

Candidates' Performance

Paper 1

Paper 1 consists of three parts: Part A, Part B1 and Part B2. Candidates have 1.5 hours to complete Part A, which is compulsory, and either Part B1 (the easier section) or Part B2 (the more difficult section). The weighting for Part A and Part B is 50% per part. The total number of candidates attempting Paper 1 was 51,218. A total of 23,295 candidates chose to do Part B1 (about 45.5%) while 28,024 (about 54.5%) chose to do 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 | 51.7 | 23.5 |
| Part B1 | 42 | 45.2 | 19.7 |
| Part B2 | 42 | 46.3 | 19.5 |

Part A (Compulsory section)

There was one reading passage in this part of the test. The passage was an interview with a writer about his newly-published book on the theme of 'messiness'. The writer argues in this book that switching between tasks and adopting 'messy' strategies may work for many people. Although there were some challenging lexical items, the use of interview questions as signposts and the informal style made the text easy to follow.

Candidates' reading comprehension was tested through a range of item types including True/False/Not Given and an editing task. A matching task was designed to test candidates' global comprehension as well as their understanding of meanings in different parts of the text.

Relatively simple factual information was tested by the True/False/Not Given items in Q.1i-v, which were answered correctly by over 60% of candidates. These items tested the fundamental reading ability of candidates, so it was reassuring to see them being answered well. Across the rest of Part A, other items answered correctly by more than two thirds of candidates included Q.4iii, Q.8ii, Q.16iii and Q.18iii. These represent a range of item types, including proofreading, gap-fill and holistic idea-matching. More challenging items were quite equally spread around Part A of the paper. They included Q.2, Q.4i, iv, Q6-7, Q.16iv and Q.18i, each answered correctly by less than a third of candidates.

Q.4 contained six individual items that asked candidates to proofread a summary, highlight mistakes in it, then correct them. Some candidates failed to follow instructions and instead ticked multiple lines as 'correct' (candidates were instructed to tick only one), underlined the identified words to be changed in an idiosyncratic way (perhaps underlining more than one word on a line, again against the instructions), or did not tick any lines, despite providing replacement words.

Q.16 was a gap-fill task, where candidates were asked to use words from the text to complete the paraphrases. A significant number of candidates misspelled the words, resulting in lost marks. Q.18 was a matching task where candidates were required to identify the source of ideas in a conversation between two friends. They were instructed to only use each paragraph number once,

but a relatively large number used a single number several times, automatically resulting in those items being scored as incorrect.

One of the most difficult items in Part A was Q.11, asking candidates to find a metaphor for ‘guilty feelings’ (the answer being ‘baggage’), which was answered correctly by about one quarter of candidates. The ability to identify and analyse figurative language using textual context can be difficult and such items are typically answered well by only the better candidates. Typical incorrect answers contained too much copied from the text, which suggested that candidates were not fully aware of the correct answer.

Part B1 (Easier section)

Part B1 had three texts on the same theme: promoting reading in Hong Kong. The first text had been taken from the web page of the Hong Kong Central Library, where activities to promote reading are provided. The second text was a newspaper article about libraries and the culture of reading in Hong Kong. The third text was a letter to the editor in which the writer suggests ways to promote a reading culture. Items in this part included identifying explicit information, gap-filling, pronoun referencing and matching. Higher order skills were tested in open-ended items and by matching summaries with the correct texts.

In Part B1, candidates performed most strongly in the items checking factual understanding of relatively concrete elements of the texts. These included Q.19, Q.22i-iv Q.27iv and Q.34, with most of these items answered correctly by at least 70% of candidates taking this section. Q.22 required a more holistic understanding of the texts, requiring candidates to scan for pertinent information and react on a broader textual level, which is a useful skill.

Single-word summary gap-fills caused candidates more problems in this part, with Q.24i-iii and 26i, iii and v answered correctly by less than quarter of the candidates. Examiners reported that a large number of words were copied incorrectly into gaps, as well as incorrect word forms. For example Q.24i required candidates to enter *materials/resources/items*, the plural forms necessitated by the preceding pre-modifiers of ‘a significant number of existing _____’ in the summary, but typical incorrect answers were singular or uncountable (e.g. ‘waste’). In Q.24ii, a number of answers tried to paraphrase the word ‘dropped’ rather than taking that word exactly from the text as specified.

Q.39 consisted of a pair of items that required more abstract holistic knowledge of the text than the more successfully answered Q.22 (see above). Q.39 asked candidates to scan the text and identify examples of technology being both a reader’s ‘friend’ (16% found an example correctly) and ‘enemy’ (9%), a reference expanded upon from the end of the text itself (paragraph 6). Stronger candidates proved able to locate the ideas which were scattered over the whole text, and grasp their more abstract qualities.

Fewer than 4% answered Q.28 correctly, but these were strong candidates. They were able to successfully analyse the sentence ‘the quality of procurement is more important than the quantity’. This necessitated revisiting the text, noting the ellipsis of ‘procurement of books’, and then relating this to the sentence opener that was provided in the question: ‘He means that libraries should...’. A majority of candidates copied indiscriminately from the text, with the result that many actually just copied the question stem back into their answer. The strongest candidates realised that the correct answer could not be found by copying directly.

Q.21 asked candidates to tick exactly three boxes to indicate correct statements about Text 2 but many candidates ticked more or fewer than this number, rendering their answer incorrect.

Part B2 (More difficult section)

Part B2 was an excerpt from the autobiography of Clive James, an Australian author, critic and broadcaster, in which he writes about his experience in primary school and his relationship with his mother. Candidates’ reading comprehension was tested through a range of item types including multiple-choice, matching, gap-fill and open-ended items. The longer sentences, idiomatic language and cultural context mean that this part was more challenging than B1.

In Part B2, candidates best answered the more concrete factual items, such as Q.42, Q.46i-ii,iv, Q.51i-ii and Q.58, all answered correctly by around 70-80% of candidates taking this part of Paper 1. These items generally required relatively straightforward factual understanding of the text.

Q.53i and ii asked candidates to identify an example of ‘pain’ and of ‘glory’ in the text. This item stood out, as ‘pain’ was found correctly by three quarters of candidates, while ‘glory’ was only identified correctly by one quarter. This was perhaps understandable given the more concrete examples of pain experienced by the writer (being caned), and the less tangible glory (respect from classmates), illustrating how abstract concepts are often harder to identify than concrete ones.

Understanding the core message of this text as a whole would have helped candidates answer a number of items. For example, in Q.47, Q.48 and Q.49 (answered correctly by between 15% and 30% of candidates), many incorrect answers suggested the writer wanted to be in favour with the teacher (Q.47), could not answer questions well at the back of the room (Q.48), or wanted to be a good student (Q.49). These answers were all incompatible with the writer’s core aim: how he wanted to rebel and sought to cause trouble.

Several items stood out as being particularly difficult. Q.50 tested candidates’ understanding of a slightly extended metaphor in which ‘fragments of pencil, pen holders or bits of chalk’ represented trains. Common incorrect answers attempted to copy something from the text, when the actual correct answer was not mentioned explicitly. Few of these copied answers made much sense when read in the context of the text: for example ‘railways’ (a common incorrect answer) cannot move along railway tracks (lines 22-23 in Text 5). Q.57 asked candidates to judge whether the writer’s attempts at running away from home were a success or a failure. Both answers could actually be correct, but this necessitated referring to the relevant parts of the text as proof, which candidates found difficult. Q.66 tested candidates’ understanding of structural devices, asking what the final line of the text suggests the next section will be about. About 5%, 29% and 23% of candidates answered these three questions correctly, respectively, meaning that they were some of the most difficult.

Recommendations

Candidates are urged to avoid excess copying, and to pay attention to the form and spelling of words needed in gap-fill questions, as well as the grammar of questions, especially for one-word or short-answer questions where information is conveyed concisely. Q.16 and Q.56 (gap-fills, requiring various nouns and verbs in the correct forms), Q.31 (reference question: ‘them’) Q.43, (reference question: ‘the treatment’) and Q.59 (reference question: ‘both’) are all examples where grammar cues should very clearly help identify incorrect answers. For example, Q.31 asked candidates to identify what ‘them’ referred to (suggestions and views). Fewer than half of candidates answered this correctly, with a common incorrect answer being ‘an LCSD spokeswoman’. This is clearly a singular noun and therefore should instantly be rejected as a possible answer. Candidates are reminded to check for such grammatical cues whenever possible.

It is worth noting that there was a range of question types requiring more holistic understanding of various texts across all parts of the paper (e.g. Q.18, Q.41, Q.64 and Q.65), and these proved approachable by all candidates (many of these items being answered correctly by around 40-60%).

Candidates should decide before entering the exam which Part B section to take (B1 or B2). It is probably unwise to base this decision on a quick glance at the texts or a superficial viewing of the items in the exam itself. As in previous years, a number of candidates choosing B2 submitted incomplete answer papers, or pages of answers copied indiscriminately from the original texts. This is an indication that B1 could have been a wiser choice for these candidates.

Paper 2

Part A

Paper 2 Part A is a short writing task. This year, candidates were asked to complete a yearbook entry as a graduating student recalling unforgettable moments from their school days. The entry had two parts. In the first, candidates had to write about one subject they had enjoyed studying or found challenging. The second part concerned what they would miss most about their class. To fulfil the aims of this writing task, candidates were expected to recount and reflect on their school experiences. Since the target audience would primarily be fellow graduates and their parents, it was expected that the writing would be informal and personal but would also say something about the school as a whole.

General Comments

In general, candidates' performance was satisfactory as the task was straightforward and the topic relevant to candidates' personal experience. Very few scripts were off topic. High-end scripts contained touching comments, personal feelings and interesting anecdotes about memorable incidents which conveyed an appropriate sense of nostalgia. The majority of candidates provided ample information in both parts but a few overlooked the specific requirement of the question in the first part, focusing on school life in general instead of writing about a subject they had enjoyed studying or found challenging. Overall, most candidates were able to complete the task using an appropriate tone and style.

Content

A common approach to the first part of the task was to describe the difficulties encountered when first studying a particular subject and then explain how these were overcome, for example with the help of a particular teacher. This proved to be a successful approach. Some candidates wrote more of an academic essay, however, giving reasons for why a subject was their favourite or trying to build an argument for the subject as the most challenging. Although many of the ideas in such answers were relevant to the topic, this approach was not consistent with the usual style of a yearbook.

In the second part of the task, many candidates wrote movingly on how much they loved their school life, recounting interesting events and citing the uplifting words of teachers or classmates. A graphic was given in the prompt, and although it was not intended that candidates would describe it, some weaker candidates did this, which led to restricted answers of limited relevance. Some candidates used the picture more strategically, for example by referring to the hand gesture seen in the photo, to add veracity to their entry. This was considered a sensible approach, although many scripts scored well without making reference to the graphic.

Some candidates chose to write on events which took place outside school premises, e.g. a school picnic. This approach was effective as long as it linked the events described with what the writer would miss most about being a student, such as camaraderie or how classmates supported each other in times of trouble. Anecdotes of this nature were uplifting and fitted the yearbook genre very well.

Stronger candidates tended to include personal touches which revealed their personality, such as messages of goodwill to their classmates and amusing remarks. Weaker scripts lacked these personal touches and were more repetitive, e.g. talking about a teacher in both parts or presenting similar content. Some candidates used the task as an opportunity to grumble about school life, which was not really in the spirit of the task.

Language

The task required recounting past events and reflecting upon these, so using tenses correctly was important to helping the reader follow the train of thought. The yearbook entry was in the first person but often referenced the experiences of a group of students, so it was important for candidates to maintain a consistent voice and identity, and have a clear sense of who the intended reader was.

Stronger candidates had the appropriate vocabulary for recounting events, and for introspection and describing feelings.

Organisation

There were two parts to the task. These were self-contained in the sense that they concerned different aspects of school life, but in marking they were treated as a single text and given an overall mark. This two-part structure did not seem to pose any problems for candidates; while some answers were written in the wrong place in the QA book, or contained duplicate material, the majority did not have these issues. Stronger candidates used a chronological structure in one or both parts, making sure that the reader understood how their current feelings or attitudes had developed. When a more thematic structure was used, remarks about a favourite subject or Class 6C were linked sensibly to a conclusion about character development or personal growth. Weaker candidates tended to simply describe rather than use the description as a springboard for personal reflection.

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 are required to choose one question and write about 400 words.

A total of 50,861 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 | Social Issues | 24.2 | 57.5 | 28.0 |
| 3 | Debating | 23.3 | 55.5 | 9.4 |
| 4 | Sports Communication | 18.4 | 43.8 | 9.5 |
| 5 | Popular Culture | 21.1 | 50.3 | 27.5 |
| 6 | Drama | 20.5 | 48.9 | 4.3 |
| 7 | Poems and Songs | 23.6 | 56.2 | 3.7 |
| 8 | Workplace Communication | 21.97 | 52.1 | 5.3 |
| 9 | Short Stories | 16.7 | 39.8 | 11.6 |

Question 2 on social issues was the most popular question, with 28% choosing it. The question on popular culture (Q.5) also proved popular while those on drama (Q.6) and poems and songs (Q.7) were the least popular.

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

Question 2: Learning English through Social Issues

This question required candidates to write an essay for their English teacher on the issue of overseas talent in the context of Hong Kong workplaces.

Most candidates showed an understanding of the requirements of the question and were able to address the 'benefits', 'challenges' and 'suggestions'. Some candidates chose to put forward one

or two arguments and to develop these ideas in some detail whereas others presented several arguments with less elaboration. Both approaches were acceptable.

Candidates demonstrated, to varying degrees, a grasp of the language of argumentation. In addition to grammatical accuracy, stronger candidates were able to use a wide range of grammatical forms and vocabulary, attempting to incorporate more complex grammatical structures into their essays and using sophisticated and varied cohesive devices to structure their writing.

With the teacher as the audience, candidates were expected to write an essay with a formal to semi-formal tone. Essays which emphasised giving personal advice instead of suggesting measures to be implemented by the government or companies demonstrated less awareness of audience or the social and communicative purpose of the text.

Question 3: Learning English through Debating

This question required candidates to write a one-sided argumentative essay giving their opinion on whether or not social media platforms encourage or stifle rational and logical public debate. Arguments were expected to be supported by clear and convincing reasons, and elaborated on with relevant evidence.

Some candidates struggled with the task requirements. As a result, some essays included irrelevant or vague ideas and arguments. For example, some candidates described different features of certain platforms without addressing the issue of public debate. This may be a result of not understanding the meaning of 'stifle' or wrongly interpreting 'public debate' to mean general communication with friends and family. A further problem was that some candidates failed to follow the requirements of the question and gave both sides of the argument.

Poor organisation and irrelevant content characterised weaker essays, while stronger candidates wrote convincing arguments with valid and salient examples. Some possessed a wide range of lexical knowledge related to social media and the internet. This made their essays lexically rich and diverse in terms of ideas.

On the whole, candidates had a reasonably good grasp of the language of argumentation, with stronger candidates using more varied and more complex forms for presenting, developing and structuring their arguments. Most candidates were able to adopt a neutral to formal tone, with stronger essays showing a greater sense of audience awareness and using a variety of means to address and engage with the reader e.g. rhetorical devices, different types of pronouns.

Question 4: Learning English through Sports Communication

This question required candidates to write a report on 'the final game of the season' between two rival schools and include a description of an unexpected incident that happened during the game. It was also a requirement to include 'thoughts and opinions from different people involved'. It was not specified which sport was involved and most candidates wrote about football or basketball.

Candidates who attempted this question were generally familiar with the language used to describe sports and some did include quite imaginative 'incidents' and provided added description from the points of view of spectators, players or managers. In most cases, though, the incidents described were mundane, such as red cards or injuries to players.

Candidates scoring highly on this question were able to include the required content and write in a style corresponding to a news report, i.e. with short paragraphs and dialogue included, in an engaging and imaginative style. Candidates who received lower marks often failed to provide sufficiently coherent descriptions of the match or incident, or did not add the views of people involved.

Question 5: Learning English through Popular Culture

Candidates were required to write a news article in which they described where they looked for information about 'the latest trends in pop culture'. They were given five areas of pop culture to

choose from. The main focus of the article should have been on the sources of information, not the areas of pop culture themselves.

Markers were looking for specific details about the sources of information, such as the names of websites, blogs, social media groups or magazines, which many candidates provided. High marks were given for writing in an engaging and informative way, with some critical analysis of the quality of the sources used.

Candidates who did not score highly on this question tended to write about the areas of pop culture themselves, such as current trends in food and drink or tech and games. Others mentioned sources but in a rather vague way without being more specific about which sites, pages or groups they used. Also quite common was for candidates to write more of an essay on the pros and cons of different sources of information.

Question 6: Learning English through Drama

In this question candidates were required to write a review of a film telling a contemporary version of a children's fairy tale in which Cinderella is a comic book heroine. Candidates had to briefly describe the plot of the new film, how the characters are portrayed in it and why the director wanted to make it.

There were some very imaginative answers to this question, telling how the director had developed a new story based on the comic book adventures of Cinderella and relating it to modern society by explaining the message that the director wanted to get across in the film.

Candidates who scored lower tended to focus too much on the story and wrote it more as a narrative than a film review. Many also omitted details about the director's reasons for making the film or comparisons with the original story of Cinderella.

Question 7: Learning English through Poems and Songs

This question was only attempted by a small number of candidates. It required them to write a speech for club members in their role as an after-school arts club leader. The focus of the speech was on the role of a critic and how to give and receive criticism. Candidates were expected to focus on all three areas though not necessarily in equal depth nor in the order in which they were listed in the question.

Candidates' definitions of 'critic' varied, ranging from 'haters and bullies' to people 'making suggestions to help others improve'. These varying definitions were judged within the context of the speech and how the candidate was able to develop these ideas into a speech for art club members. Criticism that was related to producing art was considered more relevant to the topic than criticism in general.

On the whole, candidates showed that they were familiar with the genre and were able to open and close the speech in appropriate ways. Stronger candidates were skilled in effectively using features of spoken discourse.

Question 8: Learning English through Workplace Communication

Candidates were required to adopt the identity of a volunteer in a local district council office and to write a formal email explaining the thinking behind the design of three campaign posters. Two completed posters were provided and candidates were required to explain these and suggest ideas for a third poster.

Some candidates struggled with interpreting the demands of the task. Some misunderstood 'campaign' or wrote about employee/employer relationships, while others failed to link the purpose of the posters to the context of the elections. A further problem was that some candidates wrote to Ricky Kwan while some wrote a letter to the editor.

More than half of the candidates successfully explained the messages behind the two poster designs. Stronger candidates focused on both the graphics in the posters and the slogans, and made strong connections between these and how they would make a good campaign theme. They

adopted a persuasive tone and provided details to justify the strengths of each design to the election committee. Some candidates may have run out of time and were only able to provide limited details.

Question 9: Learning English through Short Stories

This question required candidates to take the fable of ‘The Tortoise and the Hare’ and rewrite it so that the tortoise and the hare team up to race against other contestants. Candidates were given a synopsis of the original story and then told to rewrite it and to express a message through the story.

Candidates were expected to provide a setting, such as there being a race organised and the tortoise and the hare agreeing to be a team or being chosen to be in a team together. Other task requirements included telling the story of the race followed by some kind of ending, e.g. in the form of an epilogue. The message to be delivered could have been expressed explicitly at the end or implicitly throughout the story.

Some candidates did a very good job of telling the story of the race, showing how the strengths of each of the animals could be used to benefit the team, and there were some very imaginative stories, making good use of descriptive language, metaphor and dialogue, and providing a clear message.

Other candidates misinterpreted the question and wrote about the original fable, i.e. a tortoise and a hare racing against each other. Some candidates wrote about the tortoise and the hare helping each other but not in the context of a race. Such answers were regarded as only partly fulfilling the task requirements. Another area of weakness was that some candidates devoted too much of their answer to explaining their message, while others failed to include a message at all.

Recommendations

Language

Language used should be consistent in terms of style as well as appropriate to the text type and the contextual factors in the question. Candidates should consider what the text type is (narrative, review/report, workplace correspondence, etc.) when choosing the sentence structures and vocabulary to use. Accuracy in usage is also important and should be balanced with appropriate lexical and grammatical choices. A variety of sentence structures and forms need to be used appropriately and intelligibly to enhance communication. 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. 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. The text should be coherent and structured according to the text type.

Length

Part B requires candidates to write around 400 words. Longer responses will not necessarily gain higher marks simply by virtue of length. If writing beyond the suggested number of words, the length should not impede the communicative effectiveness.

Paper 3

Paper 3 consists of three parts, Part A, Part B1 and Part B2. All candidates are required to complete Part A and then choose either Part B1 or Part B2. Part B1 is designed to be the easier section, while Part B2 is the more difficult section. The total number of candidates attempting Paper 3 was 50,480, of whom 28.3% chose B1 and 71.7% 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 | 53 | 47.1 | 25.3 |
| Part B1 | 53 | 42.0 | 24.2 |
| Part B2 | 53 | 40.9 | 20.6 |

Part A (Compulsory section)

In Part A, candidates had to listen to four recordings related to an IT (information technology) club in a Hong Kong school, and the upcoming issue of the IT club online magazine. Unless otherwise stated, synonyms or similar wording were accepted as alternatives to the correct answers given here.

Task 1 (Mean = 67.4%)

Candidates were required to fill in a summary sheet while listening to a meeting in which the editor of the IT club magazine (Sarah Lo) talks to the school principal (Ms Chan) and a Science teacher (Ms Reyes) about the school's mobile phone policy. Item 1 was a multiple choice question requiring candidates to choose when the students were allowed to use their phones. Items 2 and 3 asked candidates to write short phrases regarding student opinions on mobile phone policy while items 4 to 6 required candidates to complete information regarding requests for changes to the policy. These items seemed straightforward for the vast majority of candidates except for item 3 (55% correct) and item 7 (40% correct). In item 3 a number of candidates had trouble with the word 'flexible', and 'calculator' caused problems for some candidates in item 7.

For items 9 and 10, candidates were required to tick boxes in a table which summarised the opinion of Ms Reyes and Ms Chan. For item 11 candidates needed to complete a gap regarding an additional student request regarding mobile phones. For items 12 and 14 candidates needed to complete positive or negative comments regarding the potential location of a mobile phone charging station, while for item 13 candidates needed to supply a possible location for the charging station. Items 7 to 13 proved to be straightforward for the majority of candidates. However, for item 14 (49% correct) many candidates did not appear to understand that the library was popular or did not catch this from the recording despite seemingly understanding the time period when the library was popular (at lunchtime).

Task 2 (Mean = 52.2%)

For Task 2 candidates were required to listen to a meeting between Sarah and two other members of the IT club, Aaron and Rachel, in which they discussed an educational mentoring app to be promoted to senior students. Candidates were required to write down some short phrases regarding the purpose of the app and complete information using short phrases in a table.

While items 15 to 19 seemed straightforward for candidates, a number of the later items (20 to 27) were more problematic. For item 21 (37% correct) many candidates wrote the adjective form 'Italian' rather than the country 'Italy'. In the recording Sarah said 'Italian schools' and 'Italian teenagers' and candidates needed to transform this information for the answer. For item 22 (27%

correct) a number of candidates wrote down only ‘sports’ instead of ‘sports coaching’. Item 23 (21% correct) also caused difficulty for candidates as the phrase ‘two hours each weekday’ was only mentioned once in the recording by Sarah and candidates appeared to be unfamiliar with this phrasing and the alternative phrasing for the answer, ‘two hours on weekdays’. For item 25 (22% correct) many candidates failed to grasp that the question was asking for the availability of the student tutor (the mentor) rather than the students receiving the tutoring. In the recording Sarah said ‘it’s useful for other students to know when you’re available’ and ‘if they know your availability they know when you might be able to write a question’. Candidates needed to realise that ‘you’ referred to the student tutor and ‘other students’ and ‘they’ referred to the students receiving the tutoring.

Task 3 (Mean = 44.2%)

For Task 3 Sarah, Aaron and Rachel had to choose stories relating to the use of technology around the world to feature in the IT club’s online magazine. They discussed ‘Youth Boost Centres’ in South Africa and the use of a virtual currency in this centre called ‘Imali’.

There were four sections in this task and for all questions candidates were required to complete the answers using short phrases. For the first section candidates were required to state two main reasons why people join the Youth Boost Centres. Item 28 (22% correct) proved to be more difficult for candidates than item 29 (58% correct). For item 28 many candidates wrote down ‘loads of new things’ or ‘practical advice’ from the recording but failed to include the key concept of (people) starting their own company.

For the second section candidates were required to understand what Imali was (item 30) and state the two main ways that people in the Centres could receive Imali (items 31 and 32). While item 31 proved to be more straightforward (53% correct), the other items were more problematic. For item 30 (36% correct) many candidates did not seem to understand the word ‘virtual’ from the recording, instead writing simply ‘money’. For item 32 (29% correct) many candidates wrote incomplete answers or wrote ‘develop’ rather than ‘development’.

For the third section candidates were required to complete a table by stating the uses of Imali in two different places. Item 34 (30% correct) proved to be more challenging than items 33 and 35. For item 34 candidates needed to grasp the concept of paying for or buying online courses. For this item many candidates wrote simply ‘online courses’ and therefore were not awarded the point as this was incomplete.

For the fourth section candidates had to state the main reason why users like the Youth Boost Centres (item 36) and complete two tables which showed the opinions of Sarah, Aron and Rachel on the advantages of the centres (items 37 and 38) and the possible disadvantages of Imali (items 39 and 40). Candidates generally performed well in these items, except for item 37 (24% correct), where a number of candidates wrote ‘society’ rather than ‘community’ or ‘get back to’ rather than ‘give back to’ (society).

Task 4 (Mean = 22.9%)

In Task 4, candidates listened to an interview in which Sarah interviewed Dr James Berg, a computer specialist working for NGO Taracco Solutions, for the IT Club’s online magazine.

This task, consisting mainly of questions requiring fuller answers, was designed to be more challenging for candidates. The content was more challenging intellectually and required a greater amount of interpretation and inference.

Task 4 was divided into two sections. In the first section (items 41 to 46) Sarah’s interview questions related more generally to the kinds of operations Taracco Solutions is involved in, and the kind of technology used. In this section a number of items proved to be very challenging for many candidates. For item 41 (13% correct) candidates needed to answer ‘poor and remote areas’, which appeared once in the recording. A number of candidates wrote ‘remote areas’ but omitted the concept of ‘poor’. For item 42 (13% correct) many candidates were able to understand a journey to work or school but were unable to grasp the concept of an uncomfortable journey. Some candidates wrote ‘inconvenient’ rather than ‘uncomfortable’. Item 43 also proved to be

challenging for candidates (20% correct). For this item candidates needed to grasp two concepts: inviting people who are overlooked in society (for example children) and inviting ideas and opinions from people who are overlooked. Many candidates wrote on the former concept but failed to include the latter. It was also apparent that a number of candidates did not understand the relevant vocabulary (people who are overlooked). Candidates performed better in items 45 and 46.

In the second section (items 47 to 53) the speakers discussed one specific Taracco Solutions project which had taken place in Kerala, India. This section proved to be the most challenging section of the entire paper.

For item 47 (12% correct) some candidates understood and wrote down ‘riverside’ but omitted ‘path’ or wrote ‘park’. For item 51 (15%) candidates needed to include both the concept of no one maintaining the path in the future and the concerns/thoughts/worries that the path would not be maintained. Many candidates managed to grasp the former concept but not the latter. In contrast, for item 50 (36% correct) many candidates who answered correctly included the more factual and easier to grasp concept of a similar project being left unfinished. For item 52 (9% correct) candidates appeared to experience difficulty with the word ‘deteriorated’: from the recording ‘we can easily see areas where the path had deteriorated’. Some candidates, however, did manage to use the synonym ