

Candidates' Performance

Paper 1

Paper 1 consisted of three parts; Part A, Part B1 and Part B2. All candidates were required to complete Part A and then choose either Part B1 or Part B2. Part B1 was designed to be the easier section, while Part B2 was designed to be the more difficult section. The total number of candidates attempting Paper 1 was 62,913. A total of 28,311 candidates (45%) chose to do Part B1 while 34,780 (55%) chose Part B2. Candidates who attempted parts A and B2 were able to attain the full range of levels, while Level 4 was the highest level attainable for candidates who attempted parts A and B1.

Overall results

A statistical analysis of Paper 1 was carried out. The overall results are given in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Paper 1 overall results

| | Full Mark | Mean Score (%) | Standard Deviation (%) |
|---------|-----------|----------------|------------------------|
| Part A | 41 | 62.0 | 21.7 |
| Part B1 | 43 | 43.6 | 20.2 |
| Part B2 | 43 | 50.9 | 19.5 |

Part A (Compulsory section)

The first reading passage was a 'listicle' (combination of list and article) about ten common superstitions. Each superstition was numbered, highlighted and short, making it easy for candidates to quickly skim the passage for information. Simple questions and pictures were used to test explicitly stated ideas and candidates' understanding of the concepts behind some of the superstitions.

The second reading passage continued the theme of superstition but the text's complexity was significantly higher compared to the listicle. The passage was a summary of one researcher's investigation into superstition and was structured as a quasi-science report. The text was divided into five sections, and candidates were required to match a set of given headings to the correct section by identifying the central idea of each section.

Candidates were asked to summarise the main points in one of the studies described, i.e. to identify the aim, methodology, results and conclusion. They were also required to read through a cloze summary of the text and choose the option that would best complete the cloze.

As expected, candidates found the questions based on the listicle (Q.1-4) quite straightforward, with most of these items answered correctly by more than 70% of candidates. Q.2i was a little harder, with fewer than 40% answering it correctly, possibly due to the more heavily paraphrased word *undo* in the question, which candidates had to match with 'counteract the bad luck' under the 'salt-spilling' superstition. On the whole though, most candidates proved themselves able to interpret and identify simple factual information, as exemplified by Q.5, Q.7 and Q.12ii-iv (over 75% of candidates got these correct).

Occasionally the numbers written by candidates for Q.1 and Q.2 were difficult for the markers to read. Candidates should be reminded to write legibly, especially when answers are very short and there is therefore little or no other context in the answer to help the marker interpret it.

In Q.12, in which candidates had to complete notes on a simple 'scientific report', scores were noticeably lower on Q.12i and Q.12v-vii (40-60% of candidates answering these correctly), possibly because these items were asking for more abstract answers, inferred from the text. For example, Q.12vi tested candidates' understanding of the point that the 'lucky' participants in the study were not focussed on counting every photograph in the newspaper and therefore able to 'spot the message', not 'count quickly' as some candidates wrote. This item tested candidates' understanding of the wider text.

Q.13 proved difficult for candidates, with only 34% answering it correctly. It asked, 'What does the example of the Olympic Games illustrate?' Answers which paraphrased 'how people deal with bad luck in their lives' demonstrated an understanding of the function of supporting details. Common incorrect answers were either too literal (e.g. 'it shows how people feel when they win medals'), or were incorrectly or over copied from the text (e.g. copying the entire sentence on lines 61-63).

Part B1 (Easier section)

There were a total of five reading passages in Part B1: a review of a food truck, a newspaper article about a proposal to introduce food trucks in Hong Kong, and three letters to the editor responding to the proposal.

The review, despite being very short, provided a number of facts, which candidates were asked to evaluate against a set of True, False and Not Given statements.

The second passage was another brief text publicising the Financial Secretary's proposal to introduce food trucks in Hong Kong. Candidates were required to interpret the implicit meaning in the Financial Secretary's words as well as work out the meaning of special vocabulary from the context.

In the three letters to the editor, candidates were tested on the point of view of each writer and asked to identify the main arguments of each letter by matching them to a list of given options. Candidates also had to identify reasons for each writer's point of view.

Candidates tended to score well on the True/False/Not Given statements (Q.19). Whilst around three-quarters of candidates answered Q.19i and ii correctly, Q.19iii and iv proved a little trickier, with only 60% answering these correctly. This relatively poor performance perhaps reflects a confusion between the noun form of a country and its adjective forms (in this case 'America' and 'American') and their use in cuisine and nationality references, which these items were probing.

Candidates also proved successful in identifying specific sections of the text, such as referential information (Q.27) and finding supporting evidence (Q.29 and Q.31), suggesting a strong ability to interpret explicit factual information.

Most of the questions that candidates found most difficult (Q.34, Q.42, Q.45 and Q.43, each of which were answered correctly by 25% or fewer candidates) were asking for interpretations of the writers' thoughts – once again highlighting the difficulty of inferential and tone-based questions in Paper 1. As this was the easier part of the paper, these were relatively straightforward interpretations. For example, to answer Q.42 correctly ('What does the writer think about food truck hygiene? Why?'), candidates had to interpret that the writer was neither critical nor highly positive about the hygiene of food trucks, but considered it similar to that of food hawkers.

Q.32 and Q.40 were both cloze questions, requiring candidates to fill in gaps to complete simple summaries of sections of the original texts. Q.32 was handled reasonably well by candidates (approximately 50% answering correctly), while Q.40 proved more difficult (between 5% and 16% scoring these items correctly). These questions highlight several issues for candidates to be aware of. First, correct grammar is typically more strictly required in cloze questions, as candidates are expected to acknowledge the sentence which they are completing when filling in the gap. This indicates they have read and understood both the original text and the summary in the question-answer book, and are 'copying' in a controlled way. To help with this, candidates need to read the instructions carefully. Also, candidates should not only read the context of the summary *before* the gap, but also continue reading the sentence *after* the gap. In Q.32ii for example, an incorrect answer seen fairly regularly was [*an important part of the*] 'city' [*of the city*]. The context following this gap should be a clear indicator that this answer could not be correct.

Part B2 (More difficult section)

The reading passages selected for Part B2 were textually more challenging compared to the texts given in parts A and B1. Whereas the context of the reading passages in Part B1 was local, for B2 it was international.

The first reading passage was a case study about a company's decision to join the competitive food truck business in New York City. Candidates were asked to complete a fact file about the company, giving reasons for opening the food truck, noting the company's successes and failures, and the subsequent changes to the business operations. Questions in this part primarily focussed on testing the information content of the passage.

The second and third reading passages presented two opposing views of food trucks. To understand the arguments and claims made by each writer, candidates had to do a discourse analysis of the text, for example, looking at how specific words or phrases shape the meaning and tone, as well as the arguments and counterclaims made.

Candidates were successful in answering questions for which they had to identify words or phrases that mark or reveal the writers' feelings. Q.47, Q.50 and Q.56 all tested this area, with each question being answered correctly by over three quarters of the candidates. For example, in Q.47, candidates had to find the word 'nightmare' to indicate the general unpleasantness of the food truck industry as described in that text.

The questions that asked candidates to interpret more subtle inference in open-ended answers were amongst the hardest items for candidates. Q.52ii, Q.59, Q.67 and Q.74 were examples of this type of item, with each answered correctly by only 20% of candidates or fewer. Q.59 for example asked why a pizza-selling food truck parked across the street from a pizzeria is redundant; to find this answer, candidates would need to understand that section of text in some detail and understand the situation described by the writer, as well as his overall stance towards food trucks. This type of inference-based question remains challenging for a majority of candidates.

Q.67 and Q.74 both required an understanding of the humour in the passage (Text 10). The writer used sarcasm to paint an over-dramatic picture of food trucks poisoning their customers and driving away before they could be caught. As mentioned elsewhere this year, and raised as a recommendation last year, having a good overall sense of the tone, purpose and main points of a passage will help candidates to answer questions like these. Stronger candidates were more likely than weaker candidates to work out that the writer of Text 10 supported food trucks.

Overall recommendations

Candidates demonstrated a good awareness of different question types, for example, knowing when to copy a short section and when to use their own words. They were also good at highlighting and discussing examples, using phrases like 'to show how...' or 'to illustrate...' in order to introduce writers' aims clearly and efficiently (e.g. Q.48, which asks why the writer mentions food trucks leaving early in the morning, 'to show how much competition there is in the city').

