

Optimised Study Guide — Australia After WWI & National Priorities in the 1920s

Optimised, exam-focused study guide for Australia after WWI and national priorities in the 1920s (Unit 3, Elective 1, Component C01-U3E1). Grounded in the 2020–2025 SCSA exams and marking keys, especially the 2022 Q3 on the causes and consequences of 1920s national priorities. Covers the legacy of WWI, returned soldiers and the Soldier Settlement Scheme, the 'Men, Money, Markets' policy, the Bruce-Page government and Country Party, industrial unrest, and the experiences of women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Leads with exam priorities and marking-key expectations.

Australia emerged from WWI proud but strained: a small nation of barely five million, mourning 60,000 dead, carrying war debt, and trying to absorb returned soldiers. The 1920s were defined by the Nationalist–Country Party response — the drive to "develop" the country through population, capital and trade. Exam questions here reward students who can weigh the *causes and consequences* of these national priorities.

The marking-key steer. The 2022 essay — "*Analyse the causes and consequences of adjustments to national priorities that took place in the 1920s*" — requires **both** the reasons behind a policy *and* its results. The strongest answers focus on the two flagship initiatives — "**Men, Money, Markets**" and the **Soldier Settlement Scheme** — and judge how far each succeeded or failed.

How this content is examined

- **Essays.** "Causes and consequences of 1920s national priorities," or questions on the experiences of particular groups (women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples).
- **Source analysis (Section One, Unit 3).** Posters and texts on migration, soldier settlement or industrial unrest require precise contextual knowledge.

Answer the verb. Analyse the causes and consequences = explain *why* a policy was adopted and *what resulted*, showing the links. Don't narrate the decade; build an argument about specific initiatives.

1. The legacy of WWI

- Enormous casualties and grief; the birth of the Anzac legend and a powerful **Returned and Services League (RSL)**.
- War debt and the challenge of **repatriating returned soldiers** into jobs and land.
- A surge of **nationalism** alongside continued loyalty to the British Empire — a tension that runs through the whole elective.

2. "Men, Money, Markets" (Bruce–Page government)

The central development strategy of the decade:

- **Causes.** Australia's population (5.5 million in 1920) was deemed too small for growth and defence; domestic capital was insufficient for big infrastructure (roads, railways, irrigation, building Canberra); and new export markets were needed for expanded production. The whole project assumed *British* migrants and British loans — reinforcing the White Australia Policy and the imperial relationship.
- **Consequences.** Around **282,000 British migrants** arrived (via schemes like the Empire Settlement Act 1922), but exclusivity reinforced White Australia; living standards rose little and unemployment stayed high through the decade; **state and national debt ballooned**; no significant new export markets were found; and Britain gave Australia less preferential treatment than hoped. The policy was costlier and less successful than envisaged — and left Australia dangerously exposed when the Depression hit.

3. The Soldier Settlement Scheme

- **Cause.** A felt duty to returned soldiers, plus the wish to open up land and build rural industry.
- **Consequences.** Around **£50 million** spent, but many plots were infertile or too small, settlers were poorly prepared, and falling wheat and wool prices late in the decade meant that by 1927 nearly **a third of soldier settlers had walked off their farms. Indigenous veterans were excluded** from the scheme and its benefits — deepening existing disadvantage.

4. Politics and industrial relations

- **Rise of the Country Party** (representing rural interests) and the **Bruce–Page coalition** with the Nationalists.
- **Industrial unrest** and the growth of unionism, leading toward the formation of the **ACTU (1927)**; Bruce's confrontational industrial policy ultimately contributed to his government's defeat in 1929.

5. Experiences of particular groups

- **Women:** continuity and change — limited gains in public life against continued domestic expectations.
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples:** exclusion and the policy of assimilation; denial of returned-soldier benefits; the beginnings of Aboriginal activism.

- **Immigrants:** arrival under assimilationist, White-Australia-bounded policies.

6. Historical perspectives

- **"Development decade" vs "decade of missed opportunity":** were the 1920s a genuine nation-building effort, or a costly, debt-laden failure that worsened the Depression?
- **Whose Australia?** The egalitarian, "fair go" self-image set against the realities of exclusion (women, Aboriginal people, non-British migrants).

7. Recurring exam question patterns & what high answers do

- **"Analyse the causes and consequences of 1920s national priorities."** High answers: take "Men, Money, Markets" and Soldier Settlement, give causes and consequences for each, and judge their success.
- **"Assess the experiences of [women / Aboriginal people] in the period."** High answers: balance continuity and change and avoid generalisation.

Recall self-test. Can you:

- Explain the legacy of WWI for 1920s Australia (debt, repatriation, the RSL, nationalism vs Empire)?
- State the causes *and* consequences of "Men, Money, Markets"?
- State the causes *and* consequences of the Soldier Settlement Scheme — including the exclusion of Indigenous veterans?
- Explain the rise of the Country Party and the Bruce–Page government?
- Explain 1920s industrial unrest and the formation of the ACTU?
- Describe the experiences of women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?
- Argue both the "development decade" and "missed opportunity" interpretations?