candidates displayed a distinct lack of understanding of what constitutes cultural identity and tended to produce superficial and anecdotal responses. The majority of candidates who answered Question 8 on the other hand, were well prepared on the complexity of environmental issues. They demonstrated a mature appreciation of the link between over population and its effect on the environment. These candidates were able to provide a plethora of specific examples in their discussion of the value and the limitations of the roles that various organisations and individuals can play in environmental issues. The least popular questions on the Examination Paper were Questions 11 and 12, and despite some very good responses, these questions were generally less well done.

Overall the excellent responses demonstrated a knowledge and understanding of Australian and global social and political issues that was quite exceptional. Candidates in the top range were able to employ their knowledge of events in a substantial analysis of issues as diverse as the difficulties that governments have in legislating, to the satisfaction of the majority of people, the role of the international community in peace keeping, and the role of religion in modern day society. These candidates showed an ability to identify issues precisely and express themselves succinctly. Sophisticated language was used to structure an argument, and a logical sequence of ideas and examples indicated a perceptive understanding of what the question required.

Average responses indicated that candidates understood the question, but these responses, though often quite long, did not contain the depth of analysis or the range of supporting evidence that were a feature of the top range of responses. Many candidates concentrated more on narration than analysis.

Below average responses often made minimal reference to the stimulus material provided, or ignored it completely. Candidates in this range tended to write in an anecdotal manner and lacked specific relevant examples. Sweeping generalisations were often made with no supporting evidence.

On the whole the Examination Paper allowed candidates to demonstrate their depth of knowledge of current issues, their ability to use a variety of intellectual skills, and an opportunity to employ an interdisciplinary approach to the solving of problems.