One recommendation for candidates is to ensure that, when they are asked to find answers from different parts of a text, they do not make reference to the same point more than once. For example, Q.51 asked candidates to complete a company fact-file on a food truck business by finding two reasons for opening the food truck, three challenges the business faced, and so on. One reason for opening the truck was that it was 'cheaper than opening a restaurant', paraphrased as 'putting it together cost less than \$100,000'. Candidates who mentioned these as two separate reasons were only given one mark. Scanning Text 8 would have given candidates up to five different reasons to choose from; affordability was only one of them.

Another fairly common problem was the use of pronoun references. Q.34, for example asked, 'Why does the writer think the problems raised by Chris Wong are not a problem now?' Candidates who wrote 'they have moved indoors' would not have been awarded a mark because it is unclear who/what 'they' is referring to, as the question itself does not contain a logical referent. Q.12vi, Q.42 and Q.51, amongst others, caused candidates similar problems. Using unclear references suggests a candidate may have hastily copied a chunk of text at random without truly understanding what they have read. Candidates should avoid vague references when producing their own answers.

As mentioned in previous years, accuracy in spelling and grammar is not required for open-ended questions. For some question types, however, such as cloze/gap-filling tasks, accuracy is required as the cloze itself serves as a reading comprehension text. In general, the clarity of an answer is enhanced whenever spelling and grammar mistakes are minimal, and candidates should take great care when copying single-word answers straight from a passage (e.g. Q.12ii, Q.40, Q.47) to avoid losing marks they might otherwise have scored.

Paper 2

Part A

Paper 2 Part A is a short writing task. This year, candidates were required to write a speech in the role of the President of the Students' Union to welcome newcomers to their school. They were instructed to focus on the importance of following school rules and interpersonal relationships in achieving success and having an enjoyable school life. The task, therefore, involved reasoning, elaboration, advice and persuasion. It was expected that this kind of speech would be positive in tone and in a style which reflected the nature of the text type as 'written to be read aloud'. Greetings and an opening paragraph were given as prompts at the beginning of the task.

Marks between 0 and 7 were awarded for content, language and organisation and the overall mean was 52 %.

General comments

On the whole, candidates' performance was satisfactory this year. Markers thought that the question was straightforward and reflected the assessment aims. The topic was within students' school life experience and the wording clear and easily understandable. To achieve high marks, candidates had to give cogent reasons, elaborate on statements and make a persuasive case for following school rules. The majority of candidates were

able to write relevant responses, but a small number mistakenly interpreted the question as one asking for a list of school rules which were important, or a list of activities organised by the Students' Union to facilitate making friends. A small number talked about ways of making friends and how to behave well in school. A few focussed on giving advice for achieving success and an enjoyable school life without mentioning the areas specified in the question. With regard to genre, almost all candidates were able to present their ideas in the form of a speech, but a few used a letter format, with a complimentary close, which was obviously inappropriate. Many candidates used an appropriate tone, encouraging, welcoming and advising their fellow students, but some were too stern, emphasising the negative consequences of not adhering to the rules. Such speeches sounded more like a lecture from a disciplinary teacher than brotherly or sisterly advice.

Content

Markers reported that some candidates found it hard to explain the importance of following school rules in a positive way. They tended to talk about the penalties which would be imposed for breaching the rules, such as demerit points and detention. Only a small proportion convincingly explained the positive benefits of observing school rules with reference to the interests of others and the harmony and smooth running of the school as a whole. Better candidates talked about the importance of conforming and being self-disciplined to the formation of character, and in preparation for being law-abiding citizens in future. Some strong candidates mentioned the importance of contributing to a calm environment which would be conducive to study.

Generally speaking, candidates were able to elucidate the reasons why it was important to develop good interpersonal relationships. The majority of candidates were capable of describing the benefits of forming close bonds with people around them, such as companionship in hard times and when studying, a sense of community and a common purpose.

The best candidates were able to integrate the two aspects mentioned in the question into a coherent whole and say how they contributed to a successful and enjoyable school life. Strong candidates scored high marks in content as their ideas were sensible and well-developed. Their work was generally convincing as a personal welcome to new students. There was a strong personal voice, and ideas and suggestions were convincingly supported by details or anecdotes, e.g. 'I experienced first-hand the benefits healthy interpersonal relationships offer. Studying in groups... allows you and your friends to complement one another and answer questions all of you alone wouldn't even dare to ask.'

Some candidates quoted famous people such as Nelson Mandela and Steve Jobs. Whether such quotations helped convey the overall message successfully depended on what was quoted, whether it was relevant to the topic, where in the speech it appeared and what immediately preceded or followed it. For example, some quoted Donne's 'No man is an island' and where this was done in an appropriate context, the quotation added credibility and authority to the speech. Quotations which were not appropriate to the context undermined the credibility of the speaker, however.

Once again this year, there were some very long pieces of writing. Candidates are reminded that overly long pieces of work will not necessarily score better than short ones since organisation often suffers if the suggested word limit is exceeded. Candidates are reminded to allocate their time well for the two writing tasks in Paper 2, and remember that 2A is intended to be the shorter piece of writing.

Language

As is to be expected, there was considerable variation in candidates' language. Better candidates successfully communicated their ideas with a high level of appropriacy, fluency and accuracy. As in past years, most candidates were able to make themselves understood, and there were the usual issues with verbs, agreement, vocabulary choice, collocation, sentence structure and so on. Some candidates wrote down clichés and low frequency vocabulary, presumably in the belief that these would attract high marks. This is not the case, however; the language used to complete the task needs to be appropriate to the required text type and the contextual factors suggested by the question, as well as consistent in style. A fuller discussion of language issues pertinent to the Writing paper is given in the remarks on Part 2B below.

Organisation

Stronger candidates were better able to structure paragraphs meaningfully and link up their piece of writing in an effective manner. They were also able to connect the two main areas of the speech smoothly e.g. 'Apart from following school rules, fostering interpersonal relationships is necessary.'

Some pieces of writing stood out by further explaining how following school rules and having good interpersonal relationships can lead to success and an enjoyable school life. Some shared their personal experience of being a newcomer to the school to motivate the audience. This helped to create the sense of warmth and community which is characteristic of this genre.

The writing of weaker candidates was characterised by the unnecessary repetition of ideas, and problems with the way one idea connected to another, which affected flow.

Recommendations for Part A

The first step in dealing successfully with the writing paper is to get a clear idea of where the focus of the question lies. Candidates need to make sure they know the purpose of the piece of writing, who the target audience is and what genre is required before they start writing. Drafting a writing plan may help to ensure that all ideas are relevant to the question.

Candidates are encouraged to read regularly and widely, and to respond to their reading in writing, so as to develop the necessary skills to do well in this paper.

Part B

Paper 2 Part B comprises eight questions (Q2-9), which are based on the modules in the Elective Part of the three-year senior secondary English Language curriculum (S4-6). In this part of the examination, candidates were required to choose one question and write about 400 words.

A total of 62,549 candidates attempted Paper 2 Part B. Their work was assessed according to three domains: Content, Language and Organisation. The mean score achieved out of a total score of 42 for each question is provided in the table below.

Table 2: Paper 2 Part B results

| Question | Topic | Mean Score (out of 42) | Mean (%) | Popularity (%) |
|----------|-------------------------|---------------------------|----------|----------------|
| 2 | Sports Communication | 19.5 | 46.4 | 34.1 |
| 3 | Workplace Communication | 21.7 | 51.7 | 22.6 |
| 4 | Debating | 22.6 | 53.8 | 20.6 |
| 5 | Social Issues | 18.7 | 44.5 | 5.2 |
| 6 | Short Stories | 17.1 | 40.7 | 4.0 |
| 7 | Popular Culture | 13.2 | 31.4 | 3.1 |
| 8 | Poems and Songs | 21.7 | 51.7 | 2.4 |
| 9 | Drama | 19.5 | 46.4 | 7.3 |
| | Unattempted | | | 0.7 |

The table shows that the debating question (Q. 4) was well answered by candidates but the popular culture (Q.7) and short stories (Q. 6) questions were rather poorly answered. More than a third of candidates did Q.2 and more than three quarters of the candidates chose one of the first three questions (Q.2 to Q.4).

A major concern for the examiners in this paper is that many performances may not fully reflect candidates' underlying writing ability. Examiners felt that if candidates had been clearer about what constitutes good quality writing, their marks could have been higher. The major misconception is that the writing paper is fundamentally a test of candidates' grammatical and vocabulary range, and this leads to an undue emphasis on low-frequency vocabulary or stock phrases containing complex grammatical structures. Candidates' vocabulary choices are often not compatible with other words in the sentence; in other words, there is a collocation problem and this, in turn, may lead to an inconsistent style. This conception of good writing may be contrasted with the assessment

objectives for this paper, which are based on the Curriculum and Assessment Guide. These objectives state that candidates are expected to write texts for different contexts, audiences and purposes with *relevant* content; to convey meaning *appropriately* and accurately; to plan and produce *coherent* and structured texts; and to write texts using *appropriate* tone, style and register. These objectives are reflected in the writing scoring criteria which the markers use to rate candidate performance, which clearly go far beyond grammar and vocabulary range, and are concerned with whether the text is coherent and likely to be meaningful to the reader.

Content

The following is a summary of candidates' general performance in each question of this section of the paper.

Question 2: Learning English through Sports Communication

This was the most popular question. Candidates were familiar with the features of a letter to the editor and were able to structure their views with supporting evidence. The audience for this kind of letter caused problems for candidates, however, with many adopting a tone that 'lectured' the newspaper's readers. Better responses were able to develop persuasive points that sought to change the mind of readers. Poorer letters generally did not come up with three reasons to support their views, or did not elaborate on them.

Question 3: Learning English through Workplace Communication

This question was answered quite well and candidates wrote an article that was appropriate for the readers of the school magazine, who might also include teachers and parents. A number of articles, however, spent too long explaining why graduates cannot find jobs in Hong Kong instead of giving reasons why these graduates should look abroad for opportunities. This was only one part of what was required in order to fully address the question.

Question 4: Learning English through Debating

As last year, this question proved to be one of the most popular, and the mean was the highest. This is probably because debating lends itself to an argumentative style of writing, which candidates seem familiar with, and this particular question was a letter to the Young Post, again familiar. This question did cause problems for candidates who did not read it carefully and wrote about monitoring where their children were rather than monitoring their phone activity. There was some evidence that the higher-performing candidates had read letters to newspapers and were therefore aware of their features, style and tone.

Question 5: Learning English through Social Issues

Most candidates were very familiar with the essay format and were able to reproduce it appropriately. Many candidates, however, were not very good at developing suggestions about why local street life is worth preserving, which brought down the mark. Common problems for weaker candidates were focussing on several aspects of street life instead of the one stated in the question, focussing on an aspect of Hong Kong life that was not disappearing, and discussing irrelevant points such as food trucks. All of these problems had an impact on the score, especially under the 'content' domain in the scoring criteria.

Question 6: Learning English through Short Stories

This question was not especially popular with candidates. Although there were exceptions, many of the short stories were rather disappointing. The strong candidates were very competent in storytelling and had clearly read a lot of literature and had become familiar with short story conventions, such as dialogue, vivid vocabulary and a plot with a resolution at the end. Many candidates struggled with this question however, and some stories did not seem to be about revenge at all.

Question 7: Learning English through Popular Culture

This question was rather poorly answered overall and most candidates struggled to complete it. This may have been due to the fact that it focussed on youth trends and how to present them at a festival, with justifications for presenting them in the proposed way. A further issue might have been a lack of familiarity with proposals. Although a formal proposal format was not required, sub-headings and numbering helped to effectively and appropriately organise the text.

Question 8: Learning English through Poems and Songs

As in 2015, this was the least popular question, but candidates who attempted it did quite well. They were mostly able to give creative answers that exploited interesting personal examples. Weaker candidates were not able to elaborate on ways to cope with challenges. There was some evidence of candidates not reading the question carefully and instead writing about how celebrities cope with challenges, rather than using personal examples.

Question 9: Learning English through Drama

This question was also not a very popular choice for candidates. The audience proved problematic for some candidates as they were required to write a persuasive email to their parents. There were some good examples using appropriate language for communication with family members but the use of stock phrases in some candidates' responses was a problem in terms of appropriacy. Poorer responses were rather repetitive in nature and some candidates thought they were taking up a career as an artist rather than an actor.

General comments

The comments below relate to all responses (2-9) from this section of the examination. They focus on the issues that were most commonly cited by markers and examiners as being problematic.

Content

On the whole, candidates were cautious and systematic about reading the question carefully and making sure to address each part fully. This is commendable, and is of course very important for ensuring that responses are relevant and focussed. Relevance is a key criterion in the content domain at all levels, so candidates' marks suffered when they could not demonstrate this. Another key criterion in this domain is being able to fully develop and support main ideas. There was a tendency for some weaker candidates to list several points, even within a paragraph, and not sufficiently elaborate on them to persuade the reader.

Language

As in previous years, issues with language accuracy and appropriacy undermined the communicative effectiveness of many candidates' writing. The usual range of errors occurred again this year (e.g. articles, spelling, agreement, prepositions, conjunctions, parts of speech etc.). Even in relatively accurate pieces, candidates often made inappropriate language choices, which often had negative consequences for the tone or style of the writing.

Some common language errors related to the use of prepositions:

'in campus' (*on campus*)

'in the same time' (*at the same time*)

'During the public are using the sports facilities' (*While the public*)

'I disagree this suggestion' (*disagree with*)

There were issues with sentence structure, particularly when giving a reason for something:

'citizens are more convenient to' (*it is more convenient for citizens to*)

'due to it can help the public' (*due to the fact that it can help the public*)

'as lack of sports facilities, people cannot exercise enough' (*as there is a lack of sports facilities*)

There were also issues with collocation, the manner in which words habitually occur with a small range of other words. Some candidates seem to feel that any word of the right class and with roughly the same meaning will do the job. They need to learn that English is made up of common and accepted language patterns (e.g. of nouns and verbs, adjective and nouns) and that writers do not have a free choice of which words to use: the choice of one word or structure constrains the choice of others. Some examples of collocation problems were:

'there is a rampant need for sports facilities' (collocation: *urgent/pressing need*)

'it enhances their work pressure' (collocation: *increases/worsens their work pressure/makes their work pressure worse*)

'schools face vehement competition from other schools' (collocation: *face stiff/serious competition*)

Choice of language

The problem with the following examples is not so much grammatical accuracy but rather appropriacy. These are inappropriate due to their formal style, their formulaic nature or the discrepancy between the topic of the writing and the context in which the phrase would normally occur:

- 'this suggestion is a bane' ('bane' occurs infrequently in everyday English, usually in the form 'the bane of', and does not collocate with 'suggestion'. It is often used jokingly of people you like but find annoying e.g. 'my boyfriend is the bane of my life').
- 'this is in fact a leap in the dark' ('a leap in the dark' is a cliché but we can give the candidate the benefit of the doubt and say that this was the best way of expressing this idea; but 'in fact' sounds pedantic and is probably the wrong tone for this kind of writing/writer/audience).
- 'in light of the dearth of sports facilities amid the community' ('dearth' is a very formal word so may not be appropriate to the context; 'amid' is also low-frequency, is used most often in literary works and does not collocate well with 'community'; '...in the community' would have been better)
- 'This seemingly unassailable argument is clearly unfounded' (the combination of the hedge 'seemingly' and the formal words 'unassailable' and 'unfounded' make this suitable only for a debate or legal argument).
- 'I frown on the opinion that' ('frown on' is commonly used to express disapproval of anti-social actions e.g. 'talking loudly on the MTR is frowned on', so using the first person here is only suited to a speaker/writer of great authority, one who is assuming the role of a rule-enforcer. 'I disagree with the opinion that' would have been better).
- 'The reasons for my stance are manifold' ('manifold' is a very low-frequency and formal word so may not be appropriate to the context; it also suggests a large number of reasons, so if there are actually only one or two, then this is inappropriate).

These examples illustrate that what matters is that the choice of words and phrases is appropriate to the context and that the resulting piece of writing gives a consistent impression of the writer's stance and style.

Organisation

Candidates showed some sensitivity to paragraphing and to organising their ideas. Candidates often had problems beginning their responses, however. Occasionally, candidates copied the question directly. Stronger candidates tried to paraphrase what was in the question but ran into some problems. Some examples of inappropriate openings include:

- 'I am writing the letter to' (there is no need to mention 'the letter' since this will be obvious to the reader)
- 'I am writing to your newspaper regarding schools should allow the public to' (there is no need to mention 'newspaper' since this is a letter to the editor; it is fine to refer to the topic of the letter but this can be done by saying '... regarding the issue/question of whether schools should allow')
- 'I am writing to suggest that' (the beginning of a letter is probably too soon to suggest anything since we conventionally give background first)
- 'About some people suggested that schools should...' (it is good to refer to what others have written or said at the beginning of a letter to the editor, but using 'about' is too abrupt [and grammatically unnecessary] here and the reference could be more specific. 'In her letter of February 7, 2016 Chris Wong suggests that schools...' would be better).

