

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 and B2 the more difficult section. The total number of candidates attempting Paper 1 was 54,382, of whom 43.9% chose to do Part B1 while 56.1% 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 | 42 | 54.3 | 21.8 |
| Part B1 | 42 | 47.9 | 21.1 |
| Part B2 | 42 | 52.5 | 21.8 |

Part A (Compulsory section)

There were two reading texts in Part A. The first text included classified advertisements from three music teachers. The second reading passage was an article on the theme of background music and its role in helping people to concentrate. In the second text, the author argued that, contrary to what many people believe, music can be a 'working companion'.

The topic should have been familiar to candidates. The challenge in reading the second text lay in understanding how conscious attention and unconscious attention work, and why video game soundtracks are one of the best music genres for concentration. A wide range of items were tested in Part A, including matching music teachers to adverts and completing a summary.

Candidates scored highly in this section on items that asked them to identify words within the text that had specific meanings (e.g. Q.1 and Q.10), and on items that required them to find explicitly-stated details (e.g. Q.3, Q.4, and Q.11). Between 65% and 90% of candidates answered these items correctly. These item types helped to identify those candidates with solid understanding of the texts at a fundamental level.

Candidates also performed well on a range of items that asked for the interpretation of writer opinions and holistic understanding of the text. Q.15 and Q.21 were answered correctly by around 50% of candidates, and Q.20 and Q.22 by 60-80%. These items asked candidates to clarify the writer's comments, identify holders of certain opinions, identify a title for the text and identify the writer's intention in writing the text. Previous years' reports on candidate performance in Paper 1 have pointed out that a good understanding of the text as a whole is important for answering a range of items, so seeing strength in this area is heartening.

The seven items within Q.6 caused more difficulty for candidates, and exemplified an observation made by many markers regarding candidates' performance on gap-fill/cloze items. Incorrect answers to these item types showed insensitivity to the information already provided in the summary itself (information that therefore should not be repeated by candidates in their answers), lack of awareness of the part of speech needed inside a gap (especially the difference between plural and singular nouns, and verb forms), or unfamiliarity with the instructions (e.g. writing more than one word in a gap). Q.9 ('What does 'it' refer to?' Answer: the dull task), answered correctly by less than a third of candidates, exemplified this issue. Common incorrect answers included plural nouns (e.g. 'doing tasks'), which failed to capture the more specific singular reference of the question point.

Q.8 (correctly answered by 41% of candidates), Q.16 (9%), and Q.18 (4%) tested candidates' understanding of discourse markers and the metaphor and irony contained in the text. These higher order features were difficult items, requiring 'reading between the lines', and helped to identify the strongest candidates. A common incorrect answer to Q.8 was 'potent', suggesting too much focus on the concrete details of the text rather than the language used by the writer to draw attention to pertinent details ('the trouble is' being the correct answer). Q.18 asked candidates to identify the irony which the writer highlighted within the text (on line 49). To do so, candidates needed an understanding of the entire paragraph, and to realise how the writer's comment provided a 'mismatch' against that context (i.e. the need for game designers to focus deeply). Incorrect answers to Q.16 and Q.18 also contained a large amount of text copied verbatim.

Part B1 (Easier section)

There were two texts in Part B1, both on the theme of bees: a guide to bee stings and a short article introducing Hong Kong's first urban beekeeper. Both texts were felt to be accessible to candidates in terms of their themes and discourse level. Candidates needed to work out the meaning of unfamiliar expressions, identify main and supporting ideas and complete a flow chart.

As in Section A, candidates performed strongly on items that required understanding of concrete details in the text: Q.23-Q.26, Q.30, Q.37iii and Q.38-Q.39. These represented a range of vocabulary identification, True-False-Not Given, and sentence completion items (with most being answered correctly by more than 60% of candidates). Answers were identifiable straight from the text(s) and required little inferential understanding, but strong performance here is evidence of effective fundamental reading skills, so it is reassuring to see a large number of candidates score well in these items.

Q.27 again illustrates the difficulty that candidates seemed to have with gap-fill items. Part iii was correctly answered by over 80% of candidates, possibly because the answer could be more easily located in-text, with the preceding word 'quickly' being present in both texts. However all other parts were answered correctly by fewer than 45% of candidates, probably because the wording of the summary in the flow chart was different from the original text. Incorrect word forms that did not fit the gaps, or the inclusion of information already present in the flow chart, were common (e.g. 'stinger lodged' instead of just 'stinger' for ii.). This performance was very similar in Q.36, another gap-fill, especially parts i-iii. Candidates needed to be very selective with the words chosen to complete the gaps. Copying excessively and repetitively was again the biggest problem. For example, 'founder and creative director' was often incorrectly copied into gap i. The summary had already paraphrased 'founder' as '[Leung] had set up HK Honey', thus requiring the correct answer of only 'creative director'.

Q.32-Q.34 all posed difficulties for candidates, and the weaker answers contained too much information copied straight from the original. Q.32 ('Why should you be careful when removing the stinger?') had many answers that copied how to remove the stinger or the results of being stung, rather than highlighting why care was needed. Similarly, in Q.34 ('Why does the writer suggest calling an ambulance?'), incorrect answers often included long sections copying the causes of injury, not reasons for needing an ambulance. These sorts of errors suggest difficulty in distinguishing between causal elements of the original text.

Finally, Q.40 and Q.42 also proved challenging, with incorrect answers tending to be incomplete, stating only half of the information needed. In Q.40 ('What are the two differences between western and Chinese beekeeping methods?') there were weak answers describing only one of the methods (e.g. Chinese beekeeping) and not the other. Correct answers to Q.42 ('Why is Leung continually surprised by the beehives he sets up?') also needed to include two elements: 'bees sustain themselves' and 'in urban environments'. Incorrect answers missed one of these elements, or glossed over it with an over-general answer such as 'bees do well in Hong Kong'. This answer makes less sense when the rest of the text is considered: it had previously said that beekeeping had long been established in the rural areas of the territory, therefore highlighting that the urban environment is an important element of the 'surprise'.

Part B2 (More difficult section)

The broad theme of the reading passages for Part B2 was the same as for B1: bees. There were two texts in this part: an article about farm owners using workers to pollinate and an excerpt from a book about harvesting heather honey. The higher lexical density and more complex discourse in the second text made it more challenging. Candidates were required to answer True-False-Not Given statements and gap-fill questions, identify pronouns and their antecedents, match the comments made by people in the two texts, identify metaphors for bees and work out the message that the writer wants to convey.

Candidates performed most strongly on items testing understanding of concrete textual details: Q.50 (74% correct), Q.56 (90%), and Q.61i-iii (70-82%), asking candidates to identify vocabulary with a particular meaning, identify features of heather honey, and judge statements on the actions described in the text, respectively. Candidates also did well with identifying simple metaphors in Q.66 and Q.67 (over 50% answering each correctly), common and important features of such a descriptive text.

Candidates again had mixed results with gap-fill tasks in this section: Q.60i and iv were completed well (over 70% correct), but parts ii and iii were answered correctly by only around 40% of candidates. These latter items were very often completed incorrectly by candidates repeating information already provided in the summary (e.g. that the writer wears a 'beesuit' for ii when the summary already mentions that 'something like a flying suit' was worn). Incorrect word forms were often provided in part iii (e.g. 'restrictive', 'restricting' or 'restrict', instead of 'restricted'). The same issue also occurred with the items of Q.53.

Q.63 saw issues with candidates copying too early or too much from the text, leading to unusual responses to the item, which asked candidates to identify aspects of 'skill' and 'luck' in beekeeping (e.g. 'it's boom time' makes little sense in this context). Similarly, weaker answers to Q.49 ('Why is the work more expensive than before?') tended to copy too much verbatim from the text, without realising that it was not possible to answer the item without some manipulation of the text to capture the ideas that 'humans are now paid to pollinate what bees did for free before'.

Candidates were apparently too literal in their understanding of the text when answering Q.47 ('What is the meaning of the phrase 'to hit blossom time'?'). They often placed too much literal emphasis on 'hit' and tried to use that in their answers (e.g. 'when bees hit the blossoms') rather than interpret what the verb means, which needs an understanding of the wider text. A similar issue occurred with answers to Q.64 ('Why does the writer describe the harvesting of honey as a drama?'), where candidates were focused too literally on the meaning of drama, missing the context of the text and the comparison to it. Weaker answers discussed elements of drama which made little sense and were outside the textual context (e.g. 'it contains many characters' while the text only had one 'character', or 'it is unbelievable', which had little link to the content of the narrative.) Correct answers focused on the sense of unpredictability, as closely suggested by the text. These two items were answered correctly by just 10% and 40% of candidates respectively.

One of the most difficult items in this section was Q.54 ('What is 'the logic of the market' that the writer refers to?'), with only 15% of candidates answering it correctly. Many answers were copied straight from the text, and it was not possible to answer this item without some manipulation of the wording and ideas presented in the passage. This required inferencing information from that whole section of the text, and understanding the message from the passage as a whole (that it is risky to place money and profits as the top priority). Q.69 ('Why is a stray stitch a problem for a beekeeper?'), answered correctly by 24%, required a similar set of skills from candidates, and answers could not be copied from the text. Common incorrect answers tried to do this though (e.g. 'the bees seek the vulnerable chink in the beekeeper's second skin') resulting in responses that made little sense in the context of the question. Because of this need to paraphrase the text, a wide range of answers were accepted for these items and markers were instructed to look carefully for key ideas being expressed rather than key words.

Overall recommendations

As mentioned above, all three sections included cloze/gap-fill tasks (e.g. Q.6, Q.27 and Q.60) which caused problems for candidates. This question type demands high accuracy, and writing word forms that cannot fit into the appropriate gap, or misspelling words, will result in marks not being awarded. Carefully re-reading gapped texts after completion should help to avoid this issue.

Similarly, candidates should be aware of when information is already provided in a gap-fill summary or sentence completion task, and avoid repeating it in their answers. The need to understand both the original text and the summarised text makes these item types quite challenging, and candidates should beware of focusing only on keywords in the original text.

Students are advised to avoid over-copying from the original text in answers to open-ended questions, an issue that was highlighted by markers across all the sections. The answer key is as flexible as possible but providing too much information is risky, as over-long answers may mean that candidates are compensating for lack of understanding by writing as much as possible. Also, the longer the answer, the longer it takes to write, so there is less time to spend on other parts of the paper. Stronger candidates often provide more concise answers to open-ended items, though of course this will depend on the question being asked.

Paper 2

Part A

Paper 2 Part A is a short writing task. This year, candidates were required to write a letter to parents in the role of a class teacher. They were expected to provide parents with the information about a trip to 'sky100', an observation deck in Hong Kong. A photo was given to help candidates get a rough idea about what the place looked like and what people could do there. Background information such as location, entrance fees and opening hours was provided. A mind map was used to offer some suggestions on the areas that candidates might mention in their letter, like purpose of the trip, transportation, cost and lunch. The mind map was also included to help candidates with the *process* of writing, particularly the generation and organisation of their ideas prior to composing their letter. To achieve the aim of this writing task, candidates were expected to produce an informative text. The style and tone had to be appropriate to school-parent communication. Marks between 0 and 7 were awarded for content, language and organisation. The mean for 2A was 53.6%.

General comments

In general, candidates' performance was satisfactory. High-end scripts were able to demonstrate good understanding of the question, giving a reasonable reason for organising the trip as well as details of the arrangements. Stronger candidates were also able to demonstrate good judgement about how much description and elaboration should be included in their letter so as to offer a clear and brief outline of the trip for parents. The majority of candidates were able to provide adequate information about the trip, but a few misinterpreted the target audience and wrote to fellow students, which affected content and tone. Most candidates were able to complete the task and used an appropriate style, one which was informative, explicit, polite and neither too long nor too informal.

Content

This task proved to be challenging to some candidates as they needed to decide on what to include and what not to include in the letter. Some tried to predict what parents might want to know or worry about in the trip with the use of rhetorical questions, which was inappropriate in a letter of this type.

Most candidates drew on the question prompt to provide basic details about the trip, such as logistics and lunch arrangements. Better candidates informed parents of a well-thought-out plan for the activity in a straightforward manner. Some good answers included practical ideas like safety precautions, and

a deadline for enrollment. Weaker candidates usually produced limited, repetitive or unintelligible ideas.

Candidates showed originality in explaining to parents why the trip had been organised. Many described the trip as a meaningful and educational outing in which students could, for example, appreciate the skyline, get to know more about the city's fascinating history, visit exhibitions and foster better friendships before graduation. Some candidates gave a lengthy account of such benefits, however, which was not relevant or appropriate. Better candidates tied the purpose of the trip to the rest of the letter, asking for parents' permission for their children to join the activity. Weaker candidates tended to either miss out the purpose or included only ideas suggested in the question prompt.

Language

In general, most candidates were able to make themselves understood. Stronger candidates were successful in communicating their ideas effectively with a high level of appropriate and accurate grammar, including using the right tense for different actions. Common language problems were related to spelling, subject-verb agreement, choice of vocabulary, parts of speech, collocation and sentence structure. It was encouraging to see that clichés and low-frequency vocabulary were less frequent this year.

Candidates should bear in mind that the language they use should be consistent in terms of style as well as appropriate to the audience, the text type and other contextual factors in the question. The letter this year needed to be formal and factual, with a minimum of 'flowery' language.

Organisation

Many candidates made good use of paragraphing, headings and bullets for presenting details about venue, meeting time and cost, etc. Better candidates combined information presented in this form with connected sentences and paragraphs introducing the benefits of the trip in a persuasive and interesting manner. They also handled the letter format well.

Recommendations for Part A

To cope with this part successfully, candidates should make sure their ideas are relevant to the question and their language is appropriate to the genre and context. Candidates should have a clear picture of what they are asked to write, who they should write to and why they are writing because this will help them to write an appropriate answer in terms of both content and choice of language. Since candidates cannot predict what the question will be, they should not resort to memorised ideas or extended chunks of language. These memorised chunks are very obvious to examiners as there is a clear difference between such chunks and the candidate's own style of writing and language in the rest of the text.

