

Candidates' Performance

General comments and recommendations

On the whole, candidates seem to have been well prepared for the examination. Most answers displayed knowledge relevant to the issues/topics covered by the syllabus. However, the performance was not always commensurate with the effort made. To achieve good results in History examinations, candidates need the following skills: identifying the key term(s)/phrase(s) in a question in order to grasp the gist of that question; using relevant historical information to support any arguments made; and presenting logical, coherent and clear answers.

It is imperative that candidates read the questions carefully if they want to produce relevant answers. Candidates too often jumped into answering a question without paying close attention to what it required. This explains why some candidates produced irrelevant answers when answering data-based questions: when the question required the use of sources only, they drew on their own knowledge; in contrast, when the question required the use of both sources and their own knowledge, they used one but not both. Similarly for essay-type questions, candidates should make sure that they grasp the gist of a question before producing the answer. Candidates are advised to read *A Manual of Question Words Used in History* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2007; online version 2011), in order to familiarise themselves with various command words and other commonly used words that appear in HKDSE History questions.

It is also important that candidates choose relevant historical information to substantiate their arguments. Some of the scripts were marred by irrelevancies resulting from the indiscriminate use of historical information. Writing down 'model answers' prepared in advance should be avoided.

Last but not least, candidates should pay special attention to logic, coherence and clarity of presentation. They should learn to organise answers and use facts appropriately in their answers and make clear arguments. Language and presentation skills are areas in need of improvement.

Question Choice Pattern

Question Number	Popularity
Paper 1	
1	Compulsory
2	
3	
4	
Paper 2	
1	12%
2	23%
3	13%
4	80%
5	56%
6	3%
7	13%

Paper 1 (Data-based questions)

- Q.1 (a)(i) Performance was fair. Most candidates managed to point out one anxiety felt by the Hong Kong people about the future of Hong Kong, with good reference to Source A. However, some candidates did not draw valid conclusions from the percentage figures in the table, and their answers were not awarded high marks.
- (a)(ii) Performance was below expectations. Candidates who answered in Chinese tended to perform better than those who did so in English, who sometimes did not demonstrate effective interpretation of the lyrics and thus could not accurately determine whether the anxiety inferred in (a)(i) still existed or not in 1990.
- (b) Performance was below expectations. The question required candidates to comment on whether the question of Hong Kong's future enhanced Hong Kong people's political awareness up to 1997. Many candidates did not tackle the concept 'political awareness' well, and failed to use proper historical examples to substantiate their answers. The worst answers used *government* reforms as examples of enhancing the political awareness of Hong Kong *people*, which lost marks.
- Q.2 (a) Performance was very good. This question required candidates to point out the attitude of the author of Source C towards the USA and support the answer with one clue from Source C. Many candidates were able to point out that the attitude was positive and support the answer with a relevant clue.
- (b) Performance was below expectations. This question required candidates to explain, with reference to Source D, whether they would have supported the Chinese Communist Party if they had been Chinese intellectuals in 1945. This question aimed to test the candidates' empathetic understanding of the conditions in China in 1945. Both positive and negative answers were acceptable, provided the candidates could state their standpoint clearly and substantiate their answers with reference to Source D. Only the best candidates stated their standpoint clearly, and discussed the issue effectively, with good substantiation. Many answers were overgeneralised. Some weaker answers did not refer to Source D.
- (c) Performance was fair. This question tested the candidates' understanding of change and continuity and their ability to use sources and their own knowledge, and required them to compare the guiding principles of the CCP before and after 1949. Only the best candidates made a good comparison of the guiding principles of the CCP and pointed out change and/or continuity before and after 1949. Many candidates did not clearly distinguish in their answer which facts came from the sources and which from their own knowledge, which cost them marks. Some weaker candidates did not draw effective comparisons with China after 1949.
- Q.3 (a) Performance was good. This question required candidates to identify the main message of the cartoon in Source E. Most candidates were able to focus on France and identify a valid message from the cartoon, with sound justification.
- (b) Performance was good. Most of the candidates were able to identify one general misunderstanding of the impact of the First World War on women's status, with good reference to Source F. The weakest candidates copied indiscriminately from the Source and did not make use of data about 'misunderstanding of the impact of the First World War on women's status'.
- (c) Performance was fair. The question required candidates to discuss whether the First World War brought about a better Europe, with reference to Sources E and F and using the candidates' own knowledge of the development of Europe up to 1929. Only the best candidates were able to focus their discussion on the key phrase 'better Europe' and use both sources and their own knowledge effectively. Mediocre answers

discussed how the War affected the development of Europe, with inadequate treatment of the key word 'better'. Some weak candidates ignored key phrases in the question such as 'better' and 'up to 1929', and merely wrote prepared answers on the rise of totalitarianism and causes of the Second World War.

- Q.4 (a) Performance was satisfactory. Many candidates made use of Source G to identify one justification used by Charles de Gaulle to reject Britain's application to join the EEC in both 1963 and 1967. Some weak candidates misread the 1967 source, and did not score any marks for that part.
- (b) Performance was fair. The question required candidates to elaborate what the 'trifling condition' in Source H was about. Performance depended on what candidates could draw from the cartoon. Candidates who focussed on the British flag being thrown away and the French flag being raised tended to perform much better than those focussing on, say, the removal car, which did not convey a clear message about the issue of sovereignty.
- (c) Performance was satisfactory. The question required candidates to discuss factors that hindered economic cooperation in Europe from the 1950s to the 1970s. Many candidates demonstrated understanding of the relevant knowledge in their answers. They were able to explain how different factors hindered economic cooperation in the required period. Some weak answers only discussed one factor and/or cited irrelevant historical facts, thus losing marks.

Paper 2 (Essay-type questions)

- Q.1 Performance was unsatisfactory. The question required candidates to discuss the characteristics of the relationship between Hong Kong and mainland China in the first half of the 20th century. Many scripts demonstrated limited knowledge about the subject matter. Many failed to focus their discussion on the characteristics of the relationship between Hong Kong and mainland China. Some answers recounted the relationship between the two without analysing its characteristics. The weakest answers ignored the time period of the question and discussed the relationship between the two after the 1950s. Only a few candidates pointed out the required characteristics in the required period, substantiated with solid historical data.
- Q.2 Performance was fair. The question required candidates to compare reform and revolution as means of transformation in China in the 20th century, using one reform and one revolution as examples. Most candidates chose relevant reform and revolution examples, but not many of them could draw effective comparisons between them. The weak candidates merely gave separate accounts of the chosen reform and revolution. Some attempted to make comparisons, but could not produce concrete facts for substantiation. Some were weak in understanding essential concepts such as 'transformation', and this resulted in superficial discussions. Only the best candidates could make valid comparisons of the chosen reform and revolution, focusing on reform and revolution as means of transformation in China.
- Q.3 Performance was fair. The question required candidates to discuss whether Japanese diplomacy with other Asian countries aimed primarily at compensating for its war guilt in the period 1952-2000. Besides providing accurate historical facts about Japan's foreign policies towards other Asian countries in the required period, candidates should have gone a step further to assess whether such policies were aimed primarily at compensating for Japan's war guilt. Some excellent answers displayed good understanding of the question, and clearly examined the war guilt factor and other factors in terms of their relative importance in shaping Japanese diplomacy. The best answers were good in terms of both factual accuracy and discussion of relative importance. Most answers did well in the former, and tended to be weak in the latter. Some weak candidates ignored the key word 'primarily' in the question,

and simply provided a narration of Japanese diplomacy after the SCAP period, with only one or two lines that casually touched upon the war guilt factor.

- Q.4 Performance was fair. The question required candidates to discuss whether the Great Depression was a more important factor than the Paris Peace Settlement (1919-23) in causing the Second World War, with reference to Europe's development in the period 1919-39. While a handful of candidates were able to present logical analyses of the relative importance of the two factors in causing the Second World War, many answers displayed one or more of the following flaws: narrating the ways in which the two factors led to the War without making any comparisons; focussing on one factor only, usually the Paris Peace Settlement; unnecessarily discussing Japan's expansion; and using a 'to what extent' approach which made the answer too complicated to follow.
- Q.5 Performance was satisfactory. The question required candidates to discuss the ways in which the USSR affected the development of the Cold War in the period 1946-91. Candidates in general demonstrated some knowledge of the subject matter. However, some weak answers did not cover the whole period as required, or provided one-sided answers on how the USSR intensified hostilities with the USA. Some candidates adopted a 'to what extent' approach to the key phrase 'in what ways', and unnecessarily discussed the role played by the USA in the Cold War. The weakest answers traced the development of the Cold War without focussing on the ways the USSR affected its development. Only the best answers adopted the direct approach required by the question.
- Q.6 This was the least popular question this year, and performance was unsatisfactory. The question required candidates to discuss whether the United Nations served as an ideal platform for international cooperation, with reference to its attempts at solving international conflicts and promoting international social and cultural cooperation in the period 1945-2000. While most candidates provided historical facts about the attempts made by the United Nations, they often ignored the key word 'platform', and observations tended to be shallow. The worst answers did not provide enough historical facts for substantiation.
- Q.7 Performance was fair. The question invited candidates to select two countries/regions and discuss why they would have had a 'strong urge' to migrate from one to another if they had lived in the 1960s. Candidates needed to explain both the push and pull factors behind the imaginary migration. Many answers selected a communist country as the original place of abode, and a capitalist country/region as the destination to move to. The excellent scripts managed to handle both the push and pull factors of the selected countries/regions from different perspectives in the 1960s. The weak answers displayed one or more of the following flaws: containing minimal historical facts about the 1960s, narrating historical facts about the chosen countries/regions without discussing their problems and attractions, and overgeneralising. Having said this, it is encouraging to see that a fair number of candidates had the courage to attempt this new type of question, and that the performance was comparable to that in the more popular questions.

School-based Assessment

HKDSE History School-based Assessment (SBA) requires students to complete a two-task assignment related to their selected elective. The two tasks are namely presentation of study outline and study report.

In the 2017 HKDSE History Examination, participating schools have to submit SBA marks for inclusion in the subject result. We are happy to report that 64.7% of schools fall into the 'within the expected range' category, while the marks of 17.9% of schools are higher than expected, and 17.4% lower than expected. However, among the schools with marks higher or lower than expected, the majority only deviate slightly from the expected range. This showed that the majority of the teachers do have a good understanding about SBA implementation, and hence the marking standards are generally appropriate.

The implementation of SBA in 2017 HKDSE History was generally satisfactory. SBA District Coordinators (DCs) were appointed to support schools in implementing SBA. Messages were conveyed to subject teachers through post-mortem seminars, SBA conferences and briefing sessions. Teachers, subject heads and School Coordinators (SCs) were informed of the mark submission arrangement and the format of submitting students' sample works to the HKEAA. Effective communication among DCs, SCs, supervisor and subject manager was maintained via emails and phone calls.

Generally speaking, students' performance on Comparative Studies was better than that on the other two electives. Most students opting for Comparative Studies were able to set appropriate titles with two or more comparable items. As for Issue-based Studies, many titles did not contain any controversy, and therefore did not fit the requirement of the elective. The appropriateness of works on Local Heritage Studies depended on whether the items students had chosen were heritage-related.

While students should draft appropriate titles for their chosen electives, they should also match the titles appropriately with the chosen electives. Quite many mismatches were identified: for example, a title that was claimed to be for Issue-based Studies might have a phrasing that was obviously for Comparative Studies.

In 2017 HKDSE History, no serious plagiarism was identified.