As in previous years there was often too much emphasis placed on discourse markers as the only means of structuring and organising text. The two main problems with discourse markers was their relative overuse (many responses were peppered with 'furthermore', 'in addition', 'besides') and the fact that the discourse markers

used were often simply inappropriate. Stronger candidates were better able to develop paragraphs that were coherent and cohesive without explicit discourse markers. Organisation within paragraphs was achieved through appropriate use of conjunctions and the logical development of ideas using pronouns and lexical chains (related words with related meanings). The overuse of stock phrases continues to be a problem for the organisation of paragraphs as it is difficult for the candidate to link ideas that do not really belong together on the page.

General recommendations for candidates

Candidates and their teachers are advised firstly to consider the objectives of writing in the HKDSE curriculum. This should help candidates get a clearer sense of what good quality writing consists of for this examination, and should dispel the notion of good writing as just a display of grammatical structures and low frequency vocabulary. More attention should be paid to the matter of collocation and to overall coherence.

Some memorising of new words has its place, but candidates should make sure that they know how and why particular words and phrases are used. Extensive reading of different text types is a good way of fostering this kind of awareness. As candidates engage with written texts, they will raise their own awareness of which content, language and organisation seem 'typical' and 'usual'. They should come to appreciate, for example, the range and patterns of grammatical structures and vocabulary which well-written texts have.

Candidates can be encouraged to use the Internet to 'verify' any memorised phrases and will then learn which of them are very rare or occur nowhere except in 'model essays'. Another worthwhile task is for candidates to practise different text types and then compare their work against real examples to identify the differences.

Candidates are advised to use their time wisely in the examination. Some candidates wrote too much. Currently there is no penalty for overly long answers but it is worth considering whether the extra time spent writing so many words might not have been more productively used preparing a shorter but better response. Time and care taken over sentences is likely to be a productive strategy for maximising marks across the three domains.

Paper 3

Paper 3 consisted of three parts; Part A, Part B1 and Part B2. All candidates were required to complete Part A and then choose either Part B1 or Part B2. Part B1 was designed to be the easier section, while Part B2 was designed to be the more difficult section. A total of 19,613 candidates (about 31.5%) chose Part B1 while a total of 42,659 candidates (about 68.5%) chose B2.

Overall results

A statistical analysis of Paper 3 was carried out. The overall results are given in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Paper 3 overall results

| | Full Mark | Mean Score (%) | Standard Deviation (%) |
|---------|-----------|----------------|------------------------|
| Part A | 58 | 55.1 | 26.0 |
| Part B1 | 54 | 41.7 | 23.3 |
| Part B2 | 54 | 43.5 | 16.4 |

Part A (Compulsory section)

In Part A, candidates had to listen to four recordings centred around a visit to London by a Hong Kong family. In the recordings, the family first discuss things to do in London, before deciding to visit a museum. As in the previous year's paper, the four tasks in Part A were designed to be progressively more difficult.

Task 1 (Mean = 67.3%)

Candidates were required to fill in a note sheet while listening to the three members of the Chau family, father (Mr Chau), mother (Mrs Chau) and daughter (Angela), discuss where they should go in London. The family decided to go to a museum and so they discussed the merits of three different museums. The first of the museums was The Video Games Museum and candidates had to provide the names of two video games plus the

year that each was invented. The names proved quite challenging, *Ping Pong* (Item 1) and *Teen Queen 4* (Item 3) were answered correctly by 43% and 57% of the candidates respectively. For these items the name had to be correct, so 'table tennis' was not accepted for Item 1, for example. The years (Items 2 and 4) proved quite easy for most candidates, being basic information retrieval. Item 5 asked candidates to identify the reason why the family could not go to this museum and 65% were able to provide an answer that conveyed the meaning that *the museum was closed that day*, i.e. *on Wednesdays*.

Candidates next (Items 6 and 7) had to identify the second museum as *The Railway Museum* and state what could be done in this museum, i.e. *ride on an old train*. Less than half of the candidates were able to identify this information, perhaps being unfamiliar with the vocabulary 'railway'. However, most (86% and 78%) were able to deduce the views of the Chau family concerning this museum, with Item 8, *it's boring* and Item 9, *it's expensive*, being familiar adjectives.

The third museum, The Museum of Youth Culture proved to be the one that the family favoured. Items 10, 11 and 12 were 'Yes'/'No' items which asked whether Angela wanted to see certain exhibitions in the museum. These proved very easy for candidates and were correctly answered by more than 94%. The reasons for going proved more difficult. For Item 13, just 57% identified that *the museum was open late* that day. For this item the grammatical accuracy of the answer was important as answers such as 'opened late' or 'opening late' could not be accepted as the meaning was different. Items 14 and 15 proved even more challenging as they required complete answers. For Item 14, candidates were required to state the reason that the museum was *free today (Wednesday) for children (or students or Angela)* and Item 15 required a reason that *it would be interesting for all of them*. These items were answered correctly by 32% and 35% of the candidates respectively. Most incorrect answers were incomplete and did not get the whole idea in each case.

Task 2 (Mean = 62.1%)

In Task 2, candidates were required to complete the note sheet while listening to the Chau family discuss some of the exhibitions they had seen. Angela and Mr Chau described the exhibition about teenagers and comics. Items 16 to 20 were short answer, gap-fill type items requiring candidates to identify specific information from what Angela and Mr Chau were saying about comics for girls. The items proved to be relatively straightforward with more than 70% of the candidates answering them correctly. The exception was Item 17, for which candidates had to identify the kind of comic as being *fantasy*. This being a less common term, just 51% were able to get the right word. The family next discussed the comics that Angela buys in Hong Kong. Items 21 to 24 proved more challenging as a certain degree of interpretation was required. Just over half of the candidates (53%) were able to identify *Electric Road* as the location of the shop where Angela buys her comics and slightly fewer (49%) that she buys them from there because *there are more choices or more variety*. There are a number of ways of expressing this idea and all those that conveyed this meaning scored a mark. Item 23 was looking for what the comics were about, i.e. *the problems teenagers have or teenage problems* and again this could be written in a number of ways, though unclear answers like 'problems teenage have' were marked incorrect. This item was correctly answered by 63% of the candidates. In Item 24 candidates had to provide an example of teenage problems, which was *arguing with parents*. This proved difficult (39% correct) as many candidates wrote simply 'arguing', which was not a complete answer.

The discussion then moved on to what Mrs Chau had seen, which was 'Best-selling toys from the past'. The candidates were provided with the names and pictures of two toys, 'cabbage patch dolls' and 'space hoppers' and they then had to extract the required information about them from what the speakers were saying. The items proved to be reasonably easy with each of Items 25 to 31 being correctly answered by more than half of the candidates. Most of the answers could be paraphrased, though Item 25 (51% correct) required the 's' in *1980s*, which many candidates omitted, and Item 28 (57% correct) needed the whole phrase *big rubber ball*.

Task 3 (Mean = 44.5%)

In Task 3, the Chau family were looking at an exhibition titled 'Young Inventors'. Candidates had to listen to the family and a museum guide discuss two inventions, a 'shoe battery charger' and a 'smelly alarm clock' and complete the note sheet provided, which included some description of the origin of the idea in each case, how the invention worked and what the members of the Chau family thought of each invention. This task proved to be a good deal more challenging than the first two tasks, possibly because it dealt with less familiar topics and vocabulary and required more inferencing and interpretation.

Items 32 to 40 covered the shoe battery charger. Candidates first had to complete sentences describing how the invention came to be (Items 32 and 33). The answers required were quite specific, *a lot of wasted energy* and *7000 steps per day*. The answers could be paraphrased but the meaning had to be the same as the required answer, so the word *wasted* was essential in Item 32 and some expression of *per day* in Item 33. These items

were answered correctly by 43% and 47% of the candidates respectively. For Items 34 to 36 candidates had to complete a flow chart of how the invention worked and though the information required was brief and relatively simple (*electrical disc, pressure, the outside of the shoe*), the information came quite quickly and candidates had to process the information then understand the whole concept of how the invention worked. This was challenging and just 35% and 37% correctly answered Items 34 and 35, though Item 36 was more accessible (57% correct). Candidates then completed sentences describing examples of the use of the invention and had to choose which members of the family thought it useful. Between 52% and 66% of the candidates were able to answer these fairly straightforward items.

The second of the inventions, the smelly alarm clock, was described in a similar way though candidates found the content of this part more challenging as the idea was perhaps a little more abstract. Particularly difficult were Item 43 (21% correct) *peppermint*, Item 44 (10% correct) *blows air* and Item 46 (15% correct) *feeling refreshed*. Again, understanding the whole idea of how the invention worked was important here and required applying not just local retrieval but interpretation skills as well.

Task 4 (Mean = 43.7%)

In Task 4, the Chau family were listening to a lecture in the museum about movie stars that are popular with young people. In this case the star was James Dean. Candidates listened to the lecture and answered the questions asked. This task differed from the other three in Part A in that it required candidates to answer specific questions rather than complete a note sheet. However, candidates were not expected to write their answers in complete sentences and minor grammar and spelling mistakes were overlooked provided that it was clear to the examiners that the candidate had understood the recording and answered the item appropriately.

The lecturer first described why people today still recognise James Dean, though he died many years ago. The three points were *from a work of art, from a photo on someone's wall or in a restaurant, and from the lyrics of a pop song*. The first reason was given as an example and candidates had to provide the other two. For Item 48 (60% correct), answers which included the word *photo* were accepted, provided that any further text written by the candidate did not invalidate the answer (e.g. 'photo of a restaurant'). Similarly, Item 49 (64% correct) required answers that included *pop song* or *lyrics of a (pop) song*. In the latter case the word 'pop' was optional. Both items proved to be reasonably straightforward for candidates.

Items 50 (81% correct) and 51 (44% correct) asked why James Dean was still so famous. For Item 50, the reason given was that it was because *he had died young/at the age of 24* and so *his good looks had never faded*. This was considered to be one point and so candidates were awarded the mark if they got either (or both) of these ideas. Most candidates were able to provide the first idea and many both. The second point (Item 51) was that James Dean *died tragically in a car crash*. Examiners accepted either *died tragically* or *died in a car crash*. However, candidates who wrote 'died in a car crash' did not receive the mark as the meaning is different from the required answer.

Item 52 (29% correct) concerned an episode from James Dean's past when he worked as a stunt tester on a TV game show. Candidates had to state why he had been fired from this job. The answer was that *he had completed the stunts too quickly*. It was not enough to state that he had done the stunts 'too well'. This proved to be a challenging item with just 29% of the candidates able to get the idea of James Dean carrying out the stunts 'too quickly' or 'within the time limit'.

The next item, Item 53 (40% correct) proved to be a little easier. Candidates had to state that the reason why the James Dean movie *Rebel Without a Cause* had been so special was that *it had shown the problems faced by teenagers for the first time*. It was a difficult concept for candidates to understand and required two ideas – 'it showed the problems faced by teenagers' and 'for the first time' or 'that had not been shown in movies before'. Therefore, it is pleasing that 40% of the candidates were able to get the correct answer.

The next two items dealt with the roles played by young people in the movies before *Rebel Without a Cause*. Item 54 (43% correct) asked what kinds of roles young people played, requiring an answer that expressed the idea of *the sons and daughters/children of the main characters*. For this item, simply *sons or daughters* was accepted as it is implied that they must be of the main characters of the movie, though 'children' by itself was not accepted as it was considered too vague. An alternative answer to Item 54 was *small/supporting/minor roles*. Item 55 (19% correct) asked for the purpose of having young people in movies at that time and required an answer that *it was to show that the main characters were happily married or had a happy family*. This proved to be a difficult item and was answered correctly by fewer than 20% of the candidates.

The final three items in Task 4 and in Part A of the test asked for the three effects that *Rebel Without a Cause* had on the movie industry. The answers were *A large number of movies about teenagers began to be made* (Item 56), *Movies about teenagers began to be made in different countries* (Item 57) and *Teenagers/young*

people became the target audience (Item 58). Items 56 (30% correct) and 57 (29% correct) proved quite challenging as for these items the tense used in the answer was crucial. Answers which did not convey the sense that these developments came after the release of *Rebel Without a Cause* did not score marks (e.g. 'A large number of teenager movies had been made'). Item 58 (42% correct) was quite well answered compared to the previous two.

Recommendations for Part A

Candidates should spend the preparation time familiarising themselves with the tasks. With the help of the given instructions/headings/prompts/choices, they may be able to predict the likely development of a text. They may predict the vocabulary they will hear in the recording and make guesses about possible answers. Candidates should also read the prompts and stems carefully to predict the form of answer required, i.e. whether it should be a single noun or noun phrase, or a short clause conveying a more complete meaning. For some tasks it is important to gain an understanding of the whole section of the conversation and so candidates should consider jotting down notes first before coming back to complete their answers during the pauses. Candidates should also be prepared to compose answers in their own words rather than relying on repeating the words they hear in the recording. Before moving on to Part B, candidates should take the time to check whether their answers make sense within the context of the situation. All the tasks are designed around a theme so there should be enough contextual clues to support the answers.

Part B

In both Parts B1 and B2, the situation was similar, with the candidate adopting the role of Lara Gau, an employee at The Hong Kong Social History Museum. However, the tasks in B1 and B2 were different (see below for a detailed description of each task).

In both parts, candidates were judged on their ability to effectively locate and communicate relevant content, with effective communication in English (accuracy of language use, coherence and organisation, and appropriacy) counting for 50% of the marks in all tasks except Task 5. Markers paid attention not only to whether candidates were able to locate the relevant information in the Data File, but also to whether they were able to present it in an effective manner. With respect to this component, candidates were expected to demonstrate that they could: 1) effectively manipulate content from the Data File in a wide variety of ways to create grammatically correct texts; and 2) produce original language using a range of sentence structures with accurate grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Candidates' mean scores for the six tasks are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Mean scores (%) in Paper 3 Part B tasks

| Part B1 | | | Part B2 | | |
|---------|--------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| Task 5 | Task 6 | Task 7 | Task 8 | Task 9 | Task 10 |
| 38.6% | 44.9% | 41.8% | 50.7% | 41.8% | 38.1% |

The following is a discussion of candidates' performance in the different tasks.

Part B1 (Easier section)

Part B1 consisted of three tasks:

- Completing a flier for an exhibition at the Hong Kong Social History Museum
- Writing an internal report on the progress of building works for the Director of the Hong Kong Social History Museum
- Writing a letter to a local school to inform them about upcoming part-time summer positions and to encourage the school to tell students to apply.

The B1 Data File included the following kinds of texts: a podcast, which candidates listened to; emails; minutes of a museum staff meeting; a newspaper article; an interim report; an excerpt from the museum's staff manual; and numerical data from a survey.

The candidate's performance is summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: Paper 3 Part B1 results

| Task | Full Mark | Mean Score (%) | Standard Deviation (%) |
|------|-----------|----------------|------------------------|
| 5 | 18 | 38.6 | 25.0 |
| 6 | 18 | 44.9 | 27.1 |
| 7 | 18 | 41.7 | 25.0 |

From the table it can be seen that Task 5 proved to be the most difficult, while Task 6 was the easiest. The paper proved to be successful in discriminating weaker from stronger candidates and in terms of its own internal reliability.

Task 5

In this task, candidates were required to use information from the Data File to complete a flier for an exhibition at the Hong Kong Social History Museum on living in the 1980s. The task, which was worth 18 marks, was divided into 16 marks for task completion and 2 marks for language. The task was divided into four different sections, all of which presented slightly different challenges to candidates. Language was judged according to the comprehensibility and accuracy (grammar and spelling) of the answers in sections 5.3 and 5.4. The main skills tested were the identification and appropriate presentation of information, including the ability to listen and record information.

Section 1 involved locating two items (5.1a and 5.1b) to complete the part of the flier which summarised the review of the exhibition. This challenged candidates to select the correct information from the Data File and many candidates missed the instruction to include a quote from the Hong Kong review and left the item blank. Other candidates seemed unable to pick out the summarising phrase (*An excellent day out*) from the review in the Data File, which suggests that reading to understand the main message was problematic for them. Some weaker candidates wrote irrelevant data from elsewhere in the Data File.

Section 2 involved completing details about an upcoming talk at the museum. This challenged candidates not only to identify relevant information but also to present their answer in a stylistically coherent way, for example, using parallel structure when constructing each of the bullet point responses.

Section 3 required candidates to provide summarised details about parts of the exhibition which focussed on different rooms of a 1980s home (i.e. what were the special features of each room). This challenged candidates not only to identify relevant information but also to present their answer in a concise and coherent way, for example, using parallel structure when constructing each of the summaries. Weaker candidates copied directly from the Data File and did not manipulate the language enough to produce coherent texts. In addition, some candidates missed the fact that playing old computer games was one of the TV room/lounge activities, perhaps because they did not read carefully and missed the cue 'also' from the review (i.e. *I also really enjoyed playing...*). Instead of putting these two activities together under 'TV lounge', some candidates treated them as activities for different rooms.

Section 4 involved providing directions on how to get to the museum, with nearly all of the data to complete this section coming from the podcast. Some candidates communicated this information well, but weaker candidates were not able to listen for all the information or provide coherent instructions. This meant that the directions were either incomplete or not written in concise, clear language.

Task 6

This task required candidates to write a progress report on the museum's new cafe. The task therefore involved carefully reading the instructions about what to include and who the reader was (the museum board). The mean score was 44.9%, which indicates that candidates found the task slightly easier than Task 5. Candidates had to identify relevant information from different sources in the Data File and combine it in order to create the report.

One of the main challenges in doing this was to interpret and summarise visual information from two texts in the Data File.

The better candidates demonstrated a good understanding of the genre, including organising the text and demonstrating consistent use of formal register to address the reader. Some candidates wrote the report as an email directly to Dr Jones, whereas others wrote a short report with headings. Candidates, however, varied in their ability to manipulate the language from the Data File. Stronger candidates were able to manipulate language and ably summarise the relevant numerical data from the Data File. It is worth noting that many candidates were challenged by the need to summarise the visual information; of those that did, many relied on the same repeated sentence structure to report on the progress of work on the new cafe and encountered difficulty with verb tenses. For example:

'The cafe kitchen have complete 70%, need to finish at April 16. The gift shop windows only complete 15%, need to finish at April 28.'

Weaker candidates demonstrated an ability to locate information, but difficulty with control of summarising the visual information from the charts in the Data File. These candidates were also challenged by the requirement to manipulate the language from the Data File texts, meaning the use of language, including register, was inconsistent in some answers for this task.

Task 7

As noted above, this proved to be a challenging task. Candidates were required to write a letter to Ms Pollitti, the Careers Mistress at a local school, to inform her about upcoming part-time summer vacancies in the museum and to encourage students to apply. This task tested candidates' ability to locate relevant information and synthesise it with other information in the Data File and organise it coherently, whilst using language appropriate to a formal letter which also required an element of persuasive writing.

The stronger candidates were able to produce a concise, relevant, organised letter whilst maintaining a formal tone. The salutation, opening and closing paragraphs were appropriate for the context and the genre. Weaker candidates demonstrated some difficulties in addressing the letter to the correct person and thus in using the correct salutation and in opening/closing the letter appropriately. This may indicate that they were uncertain about or did not understand how the reader was connected to the school. For example:

'hope you do some part time job

Love, Lara'

More specifically, the task required candidates to communicate the details of the position, including rates of pay, main duties and so on. Better candidates were able to locate the relevant information and summarise it using their own words. However, weaker candidates copied indiscriminately and directly from the Data File (the minutes of the staff meeting, the museum's staff manual and the feedback comments from previous part-time summer staff) meaning that sections of the letter were written in an inconsistent register, thus affecting the flow of the text and its appropriacy. For example:

'We are sincerely hope that we can attract pupils from this excellent school. The more they paid, the more they gain.'

Overall, weaker candidates demonstrated some difficulty in manipulating language from the Data File to achieve the desired effect.

Part B2 (More difficult section)

Part B2 consisted of three tasks:

- Writing an email as part of ongoing correspondence to respond to questions and persuade a local village hall to grant permission for the museum to borrow the village's plough for an upcoming exhibition
- Writing a description for the museum's website to introduce a traditional farmhouse from the Wang Chung Village, which had been moved to the museum to be exhibited
- Writing the main section of a report for the Museum Board to report on problems the museum had been having and to make recommendations to deal with them.

The B2 Data File included the following kinds of texts: a podcast, which candidates listened to; a section from the museum's staff manual; emails; minutes from a museum staff meeting; a newspaper article; WhatsApp chat extracts; online survey results; and a transcript of an interview.

The candidates' performance is summarised in Table 6.

Table 6: Paper 3 Part B2 results

| Task | Full Mark | Mean Score (%) | Standard Deviation (%) |
|------|-----------|----------------|------------------------|
| 8 | 18 | 50.7 | 18.4 |
| 9 | 18 | 41.8 | 18.3 |
| 10 | 18 | 38.1 | 19.7 |

The overall mean score for Part B2 was 43.5%, and Task 10 proved to be the most difficult with a mean score of slightly over 38%. The paper proved to be successful in discriminating weaker from stronger candidates and in terms of its own internal reliability.

Task 8

Overall, this proved to be the easiest task, but it did pose some challenges, with candidates scoring a mean of 50.7%. Candidates were required to write an email to Ms Ip Lai Ping, Head of the Shun Yee Tak Village Hall, as part of ongoing correspondence to respond to her questions and persuade the village hall to grant permission for the museum to borrow the village's plough for an upcoming exhibition. Candidates had to identify relevant information (e.g. museum policy on transporting borrowed items) by synthesising sources in the Data File, including the listening input (podcast). They then needed to present this information appropriately, using formal register. Candidates needed to provide an appropriate subject line for the email and the best candidates were able to choose one that included the reason for writing (borrowing/loan of the Chang Yee Tak plough), as in the following example:

'Request to borrow the Chang Yee Tak Plough'

As in previous years, some candidates omitted the subject line, or wrote a long subject line, which shows some lack of awareness of the genre.

The content of the email needed to include several points, including why the museum needed to borrow the plough, the museum's policy on transporting borrowed items (e.g. costs), what would happen if the plough was damaged, etc. In the better answers, the reason for writing was clear, the information was correctly selected and organised well (e.g. by answering the points in Ms Ip's email in the same order). Also, the register was consistently appropriate for an email which needed to inform and persuade/reassure the reader. For example:

'Dear Ms Ip,

I am writing to provide you with more information about the request to borrow the Chang Yee Tak plough...

we understand your worries about the safety of the plough.'

Weaker candidates struggled to begin the email, either by starting inappropriately or addressing the wrong person/assuming the wrong name as the writer. There were evident problems in maintaining the register in the email and/or stating the reason for writing clearly. For example:

'Dear Ms Ip,

I am writing for asking you a question...

I look forward to reading your reply on this matter.'

'Dear Ms Ip,

How are you? I am Indy Wong the museum assistant for Lara Gau...

Hope you can find out the information that you want and look forward to your reply!

Candidates needed to extract and manipulate relevant information from the Data File, including data from the museum's staff manual, which was written in a very formal tone. More able candidates were able to attempt this. However, many of the weaker candidates were not able to identify the level of formality in the Data File text and subsequently did not manipulate the language well enough. This affected overall appropriacy. The email also needed to include a request to Ms Ip for the museum to be able to photograph the plough. Many candidates were able to communicate this as a request, for example:

'In addition, we would like to request to photograph the plough, as we hope to put a photo of the plough in our poster for the exhibition.'

However, other candidates could not frame the request due to issues with grammar or appropriacy, or both. The request sometimes appeared as an imperative, or as a statement which overlooked the reader-writer relationship. For example:

'All in All, Lara Gau want to put a photo of it on our new museum posters, do you allow us to do this?'

Two key points in the email came from the podcast and both required candidates to listen for detail (the name of the exhibition) and what makes the plough so unique (materials, age and condition). Stronger candidates were able to listen and follow the conversation to successfully record all relevant detail, but some candidates found this part of the listening challenging and missed important detail (e.g. *in perfect condition*) and could not discriminate the century (18th), often reporting the plough as dating from the 80th century, making the information incomplete/incoherent.

Task 9

This task proved to be more challenging than Task 8, with a mean of 41.8%. The task involved writing a description for the museum's website to introduce a traditional farmhouse from the Wang Chung Village which had been moved to the museum brick by brick for exhibition. Candidates also had to provide a brief background of how the farmhouse was found and some interesting facts about the Wang Chung Village itself. This required candidates to synthesise information across a range of sources, including five pieces of information from the podcast. A key part of the background of the farmhouse included its discovery and the circumstances around its disappearance. This was challenging to candidates as they needed to listen, then write an accurate, coherent chronology of events, with some brief input from the Data File. Weaker candidates were not able to follow the information in the listening input to establish the chronology and appeared to miss the relevant input in the Data File.

In terms of the text as a whole, the text could have been written as either a more formal piece in the style of a museum panel, or a more 'interactive' and less formal text to fit the genre of a website and a (potentially) younger reader. These two approaches are illustrated in the two examples below:

'Wang Chung Village was once a famous village in the far north-west of the New Territories.'

'Have you ever heard of Wang Chung Village? Do you know any story about the village? In fact the Wang Chung Village is extremely famous, especially the traditional farmhouse.'

Successful candidates were able to organise their writing and maintain the tone and style throughout the description. In contrast, weaker candidates were not able to maintain the tone (e.g. not changing spoken speech to written speech when using data from the transcript of the interview with an elderly former resident of the village in the Data File) or organise the text into cohesive and coherent paragraphs. A further feature of this task was that it required candidates to summarise and write concisely. The description needed to include a summary of a story about the kitchen cupboard in the farmhouse and some candidates were not able to concisely summarise this event, choosing instead to copy large chunks of text from the Data File (newspaper article) meaning that some texts produced were rather long and were not appropriate to the task.

There were some notable features in the task which challenged some candidates. These included spelling of items from the listening. Two items frequently misspelled were 'pineapple' and 'farming'. These items were from the podcast and the misspellings may be due to a lack of awareness of or practice in reproducing words accurately in their written forms after noting them down when listening.

Task 10

This was the most challenging of the tasks in Part B2, with a mean of 38.1%. Candidates were required to write the main section of a report to the Museum Board which reported problems that the museum had been having

and recommendations to deal with them. A number of candidates did not interpret the task instructions correctly and produced a complete report including an introduction, main section and conclusion. This affected the appropriacy of the task.

Better candidates were able to include the main features of report writing in their answers (e.g. a formal register, headings and some sub-headings). The short length of the text allowed for a report section which used no headings at all and some candidates produced very good scripts without headings. These candidates were able to organise the writing by paragraphing the information well, used appropriate topic sentences/cohesive devices and logically structured the report section into problems the museum had been having (with specific example(s)), plus suggested solutions. Weaker candidates had some difficulties with structuring the text. Some candidates used vague or over-long headings, others used no headings in the text but did not then paragraph appropriately. This resulted in a lack of cohesion and coherence in their scripts. A formal tone was required as the readers of the report are members of the Museum Board. Some candidates do not seem to have been aware of the audience as the tone of the writing lacked formality. Other candidates began the report section using the correct register but then demonstrated less control of tone through not manipulating the information from the Data File adequately. For example, some items were in the minutes of the staff meeting and lack of manipulation of the original sentences contrasted markedly with the candidates' own language within paragraphs/sections.

In terms of grammar, candidates were sometimes challenged by the use of tenses in this task. Different items in the task required different tenses (e.g. reporting a current problem in the present aspect, but the specific example to illustrate the problem required the past tense). Stronger candidates were able to control the verb tenses more consistently throughout the text.

One challenge that candidates encountered related to careful reading of the Data File. Stronger candidates were able to read carefully and follow the links between Data File items. However, some weaker candidates did not read carefully enough. For example, one recommendation in the report was for full-time staff to assist school groups and teachers during the visits to the museum. This information was located in the minutes of the staff meeting in the Data File. When first mentioned in the minutes, it was proposed that all staff assist, but this was then amended in the subsequent discussion in the meeting to apply to full-time staff only. Weaker candidates did not read carefully (i.e. beyond the first mention in the minutes) and reported this as 'all staff' needing to assist school groups. This is incorrect and would have misled the readers.

Recommendations for Part B

Weaker candidates (in particular, those attempting Part B1) found locating information in the listening input more difficult than locating it in the written Data File. Candidates should read through the question prompts in the Data File and the questions to get a general sense of the upcoming information. This will help them to engage in 'strategic' listening, taking notes on those parts that are directly relevant to the questions, rather than trying to note every single point made.

The other main areas which require attention are reading the Data File, checking task instructions and expressing visual information in written form. Task instructions are included to clearly direct candidates in terms of the situation, genre required, etc. A number of candidates overlooked task instructions (e.g. the persuasive element in Task 7, and the requirement to only produce the *main* section of a report for Task 10). In terms of reading, it was noted that some candidates had difficulty locating information if they were required to follow links from one document in the Data File to another; or candidates did not continue reading within Data File texts to verify that information was correct. Therefore, candidates need to practise the skill of reading within different parts of a text or between texts in order to verify information and to be fully aware of any changes in the dynamic situation as depicted in the Data File.

Many candidates demonstrated an ability to write various genres, such as email, letter and report. However, some candidates still need to practise the basic structure and textual features of such documents. For example, some candidates attempted to write a report without paragraphing or using headings/sequencing language to help the reader. Candidates are advised to practise writing report headings using noun phrases in order to avoid being too vague or producing over-long headings.

In both parts B1 and B2, awareness of the audience challenged a number of candidates. For example, despite clear instructions in the task, candidates did not pay sufficient attention to *maintaining* register and audience awareness (e.g. in tasks 7, 9 and 10) thus affecting the appropriacy of the texts. This is mostly related to a lack of manipulation of language in the Data File. Candidates are advised to consider the texts within the Data File and practise reading written and spoken texts in order to understand the differences between them in terms of register and appropriacy, including vocabulary.

Regarding the summarising of visual information, common errors with language centred around sentence structure, e.g. wrongly manipulating verb/noun phrases, selecting the incorrect tense, and overusing the same sentence structure. Candidates attempting part B1 were particularly challenged by this aspect of the paper. All candidates are advised that visual data can be expressed in written sentences in a variety of ways and that this is worthwhile practising, paying particular attention to sentence structure and verb tenses.

Paper 4

Over the nine-day examination period, a total of 27 versions of the question paper were used. The examination comprised two parts: Group Interaction and Individual Response. Candidates were given ten minutes for preparation for the group interaction discussion based on a given short text. These texts included articles from local or international newspapers, magazines, Internet news and web pages. Candidates were required to perform a variety of functional tasks, such as giving opinions, making suggestions, solving problems, making or explaining choices, preparing arguments for and/or against a motion, and discussing the advantages and disadvantages of a proposal. At the end of the group interaction, candidates were each given one minute to respond to a question asked by the examiner.

The candidates' performances were judged in four domains, namely, Pronunciation & Delivery; Communication Strategies; Vocabulary & Language Patterns; and Ideas & Organisation, as detailed in the Paper 4 (Speaking) Assessment Guidelines. This year, the mean scores for each domain (out of a total of 14) were 7.41, 7.26, 7.06 and 7.61 respectively. The mean score achieved out of a total score of 56, derived by adding up the domain scores, was 29.35 (52.4%).

Examiners' comments on candidates' performance in the two parts are reported below.

Part A Group Interaction

Candidates were expected to collaborate as a group on a given task, for example, to make a presentation, to prepare for a debate, work on a project, organise an event, promote an activity, design a poster, etc.

Most candidates spoke clearly enough for interaction to take place. Stronger candidates consistently exhibited an ability to listen carefully to others, respond at a meaningful pace and contribute intelligently to the discussion. Weaker candidates, however, made extensive eye-contact with examiners instead of their group members, or just talked to their notecards. Examiners judged negatively candidates who spoke too fast or who did not seem to care whether the rest of the group members were able to understand the flow of the conversation.

Weaker candidates were poor at turn taking and gave only minimal responses, for example 'I agree with you' without saying what they agreed with or providing an appropriate explanation for their agreement. Some candidates interrupted in an impolite manner during the discussion, expressing their views in an overly loud and aggressive way. Such candidates seemed to be more interested in giving a presentation of their own ideas than participating in a discussion with others. The strongest candidates were those who successfully persuaded their group members to come to a consensus, encouraged others to participate, paraphrased or clarified a point to help weaker or confused candidates, expressed empathy or critiqued politely with a rational explanation.

Examiners reported that while the majority of candidates seemed to have acquired a lot of general vocabulary, many were unable to produce accurate language patterns. Some candidates knew stock phrases like 'materialistic culture' or 'strong purchasing power', but they used them indiscriminately, out of context. Some stronger candidates tried to impress the examiners by using sophisticated vocabulary but failed to give consideration to weaker candidates. This made the flow of the interaction quite unnatural. Common mistakes included the use of the present or base form when talking about past events; the inaccurate use of comparative adjectives; and the misuse of singular and plural for countable and uncountable nouns. The influence of structures erroneously transferred from L1 was at its most prominent in weaker candidates.

Stronger candidates were able to make use of the given text, extract relevant information and organise the information for their contribution using an appropriate structure. They related personal experiences to support their opinion, which made the content of the discussion more interesting and relevant. They were also more focussed on achieving the aim of the task and more conscious of the given examination time. Weaker candidates, in contrast, seemed to ignore the text, visual clues and prompts and often spoke about the topic in a very general way. Such candidates often jumped back and forth from one prompt to another, making the discussion incoherent. Weaker candidates also had difficulty when elaborating on their own views and when giving

appropriate responses to previous speakers. They misunderstood the question and made statements irrelevant to the discussion task. This sometimes resulted in them being ignored by other candidates.

Part B Individual Response

The majority of candidates responded enthusiastically to the questions. Successful candidates made full use of the one minute to give a response, and explained and elaborated it with interesting examples or by relating it to their personal experience. Weaker candidates often showed difficulty in sustaining their response. Although there are no right or wrong answers to the questions, it should be noted that candidates who give an irrelevant response are not awarded a high mark in Domain 4.

General recommendations

Candidates are recommended to read local and international media and be knowledgeable about common social and current issues. This will help them to elaborate on their ideas and provide examples to support their arguments.

Candidates should make meaningful use of the texts, pictures or diagrams provided to make their interaction more relevant to the given task. They should read the question prompt carefully and identify their roles so that they can interact successfully with each other towards a common goal.

During the discussion, they should not be afraid to seek clarification from other candidates as to the meaning of words or phrases which are unfamiliar to them or on points which are confusing to them. In fact, these are features of authentic discussions which contribute positively to the interaction.

School-based Assessment (SBA)

This year, 56,849 candidates participated in SBA. The mean of the moderated SBA marks was 60.9% and the standard deviation 17.4%.

Once again, it seems that most teachers' assessment of their students was accurate and reliable. According to data generated during the statistical moderation of the marks submitted by participating schools, 81.1% of schools submitted marks that were 'within the expected range', with only 10.2% in the 'slightly higher than expected range' and 7.6% in the 'slightly lower than expected range' categories. A very small percentage of schools gave scores which were 'higher than expected' (0.8%) or 'much higher than expected' (0.2%), and none fell into the category 'lower than expected range'. These figures give support to the statement that the SBA component is an accurate and reliable means of assessing students' speaking performance.

In the 2015-16 school year, the HKEAA provided support to teachers and schools in the form of briefing sessions to keep teachers abreast of new developments; standardisation, feedback and sharing sessions conducted by district coordinators to enable teachers to receive feedback and share good teaching practice; personal contact with teachers and schools through school visits and emails; and professional development courses to help teachers understand how to implement SBA effectively. This year, three professional development courses were organised and a total of 97 teachers were trained and awarded certificates.

General Comments and Recommendations

It seems that the number of memorisation cases increased this year. The Supervisor's reports of the past few years have repeatedly emphasised that memorisation and reading aloud from note cards should not be allowed. The purpose of SBA is to assess the students' speaking ability and not their reading aloud or memorisation skills. Unfortunately, some teachers are not following the mandatory conditions set out in the handbook and are allowing – and in some cases even encouraging – their students to write out a script in full, memorise it and then recite what they prepared. By allowing their students to do this, teachers are putting their own students at a disadvantage (by not preparing them properly for real-life speaking contexts), as well as students in other classes of the same level (by not rank ordering the students within the school reliably). Such cases are easily detected by the district coordinators and during statistical moderation. Once suspected memorisation cases are identified, the recording of the SBA assessment is reviewed and reassessed, and mark adjustments for all the students in that particular school made accordingly. Students who read aloud or memorise their scripts are not demonstrating that they have any ability to use spoken English interactively; and when they take part in the public examination, such students usually perform badly and get low marks. Therefore, teachers should take the opportunity which the SBA component of the curriculum offers to provide opportunities for meaningful interaction. They can use

the methods which have been suggested in past reports to prevent students from reading aloud or memorising, such as giving the actual assessment tasks just before the assessment. In this way, students will get the message about what is acceptable practice, and may improve their English in the process.

Another aspect that teachers should give some thought to is the design of appropriate assessment tasks. The SBA tasks used by some teachers are sometimes inappropriate in terms of the task nature or the level of difficulty. The nature of the task is of the utmost importance as it can greatly affect the performance of students. If, for example, students are asked to describe their favourite book during a group interaction, it is extremely difficult for them to engage in a proper discussion as each student is actually relating the plot of a book which only they have read. The inevitable outcome will be a series of short, unrelated presentations rather than an interaction, and so there is no opportunity to display natural and appropriate communication and interaction strategies. In such a scenario, students cannot be expected to perform well because the task that they have been given does not lend itself to a proper discussion. However, if the students are asked to describe their favourite character in the same book that they have read, there will be more genuine interaction.

The level of difficulty of the task is also very important. Tasks have to be set in such a way that it is appropriate to the level of the students and at the same time challenging enough to stretch them to their fullest potential. One of the principles of SBA is that students should be given the opportunity to perform to the best of their ability, and this can only be achieved if tasks are appropriate and set at the right level(s) for the students.

SBA serves a summative assessment function but is also intended to be formative. The benefits of school-based assessment practices derive from the opportunity to integrate assessment with learning so as to monitor students' progress and cater for the diversity of their learning needs. Panel heads and school coordinators play an extremely important role. They need to hold within-school standardisation meetings so that all teachers can watch, assess and discuss the standardisation and students' videos together. They should also help to ensure that appropriate tasks are designed and that the assessment is carried out according to the mandatory conditions. Teachers are encouraged to attend professional development courses and district standardisation sessions so that they have a chance to share and learn good practices with their peers from other schools. By doing this, teachers can gain a deeper understanding of the principles and procedures of SBA and be able to implement it in a proper and professional manner. Only then will students really benefit from SBA.

Appendix 1: Conversion tables between the easier section and more difficult section of Papers 1B and 3B

There were two parts in Papers 1 and 3. Candidates were required to answer ALL questions in Part A. In Part B, candidates could choose EITHER Part B1 (easier section) OR Part B2 (more difficult section). In the grading process, the marks for Part B1 were converted to the marks on the scale for Part B2 using the tables on the next page. For example, if we refer to the conversion table for Paper 1B, a score of 20 marks scored by a candidate taking Part 1B1 would be converted to 10 marks on the 1B2 scale.

These tables were generated using the percentile-equating method as described in the booklet 'Grading Procedures and Standards-referenced Reporting in the HKDSE Examination', which can be found on the HKEAA website (http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/DocLibrary/Media/Leaflets/HKDSE_SRR_A4_Booklet_Jun2011.pdf).

Conversion tables between the easier section and more difficult section of Papers 1B and 3B.

Paper 1B

| 1B1 (easier) | 1B2 (more difficult) |
|-----------------|-------------------------|
| 0 | 0 |
| 1 | 0 |
| 2 | 1 |
| 3 | 1 |
| 4 | 2 |
| 5 | 2 |
| 6 | 3 |
| 7 | 3 |
| 8 | 4 |
| 9 | 4 |
| 10 | 5 |
| 11 | 5 |
| 12 | 6 |
| 13 | 6 |
| 14 | 7 |
| 15 | 7 |
| 16 | 8 |
| 17 | 8 |
| 18 | 9 |
| 19 | 9 |
| 20 | 10 |
| 21 | 10 |
| 22 | 11 |
| 23 | 12 |
| 24 | 13 |
| 25 | 13 |
| 26 | 14 |
| 27 | 15 |
| 28 | 16 |
| 29 | 17 |
| 30 | 19 |
| 31 | 19 |
| 32 | 21 |
| 33 | 22 |
| 34 | 23 |
| 35 | 24 |
| 36 | 26 |
| 37 | 28 |
| 38 | 30 |
| 39 | 32 |
| 40 | 34 |
| 41 | 37 |
| 42 | 39 |
| 43 | 41 |

Paper 3B

| 3B1 (easier) | 3B2 (more difficult) |
|-----------------|-------------------------|
| 0 | 0 |
| 1 | 1 |
| 2 | 2 |
| 3 | 2 |
| 4 | 2 |
| 5 | 2 |
| 6 | 3 |
| 7 | 3 |
| 8 | 3 |
| 9 | 3 |
| 10 | 4 |
| 11 | 4 |
| 12 | 4 |
| 13 | 5 |
| 14 | 5 |
| 15 | 5 |
| 16 | 5 |
| 17 | 6 |
| 18 | 6 |
| 19 | 7 |
| 20 | 7 |
| 21 | 7 |
| 22 | 8 |
| 23 | 8 |
| 24 | 9 |
| 25 | 10 |
| 26 | 10 |
| 27 | 11 |
| 28 | 11 |
| 29 | 12 |
| 30 | 13 |
| 31 | 13 |
| 32 | 14 |
| 33 | 15 |
| 34 | 16 |
| 35 | 16 |
| 36 | 17 |
| 37 | 18 |
| 38 | 19 |
| 39 | 20 |
| 40 | 20 |
| 41 | 21 |
| 42 | 22 |
| 43 | 23 |
| 44 | 24 |
| 45 | 25 |
| 46 | 26 |

Paper 3B

| 3B1 (easier) | 3B2 (more difficult) |
|-----------------|-------------------------|
| 47 | 27 |
| 48 | 29 |
| 49 | 30 |
| 50 | 33 |
| 51 | 35 |
| 52 | 38 |
| 53 | 41 |
| 54 | 44 |