Part B

Paper 2 Part B comprises eight questions (Q.2-Q.9) based on the elective modules in the 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 54,041 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 | 20.8 | 49.3% | 23% |
| 3 | Workplace Communication | 20.1 | 47.1% | 2% |
| 4 | Social Issues | 22.0 | 52.3% | 43% |
| 5 | Debating | 26.1 | 62.0% | 9% |
| 6 | Popular Culture | 23.6 | 55.7% | 9% |
| 7 | Drama | 18.4 | 43.1% | 2% |
| 8 | Poems and Songs | 10.7 | 24.1% | 1% |
| 9 | Short Stories | 18.7 | 43.9% | 11% |

Question 4 on social issues was the most popular question, with about 43% choosing it. The question on sports communication (Q.2) also proved popular. The question on poems and songs was the least popular (Q.8).

The following is a summary of candidates' general performance in each question.

Question 2: Learning English through Sports Communication

This question required recounting a personal experience and encouraging others to take part in a marathon, for example 'My first experience running a marathon' or 'Lessons I learned from running a marathon'. Some blogs were structured according to pre- and post-marathon accounts while others detailed the event play-by-play. However structured, the blog needed to convey a tone of excitement consistent with accomplishing a major feat and inspire readers to sign up for a marathon; for example 'Is running a marathon on your bucket list?'

Blogs that were well written conveyed a personal perspective on the challenges and benefits of running a marathon. Some blogs over-emphasised negative experiences of running, which seemed to contradict the aim of encouraging others to take part. Blogs which only included the benefits of sports in general and did not mention running specifically did not meet minimum task requirements.

Question 3: Learning English through Workplace Communication

This question required addressing the complaint made by staff about the number of emails and texts they receive outside office hours. Candidates were given the choice of adopting different stances in response to the complaint, i.e. acknowledging and supporting staff needs or acknowledging but supporting company needs. The structure of the letter needed to include opening and closing salutations appropriate to a work context and make clear arguments relevant to the complaint which could be linked back to the problem causally.

Letters that were well written showed a development of ideas that was logical and coherent, for example the importance of work-life balance and how to achieve this going forward, such as hiring more staff or discussing changes in policy with regard to urgent or non-urgent emails. Some argued that because business had boomed recently, it was important to keep up with the demand and therefore an increase in salary or bonuses would be included in the next pay cheque.

Some candidates misinterpreted or overlooked the concept 'out of office', either writing about complaints in general or discussing problems related to emails, for example security issues, speed of connection to messages, etc.

The choice of tone was open to interpretation. Some candidates chose a softer, more apologetic and conciliatory tone while others took a firm, defensive and slightly aggressive stance. Adopting a formal or less formal tone was appropriate as the relationship between employer and employee was not prescribed in the question. It was important however to ensure the tone was consistent throughout the letter and did not become too informal. Weaker candidates tended to have more difficulty achieving this effect in their writing.

Question 4: Learning English through Social Issues

This question included a letter of advice written by a young reader of a teen magazine and candidates were required to respond to the letter by adopting the role of the advice columnist. Task requirements included validating J.C.'s problem, i.e. showing that the writer understands where J.C. is coming from and giving advice on ways to deal with or view the problem, i.e. what should be done, some course of action to follow relating to communicating with parents and to the choice of career. Suggestions put forward needed to be logical, helpful and actionable.

Strong candidates often used examples of other readers facing a similar situation, acknowledging the problem, expressing some form of sympathy and offering help, for example 'I truly understand what you are going through'; 'choose the right time to talk to your parents'; 'try and see things from their point of view'; 'do some research on the future prospects of your career'. Stronger candidates were able to explore the problem from different perspectives and offer logical advice. They were also able to adopt a professional and knowledgeable tone that was friendly and supportive in addressing a 16-year-old reader while at the same time speaking to a wider audience. A distant tone was not appropriate to the purpose of the letter and the context.

Some candidates misinterpreted the question and wrote an article about a letter received by J.C., but on the whole, most candidates were at least somewhat familiar with the topic and text-type and were therefore able to give some relevant advice.

Question 5: Learning English through Debating

This question required writing a debate speech on whether to abolish the reporting of students' class positions. As debate speeches are quite formulaic, most candidates followed the conventions by addressing the audience in the opening paragraph and presenting arguments to support their chosen stance, and closed by reiterating their overall stance regarding the issue.

Strong candidates were able to directly and firmly state their position with regard to the motion. Some candidates confused their stance however by claiming to argue against the motion but then arguing that the practice of disclosing class rankings should stop. This presented some inconsistency in the organisation of the speech.

Effective debate speeches presented a number of distinct arguments, with each argument developed and justified with examples, anecdotes or personal experiences, for example, continuing an outmoded educational policy with overemphasis on results rather than progress, the negative effects on individual psychology, and the corrosion in social and interpersonal relationships.

Candidates who attempted this question were generally familiar with the language of argumentation and able to use a variety of sentence structures with more complex forms such as relative clauses and conditional forms. Some were able to use a tone consistent with a debate speech, for example using rhetorical questions.

Question 6: Learning English through Popular Culture

This question required candidates to focus on possible reasons for the increase in popularity of 'athleisure' clothing. Common reasons included comfort, style, change in lifestyle, convenience, affordability and celebrity endorsement.

Some candidates provided a definition of athleisure in the opening paragraph, to orientate the reader. Strong candidates were able to clearly organise their writing and put forward distinct reasons to be further explored or developed in each subsequent paragraph. They were also able to employ a journalistic tone to inform and entertain the reader.

The effects of the rise in popularity of athleisure wear were often given (e.g. encouraging healthier lifestyles, raising awareness of the importance of exercise). Such arguments needed to be on topic and linked back to the popularity of athleisure and not wander off into more general discussion about the pros of living a healthy life. The latter was characteristic of candidates who received lower marks on this question.

Question 7: Learning English through Drama

This question focused on whether it is desirable for people to watch stage plays and whether viewing a video-recording of a live stage play is a good way of exposing more people to drama on stage. Candidates were given the choice of arguing for or against the idea, or addressing both pros and cons.

Some well-written articles offered personal and memorable recounts of watching video-recorded and live performances, while others gave a very good critique of the differences between live stage performance and video recordings, and the potential impact on each art form. Strong candidates were able to pick up on the specific nature of the magazine and write an article with a specific reader in mind, namely someone with an interest in drama or film. The tone could be journalistic, addressing the reader directly, or candidates could adopt a more formal, serious tone. Consistency in tone throughout the text was important. Weak students tended to talk about a play or drama in general, or wrote a film review.

There was some variability in possible interpretations of the question, for example where and how people might be given access to stage plays. However, the issue of watching *recordings* of stage plays as opposed to watching plays performed live, was important for task fulfilment.

Question 8: Learning English through Poems and Songs

For this question, candidates had to write a letter introducing themselves as an applicant, saying why they were interested in attending a poetry workshop, and why they deserved to be selected as one of the participants.

Strong candidates were able to write about themselves objectively to outline their relationship with or interest in poetry and how they could benefit from participating in the workshop. They were able to convey their individuality and strong desire to take part in the workshop with confidence and passion yet not appear overly self-possessed or oversell themselves.

Some candidates wrote about their favourite poem. Candidates needed to be careful not to appear to be analysing a poem; instead, they had to draw the reader's attention to why it was relevant to the workshop application.

Question 9: Learning English through Short Stories

This question required writing a narrative text from the perspective of a pet bird whose cage door is left open. There were many ways of approaching the task and the 'story'. The open-ended prompt gave candidates the freedom to experiment with how to organise and develop their ideas within a narrative. For example, the story did not have to follow a chronological order. Candidates were expected to show creativity and originality in their stories and to engage the readers' attention through their imagination.

Strong candidates were able to use literary devices to good effect (e.g. use of similes, metaphors). It was important not to overuse these devices however. They were also able to use a range of adjectives and adverbials to create atmosphere and emotion and to write dialogue in direct speech, particularly as an anthropomorphic bird. Some weak candidates misinterpreted the question and wrote the story as an omniscient narrator or from the perspective of the owner rather than the bird.

Recommendations for candidates

Genre

Candidates need to develop a good awareness of a range of different written genres such as narratives and persuasive texts. They need a good understanding of the social purposes of a given genre and how the organisation of the text they are writing and their choice of grammar and vocabulary help achieve the social and communicative purposes. Developing this kind of awareness should be a priority for all candidates as it is useful in all English Language papers.

Language

A variety of sentence structures and forms need to be used appropriately and intelligibly to enhance communication. Candidates need to be aware of the uses of different tenses and voices, and be able to use these appropriately. Stock phrases should be used only where appropriate to the context and intended meaning.

Coherence

Candidates should shape or sequence ideas within paragraphs and across paragraphs. They also need to build up a range of grammatical and lexical structures for achieving the same communicative function (e.g. giving advice), to avoid repetition. They also need to develop an awareness of the use of devices such as synonyms and superordinates to avoid unnecessary repetition of vocabulary and to help their texts hang together. The flow of ideas should be clear and logical. Longer responses should maintain coherence. If too many details are included without appropriate links or effective cohesive devices, there is a risk of losing the reader.

Length

Part B task instructs candidates to write around 400 words. Longer responses will not necessarily get a higher score simply by virtue of length. If writing beyond the word guide, the length should not impede communicative effectiveness.

Paper 3

Paper 3 consists 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 3 was 53,600, of whom 28.4% chose B1 and 71.6% 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 | 51 | 46.1 | 24.0 |
| Part B1 | 52 | 51.0 | 23.8 |
| Part B2 | 52 | 50.4 | 18.3 |

Part A (Compulsory section)

In Part A, candidates had to listen to four recordings related to a magazine about science and culture and its upcoming issue, the theme of which was to be games and play.

Task 1 (Mean = 57.8%)

Candidates were required to fill in a note sheet while listening to a meeting in which the editor of the magazine, Kaity, talks to her colleagues Iris and Dan about the next issue of the magazine. Items 1, 3 and 5 asked candidates to add adjectives which described how each speaker felt their weekend had gone while 2, 4 and 6 required the reasons for their feelings. These items varied in difficulty. Item 1 required the answer *terrible* or *awful* to describe Iris's weekend (65% correct) because *her dog was sick* (70%), which seemed quite straightforward, and Item 3, 'Dan had a *great* or *wonderful* weekend' proved to be an easy item (89%). However, the reason, 'because he *bought a big TV*' was much more challenging (25%). Similarly, 'Kaity had a *boring* weekend' was found to be an easy item (89%) while the reason, 'she *had to work all weekend*' proved very difficult (13%), as candidates were required to express both the idea of obligation and that she was working the entire weekend.

Candidates were then required to complete a table with information about the topics and the reasons for Kaity's decisions to accept or not the suggestions for the next issue of the magazine. Items 7 to 12 proved to be generally straightforward. However, the reason why Kaity did not accept the decision (i.e. *Dan had done no research*) proved to be challenging for candidates (16% correct). In some cases, candidates did not seem to be familiar with the term 'research', though it was said four times in the conversation, or perhaps they had difficulty in transforming the direct speech in the conversation into a suitable form to fill the space required in the table.

Task 2 (Mean = 45.5%)

Task 2 consisted of three parts. In Part A, Iris explained a new game called 'Monster Maze' to Dan. Candidates were given an illustration of what the game looked like and had to label three parts of it. These items proved to be relatively straightforward. Part B contained two innovative items in which candidates had to listen to the two speakers describe Dan's moves in the game and plot these by drawing circles in the relevant squares in the maze and an 'M' where they thought the monster was located. These two items (17 and 18) required candidates to demonstrate their understanding by showing that they were able to visualise what Dan was doing. The items were answered correctly by 55% and 59% respectively.

Part C of Task 2 was more descriptive and candidates were required to answer questions relating to the design of the game. These items (19 to 26) proved to be a good deal more challenging for candidates as they required complete and unambiguous answers. Firstly, Items 19 and 20 required candidates to give Dan's two suggestions for improving the game. These were, *make the game more colourful* and *add more monsters*. These two items were answered correctly by 37% and 46% of candidates respectively. Though seemingly a straightforward item, many candidates did not provide answers complete enough to be considered a clear suggestion. In Items 21 and 22, candidates were asked how people play the game online. In Item 21, many candidates wrote answers like 'by actually

speaking' or 'voice control'. However, such answers did not explain how people played the game (i.e. *with a phone*) and consequently the percentage of correct answers was quite low.

In Items 23 to 26, candidates had to complete the sentences describing the steps involved in ensuring that players could trust that there was no cheating when placing the monsters in the grid. All elements of these answers were required to be correct as otherwise the meaning would not be clear. Many candidates were able to get some parts of the answer but not the whole answer and so were not able to gain the marks.

Task 3 (Mean = 47.5%)

For Task 3, the scenario was that Kaity called Dan to ask him to edit an article she had been working on. There were three parts to this task. In Part A, candidates were required to correct three sentences which related to a painting called 'Children's Games' or indicate that they were correct, as appropriate. Item 27 stated that 'It [the painting] was started in the year 1560'. Candidates had to change 'started' to *completed* and 40% of candidates were able to do this. The next item (Item 28), in which candidates had to correct the spelling of the painter from 'Pete' to *Pieter* proved to be relatively easy as the answer was spelled out by Dan, and 76% answered this correctly. The third item in this part, Item 29, proved easier still, with 91% correct. This is commendable as the information was quite complicated.

In Part B of Task 3, candidates were provided with a painting and had to provide labels for the four games shown in the painting for the magazine article. Candidates were instructed to use no more than four words for each label. These items proved to be relatively challenging, with the percentage of correct answers ranging from 37% to 61%. Of these items, Item 31 proved the most difficult: many candidates simply stated that it was a wedding and so did not gain a point.

The third part of Task 3, Part C, required candidates to listen as Kaity described a section of her article about present day games that use classic art for their graphics and complete a summary text of the conversation. Again the items varied in difficulty, with some proving very challenging. Completing summary texts based on listening comprehension requires candidates to process the information they hear and reformulate it so that it fits grammatically into the summary. The first item, Item 34, required the answer *8-bit graphics* and just 27% of candidates were able to get this, though the information was repeated twice. The following information, use *little blocks* (Item 35, 31%) with only *a few colours* (Item 36, 17%) to create *complex pictures* (Item 37, 30%) did prove to be very challenging as the information was spoken as one utterance although the information was rephrased by Kaity. Such items test candidates' ability to process spoken text by breaking it down into separate pieces of information quickly and require higher levels of listening comprehension ability. Items 38 (*funny*) and 39 (*for free*), which were answered correctly by 64% and 44% of candidates respectively, proved to be easier as the information was signposted quite clearly.

Task 4 (Mean = 32.5%)

In Task 4, candidates listened to a podcast in which Kaity discussed the psychology of games with two professors of psychology. This task, consisting mainly of questions requiring fuller answers, often in the form of complete sentences or clauses, was designed to be more challenging for candidates. In addition to this, the content was more challenging intellectually and required more interpretation and inference to answer the questions asked.

The speakers first discussed the definition of 'game'. Candidates needed to extract the three key aspects mentioned in this respect from the discussion. Of these, it was Item 41 *has an outcome or goal* (23%) that proved the most difficult. Many candidates either did not write a complete enough answer to merit a point or wrote 'go' instead of 'goal' thus creating a nonsensical answer. The two professors then disagreed about a point, which candidates had to identify as *life is a game* (Item 43), which was answered correctly by 60% of candidates and was the easiest item in this task as the information was repeated, albeit in different forms, four times.

Candidates were then asked to complete a table with details of the types of play and the benefits two types of animals got from it. Candidates' performance in this section was variable. For instance, more

than half of the candidates (57%) were able to answer for Item 45 that the type of play that fish engaged in was *play jumping* or *jumping for fun* (Item 45). However, when asked for the benefit of this, i.e. *it helps them to escape from predators/hunters* (Item 46), only 19% answered it correctly. It would seem that the concept and vocabulary were a little difficult for most candidates.

The third example of animals and play discussed concerned rats, and candidates had to extract from the discussion the three key points about this given by one of the speakers. The first point (Item 47) was that *one rat is always stronger than the other*. A total of 36% of candidates answered this item correctly as the information was a little complex but was repeated. The next item was more challenging though, that *the weaker rat will stop playing if it always loses* (Item 48), and was answered correctly by 27% of candidates. The key word in this answer was 'always' and many candidates missed this word, or the sense of it, from their answer. The third point was that *the stronger rat lets the weaker rat win some of the time so they can keep playing* (Item 49). This was a complex concept and had to be fully expressed, with all elements in the answer. Consequently, it was answered correctly by only 8% of candidates, with most missing some parts of the answer. It should be noted that this item, as well with others in this task, discriminated well between the top performing candidates and the rest of the cohort.

In general, Part A worked very well, with a mean score close to 50% and a good range of item difficulties. The tasks did become progressively more difficult, as intended, though Task 2 was a little more difficult than Task 3 due to the part requiring longer answers. The test made use of different spoken text types and different item types, including gap-fill, diagram completion, picture labelling, and summary/paraphrase of key ideas.

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 also predict the vocabulary they will hear in the recording and make guesses about possible answers. Candidates should read the prompts and stems carefully to predict the required form of the answer, i.e. whether it should be a single noun, noun phrase, clause or sentence conveying a more complete meaning. For some tasks it is important to gain an understanding of the whole section of conversation and so candidates may 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.

Part B

In both Parts B1 and B2, the situation was similar, with the candidate adopting the role of Sammy Tsang, an employee at a board game company in Hong Kong called Griffin Workshop. In both parts, candidates were assessed on their ability to effectively locate and communicate relevant content with effective communication in English (accuracy of language use, coherence and organisation, and appropriacy). 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 effectively manipulate content from the Data File in a wide variety of ways to create grammatically correct texts, and produce original language using a range of sentence structures with accurate grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Part B1

Part B1 consisted of three tasks which were connected with Griffin Workshop's latest board game. The B1 Data File included the following texts: a podcast which candidates listened to; emails; a thread from a board game forum; questionnaire results; a Skype chat and screenshots of a WhatsApp group's messages.

The candidates' performance is summarised in Table 4:

Table 4: Paper 3 Part B1 results

| Task | Full Mark | Mean Score (%) | Standard Deviation (%) |
|------|-----------|----------------|------------------------|
| 5 | 14 | 45.4 | 24.8 |
| 6 | 18 | 51.7 | 27.4 |
| 7 | 20 | 54.3 | 25.9 |

From Table 4, it can be seen that Task 5 proved to be the most challenging while Tasks 6 and 7 proved to be slightly easier. The overall mean was 50.9% for all of Part B1 and it proved to be successful in discriminating weaker from stronger candidates and in terms of internal reliability.

Task 5

In this task, candidates were required to complete an application form for Griffin Workshop to attend the MegaGame Conference. This involved identifying relevant information from their listening notes and two texts in the Data File (Skype chat and the email exchange) to complete the task.

Most candidates were able to locate the relevant information for Part 1 of the form, particularly for Items 5.1, 5.2, 5.5 and 5.7. The headings in the Data File and the lexical links in the questions on the form seemed to provide clear direction on selecting the correct information from the Data File. The more challenging items were 5.3 and 5.4. Some candidates appeared to miss the cue that *special dietary needs* on the form was the same as requesting information about *special food needs* as mentioned in the email correspondence in the Data File. Very weak candidates were not able to provide an answer for this item.

Part 2 of the form presented different challenges for candidates. Items 5.8a-c and 5.9b came from the podcast and some of the weaker candidates did not seem able to follow the listening input or record accurate notes. Candidates also needed to provide information for these items in complete sentences and create a coherent text. Stronger candidates made a better attempt to write a coherent text and manipulate their notes from the listening input, albeit with some grammatical errors.

Task 6

In this task, candidates were required to write an invitation email to a well-known game reviewer to do a YouTube video review for Griffin Workshop's new game. In the email, they needed to briefly describe the new game for the reviewer as well as inform him that the target audience of the game was teenagers. Candidates needed to use information from their listening notes as well as relevant information from the *BoardGameFan* forum to complete the task.

Better candidates demonstrated a good understanding of the genre, such as including an appropriate and relevant subject line. Such candidates organised the details of the email in a logical order and manipulated the relevant information from the Data File. This manipulation also included transforming the text from informal language to the more formal register needed to address the reader. Stronger candidates provided an effective introductory paragraph (e.g. by referring to the reason for writing and mentioning the previous video review the reader had done).

Stronger candidates were also able to discriminate effectively which information was most relevant, as well as manipulate the language to successfully incorporate those points into their own writing. Weaker candidates demonstrated an ability to locate information within the Data File but tended to copy the information directly. This affected the consistency of the register of their texts, as well as the marks awarded for language. More specifically, these candidates seemed to have difficulty reporting all the information about the game (i.e. they tended to miss Items 6.3c and 6.3f). This may have been due to their being challenged by the listening input as these items came directly from the podcast.

Task 7

Candidates were required to write a report for an upcoming company meeting. Candidates needed to summarise the results of a questionnaire which had been distributed to a group of people who tested the company's latest board game. Candidates also needed to summarise what had been done to respond to the comments from the test group and what tasks were still outstanding. Candidates had to identify relevant information by synthesising information from the *BoardGameFan* forum, the questionnaire results and the WhatsApp group messages in the Data File. They then needed to present this information appropriately, using an appropriate register and a report structure.

More able candidates demonstrated an understanding of the report genre by presenting the information using a report layout. This included elements such as a relevant title, a brief introduction to orientate the reader, sections with headings, and so on. Very weak candidates showed much less reader awareness and overall awareness of the genre. For example, these candidates often used a vague title (e.g. *Company Meeting*) and often did not attempt to set a context or state the purpose for writing the report. Overall, this would have a negative effect on the reader.

Candidates were challenged by the aspect of this task which required them to summarise visual information. Items 7.1a, 7.2a, 7.3a and 7.4a required the candidate to summarise the main statistically significant answer for the question asked in the questionnaire. Stronger candidates were able to do this and were clearly not distracted by the less relevant data, choosing not to include this in their reports. They were also able to take the extra step to link the results of the questionnaire to the additional specific comments from the game testers. Very weak candidates struggled with summarising the data and often copied the questions, the corresponding data and comments directly from page 8 of the Data File.

Most candidates produced a separate section or paragraph for the action taken/outstanding action points with regard to the questionnaire results. This was more successful for most candidates as they were able to locate the items in the Data File and present the information in the same order in which they had presented the findings of the questionnaire. Once again, stronger candidates were able to successfully manipulate the Data File and use their own language, clearly linking points together.

Part B2

Part B2 consisted of three tasks which focused mainly on Griffin Workshop's development of its latest board game *Escape to Hong Kong Island*.

The B2 Data File included the following kinds of texts: a podcast, which candidates listened to; emails; a personal blog; a bank's online webpage; questionnaire results; and a Skype text chat.

The candidates' performance is summarised in Table 5:

Table 5: Paper 3 Part B2 results

| Task | Full Mark | Mean Score (%) | Standard Deviation (%) |
|------|-----------|----------------|------------------------|
| 8 | 22 | 47.8 | 19.8 |
| 9 | 13 | 55.7 | 22.1 |
| 10 | 17 | 49.7 | 21.4 |

With an overall mean score of 50.4%, Part B2 proved to be slightly easier for this year's candidates compared with Part B2 in previous years. The paper proved to be successful in discriminating weaker from stronger candidates and in terms of its own internal reliability.

Task 8

Overall, with a mean of 47.8% this task was the most challenging of the three B2 tasks. Candidates were required to write a funding report for Sammy Tsang's boss. Candidates needed to summarise the advantages and disadvantages of two possible funding options for the company's latest board game. The two funding options were to apply for The Acorn Grant, a grant awarded by a local bank, or use an online funding website called Gamezstart. The document would be needed in an upcoming company board meeting and therefore could be regarded as an internal report. Candidates had to identify relevant information by synthesising sources in the Data File, including the listening input. They then needed to present this information appropriately, using an appropriate register.

Stronger candidates were able to locate and summarise the main points concisely, logically organise the information and avoid including irrelevant information. In terms of structure, this task required a report structure, and many candidates attempted this (e.g. providing a title, brief introduction, headings/numbered headings and subheadings, etc.).

It is possible to write a report of this length without using headings and some candidates attempted this, relying on topic sentences to guide the reader. This was done with varying degrees of success. Weaker candidates sometimes wrote the report as an advantage-disadvantage essay. This suggested a lack of awareness of the genre, the purpose of a report and the readers' needs.

Some candidates started the text in a fairly abrupt manner and some did not include a relevant title for the report. This was unfortunate as an effective title informs the reader about a report's focus (e.g. *Funding Report, Report on Escape to Hong Kong Island*). Weaker candidates also failed to include an introductory overview paragraph which would effectively orientate the reader. Instead they resorted to prepared set phrases, such as *Let me talk about the advantages of using Gamezstart as our sponsorship first*.

In contrast, stronger candidates were able to begin the report by concisely explaining its aims, with some candidates referring back to the previous meeting, as mentioned in Angel Fu's email on page 4 of the Data File:

In the March meeting, we discussed the funding option for Escape to Hong Kong Island. This report summarises the choices and the advantages and disadvantages respectively.

Candidates needed to extract and manipulate relevant information from the Data File, namely data from a personal blog, from the online webpage of a bank which provided detail about a grant that the bank awards on an annual basis, and from the notes they took from the listening input. Many of the weaker candidates were not able to identify the level of formality from the bank's webpage and subsequently did not manipulate the language well enough from texts in the Data File, sometimes directly copying phrases which affected overall appropriacy; for example, using informal phrases (e.g. *so everybody's happy; it's a win-win situation; a bunch of stuff; no ifs or buts*).

One key part of the content regarding the disadvantages of Gamezstart came from the personal blog on page 5 of the Data File. Stronger candidates were able to successfully locate the relevant detail and summarise it, but less able candidates seemed to overlook some of the detail and relied on copying complete sentences, meaning that they did not successfully demonstrate an ability to manipulate language from the Data File. These candidates did not appear to have read the information in the blog thoroughly. For instance, some candidates did not go on to read the comments section below the blog, which mentioned two distinct disadvantages when using Gamezstart (Items 8.2b and 8.2c), meaning they missed these task completion marks.

Stronger candidates were better able to manipulate the Data File and successfully incorporated Data File content into their own writing. They also converted spoken/informal speech so that it was appropriately and accurately presented in the text. Also, successful texts maintained levels of appropriacy across different areas, such as layout, register, and overall reader awareness. Weaker texts tended to demonstrate problems with organisation and reader awareness, and inconsistency in grammatical accuracy and register, often due to direct copying from the Data File.

Task 9

This task proved to be the easiest of the three, with a mean of 55.7%. Candidates were required to write an email to Jacky Shin at the Crossroads Game Café as part of an ongoing correspondence to make arrangements for a competition to be held at the café. The task required candidates to catch up with the correspondence to date, confirm arrangements and request a discount for the fees involved in hiring the café. The text could be written to Jacky Shin in a slightly less formal register as it formed part of an on-going correspondence, or a little more formally as this would be the first time that Sammy Tsang had contacted Jacky Shin.

Most candidates were able to organise a coherent text in three main parts: confirming date and number of attendees, further details (responding to Jacky Shin's offer to let regular customers know about the competition and informing him about the special guest), and details of the financial aspects of the evening (who will pay the fees and making a request for a discount).

It is worth noting some issues with relevance and appropriacy in Item 9.5. Candidates were required to ask Jacky Shin for a discount of 50%. This was an important point in the email and one which needed to be handled carefully in order not to upset the reader. Some candidates framed the request well, but others were too direct and even took an inappropriate bargaining tone (for instance, mentioning that Dragon Workshop would be willing to accept a reduced discount of 40% would be counterproductive at this stage).

Stronger candidates were better able to manipulate the Data File and successfully incorporated Data File content into their own writing. This included converting informal language from the Skype chat so that it was appropriately and accurately presented in the text. A notable grammatical feature in the task was verb tenses, and this challenged some candidates, who were inconsistent in their use of tenses, particularly for reporting the decision about the special guest attending the event. During the Skype chat, Eric Park is invited and accepts the invitation to attend. However, weaker candidates reported this as a future idea (e.g. *We will invite Eric Park to come*), which was misleading to the reader, especially as Jacky Shin is sending out an email to regular customers about the event.

Task 10

In this task, candidates were required to write an email giving feedback to the artist Ryan Au about his artwork samples for the latest board game *Escape to Hong Kong Island*. Candidates were instructed to also tell him about the deadline for the revised artwork samples and to impress upon him not to be late in meeting the deadline but without upsetting him. Candidates needed to refer to the questionnaire results from groups who tested the game, staff's comments in the Skype chat and internal emails, as well as their notes from the listening input.

Stronger candidates were able to produce a relevant, concise and appropriate email which would make a positive impression on the reader despite providing some negative feedback to him. Weaker candidates omitted important details, such as the deadline for the revised artwork samples (Item 10.4a) or correctly included the deadline and date but did not frame the request in an appropriate manner due to simply copying from the Data File (e.g. *get it done by 27th of this month*). Stronger candidates were more able to summarise the visual information from page 8, whereas less able candidates tended to report all of the data. There was a sense that these candidates were unable to discriminate between the relevant and less relevant data when selecting which data to summarise.

In terms of specific content, Items 10.2c and 10.2d came from the listening input and some candidates either omitted these points or did not seem to be able to identify that one followed on naturally from the other (i.e. that parents usually buy the game and will not buy the game if the artwork is too violent or graphic). This may have been because they were not able to fully follow the listening input and/or record notes accurately. Stronger candidates were able to use their notes from the listening input and summarise the points well.

With regard to structure and overall coherence, stronger candidates organised the email well. They provided a suitable opening and closing paragraph, with the body paragraphs falling into three clear areas: positive feedback, less positive feedback with suggestions for improvement, and the deadline. Others organised the main body of the text by main area, with both positive and negative comments plus suggestions (e.g. one paragraph focusing on the artwork on the cards, another focusing on the map, and so on). These organisational structures meant the text was easy to read and the use of cohesive devices with effective topic sentences helped the reader to follow the text. Weaker candidates tended to produce less organised texts; for example, some candidates put all the feedback into one paragraph, meaning it became a lengthy paragraph that would be difficult for the reader to navigate.

In terms of grammar, stronger candidates controlled the verb tenses well and were able to frame the requests and suggestions to the artist using appropriate structure/modal verbs. Stronger candidates were also more able to manipulate the Data File and successfully incorporate Data File content into their own writing using appropriate language. This also included converting spoken/informal speech so that it was appropriately and accurately presented in the text.

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 tasks, rather than trying to note every single point made. Candidates are also advised to review the notes made from the listening input to check if any information is connected directly to any content in the Data File (checking for the relationships between the pieces of information, such as cause-effect relationships or problem-solution relationships).

Many weaker candidates (in both B1 and B2) copied text verbatim from the Data File. This inevitably affected the coherence of the text and very often the appropriacy of what they were writing as the content was sometimes in a very informal register or was from a spoken text. This then clashed with other sections of the text being produced.

Beyond practising writing a variety of texts, candidates should work on summarising skills. Tasks 7, 8 and 10 required candidates to summarise information and many candidates exceeded the recommended number of words in completing these tasks. Conciseness is often a key facet of effective workplace written communication. A case in point is the summarising of visual information such as from graphs and charts, which again caused candidates problems in this year's paper.

Candidates are advised to read the prompt carefully to ensure they understand all elements of the task. In addition to reading the Data File carefully to make sure they have all information relevant to the task, candidates should be prepared to apply their inferencing-through-reading skills to make sense of information that may not be explicitly stated or in order to make the link between two pieces of information which appear in different parts of the Data File.

Paper 4

A total of 51,119 candidates took part in the public speaking examination, which was conducted over eight days for normal examining and two days for candidates with special needs. A total of 24 different sets of question papers were used.

Candidates' speaking performances were judged in four domains: 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 7.6, 7.4, 7.2 and 7.8 respectively. The percentage mean score was 53%.

The speaking examination has two parts: Part A, Group Interaction and Part B Individual Response. In Part A, candidates are given eight minutes (or six minutes for a group of three candidates) to discuss the ideas presented in a short text, and may use the discussion prompts given to guide the group interaction. During the group interaction, candidates may be required to perform a variety of functional tasks, such as making suggestions or improvement, giving opinions, comparing and contrasting, identifying pros and cons, and discussing problems and solutions. After Part A, each candidate is asked one question by an examiner. Candidates are not given any time to prepare for this part of the examination.

Part A Group Interaction

Examiners reported that there was a willingness among most candidates to participate in the group interaction, even by candidates whose language skills were not particularly strong. Therefore, there were few cases of completely silent candidates who chose not to participate at all.

As is evident in the mean score for Ideas & Organisation, which was highest among the four domains, most candidates were able to generate ideas to talk about. Candidates performed best with topics such as those related to the school, the local community, and environmental and social issues. Strong candidates were able to extract relevant information from the text and acknowledge the source when using it to support their ideas. They were also able to elaborate on ideas proposed by other group members spontaneously, give examples from their personal experience, draw on related information taken from other sources and engage actively in the discussion in a collaborative manner. Weak students tended to present ideas which were vague and not stimulating to the discussion. They were almost entirely reliant on the notes they had written down, rather than responding to the ideas presented by other members of the group.

The issue of certain candidates speaking over other candidates, or not allowing other candidates to take their turn, was a problem. Candidates who dominated the group interaction or did not allow other members of the group to participate were judged negatively by examiners in terms of Communication Strategies. Candidates who performed well in this part of the examination demonstrated an ability to articulate and interact politely with other group members, adjusting the pace of their speech when speaking to different candidates in the group. Candidates who read from notecards or delivered a prepared monologue, as opposed to striving for genuine interaction and responding to what others said, were not judged favourably.

Stronger candidates were able to self-correct and demonstrated an ability to use a range of sentence patterns such as those containing relative clauses, conditionals and question tags.

Part B Individual Response

The majority of candidates were able to make full use of the one minute given. Examiners noted that this part of the examination allowed less able candidates to repeat similar points that they had made in the Group Interaction. This was useful since it meant that they had something to say but, in the worst cases, candidates simply repeated what they had already said in the previous section. More able candidates took the opportunity to display both the range of their linguistic abilities and the range and sophistication of their arguments and ideas.

General Recommendations

Candidates are reminded to speak at a natural pace so that all group members and examiners can understand what they are saying: fast does not equal fluent. Fluency is achieved by the use of judicious pausing and chunking of speech. Speaking very quickly may negatively affect pronunciation and intonation, as well as the interaction between candidates.

The overreliance on notecards remains a problem. It is recommended that candidates take *notes* (i.e. short phrases and key words) as a reminder of things they would like to bring up in the discussion, and speak as if these were ideas they had been thinking about, rather than writing out ideas in complete sentences.

Candidates should be aware that making long, speech-like contributions does not necessarily lead to a high mark. Examiners are instructed to give credit to candidates who engage in more natural interaction through shorter but more frequent turns which demonstrate that they are capable of co-constructing meaning. Therefore, candidates should think of the other members of their group as co-collaborators. All members should actively listen and respond to the ideas raised, adding ideas to the discussion, commenting, critiquing or asking for clarification of what has just been said. The flow of the discussion will depend on the cooperation of all members, and the ability to maintain a balance between a healthy exchange of ideas and mutual engagement is critical to elevating the performance of all candidates.

As candidates should be engaging with other group members during the group interaction, they should remember to direct their speech to other group members, not just the oral examiner.

If they are to be confident in their own speaking ability, candidates cannot limit themselves simply to practising HKDSE-style group interactions and past papers. They should practise interacting with their peers in English at every opportunity, both in school and outside. They should also take every opportunity to expose themselves to spontaneous, unscripted spoken interaction in English. Nowadays, there is an almost limitless pool of such English interaction available to watch, and this should be exploited by candidates to raise their awareness about turn-taking strategies and how spontaneous interaction actually functions.

As regards the Individual Response, it should be noted that candidates are not expected to fill up every second of the allocated one minute. It is much better to give a relevant and spontaneous response which answers the question in a thoughtful manner than one that lasts for exactly one minute but does not display any of these qualities.

School-based Assessment (SBA)

SBA is divided into two parts: Part A, the reading/viewing component and Part B, the elective component. Students are required to do one assessment for each part, of which one must be an individual presentation and the other a group interaction. The assessment is based on the student's oral performance and the total score obtained from the two parts constitutes 15% of the subject mark.

This year, 51,343 students participated in the SBA. The mean moderated mark was 62.6%. According to statistical moderation data, 78.9% of schools were in the 'as expected' category, 9.4% in the 'slightly higher than expected' category and 10% in the 'slightly lower than expected' category. In the categories of 'higher than expected' and 'much higher than expected', the figures were 1.3% and 0.4% respectively.

General Comments and Recommendations

The majority of the students performed relatively well during their assessment. They seem to have put some effort in preparing and practising for the assessment, and the result of their efforts can be seen in their marks.

At the top end of the spectrum, students did extremely well, with some students obtaining Level 6 in all of the four domains of Pronunciation & Delivery, Communication Strategies, Vocabulary & Language Patterns, and Ideas & Organisation. These students were able to give interesting and well-organised individual presentations. They were able to speak fluently and naturally with clear, accurate pronunciation with appropriate intonation. They demonstrated audience awareness and were able to

maintain good eye contact. They used a wide range of vocabulary and were able to present their ideas clearly with accurate grammar, and elaborated with details, examples and personal responses.

Students at the lower end tended to be less confident but the majority were still able to give an adequate presentation. Their major problems were pronunciation and language accuracy. Very often they were unable to pronounce sound clusters accurately, which sometimes made it difficult for others to understand what they were saying. Intonation was also one of their weak areas. As for language accuracy, these students lacked vocabulary to express their ideas clearly and they had problems using correct language patterns. It was encouraging, however, to see some students really trying hard to present their ideas in spite of their weak pronunciation and language.

During the group interaction, the higher ability students showed that they had a good idea of what a discussion should be like. They understood the importance of listening to others and were able to give appropriate responses to other members of the group so that their contributions were usually relevant and coherent. They were good at turn-taking and often tried to include the quieter members in the discussion by giving them opportunities to speak. They had a wide range of vocabulary and were able to make use of different sentence patterns.

The lower ability students had difficulty in understanding what other members of the group were saying. As a result, what they said was not always relevant to what the others were discussing and sometimes they found it difficult to take a turn as they needed more time to form an appropriate reply. This put them at a disadvantage in the interaction and resulted in lower marks.

Since students usually get low marks due to poor pronunciation and problems with language accuracy, it is worth spending more time on these two areas. They can listen to some simple audio books and read along with the recordings. This can help them with their pronunciation, and improve their intonation and language accuracy. Another way to improve language is to keep a vocabulary book. Besides the definition of the words, examples of how the words are used could be written down. Whenever possible, they can try and make use of the new vocabulary so that they can develop a wider range of vocabulary and sentence structures. If students are willing to make an effort to improve and practise more, they will definitely be able to do better. Once their pronunciation and language use are improved, they will be able to do well in the other two domains and get a much better score in their SBA component, as well as Paper 4, which tests the same skills.

The drawbacks of reading aloud and memorisation during the assessment have been discussed in great detail in previous reports but this problem is still prevalent throughout the ability spectrum. Some high ability students wrote out their scripts, memorised them and then recited what they had memorised. Less able students tended to copy out chunks of information from different sources and then read everything out during their assessment. In both cases, students were given marks which were lower than they could have achieved by presenting in a more desirable manner. This problem was more common during individual presentations but it also occurred during the group interaction, where the insertion of a prepared chunk negatively affected the flow of the interaction. Students are strongly advised not to engage in memorisation or reading aloud.

Conclusion

One of the positive effects of the implementation of SBA is that students now seem to be more willing to speak in English, and even students at the lower end of the spectrum are now able to express some ideas in English. Students also seem to show more confidence in speaking in English, and this could be due to the fact that they are now given more opportunities to practise speaking in school. The fact that SBA is formative in nature and consists of two assessments gives students the opportunity to realise what they need to improve and to have another assessment in which they can do better. This motivates them to put more effort into preparing for the assessment. When students take full advantage of SBA, they will perform better in the HKDSE and develop better language skills which will help them in future, no matter what career they decide to pursue.

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 | | Paper 3B | | Paper 3B | |
|----------|------------------|----------|------------------|----------|------------------|
| (easier) | (more difficult) | (easier) | (more difficult) | (easier) | (more difficult) |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 43 | 25 |
| 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 44 | 27 |
| 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 45 | 29 |
| 3 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 46 | 30 |
| 4 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 47 | 32 |
| 5 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 48 | 35 |
| 6 | 2 | 6 | 2 | 49 | 38 |
| 7 | 2 | 7 | 2 | 50 | 41 |
| 8 | 2 | 8 | 2 | 51 | 44 |
| 9 | 3 | 9 | 2 | 52 | 47 |
| 10 | 3 | 10 | 2 | | |
| 11 | 3 | 11 | 3 | | |
| 12 | 4 | 12 | 3 | | |
| 13 | 4 | 13 | 3 | | |
| 14 | 5 | 14 | 3 | | |
| 15 | 5 | 15 | 3 | | |
| 16 | 5 | 16 | 3 | | |
| 17 | 5 | 17 | 3 | | |
| 18 | 6 | 18 | 4 | | |
| 19 | 6 | 19 | 4 | | |
| 20 | 7 | 20 | 5 | | |
| 21 | 8 | 21 | 5 | | |
| 22 | 8 | 22 | 5 | | |
| 23 | 9 | 23 | 6 | | |
| 24 | 10 | 24 | 6 | | |
| 25 | 10 | 25 | 7 | | |
| 26 | 11 | 26 | 7 | | |
| 27 | 12 | 27 | 8 | | |
| 28 | 13 | 28 | 8 | | |
| 29 | 14 | 29 | 9 | | |
| 30 | 15 | 30 | 10 | | |
| 31 | 16 | 31 | 11 | | |
| 32 | 17 | 32 | 12 | | |
| 33 | 19 | 33 | 13 | | |
| 34 | 20 | 34 | 14 | | |
| 35 | 22 | 35 | 15 | | |
| 36 | 23 | 36 | 17 | | |
| 37 | 25 | 37 | 18 | | |
| 38 | 28 | 38 | 19 | | |
| 39 | 31 | 39 | 20 | | |
| 40 | 34 | 40 | 22 | | |
| 41 | 37 | 41 | 23 | | |
| 42 | 40 | 42 | 24 | | |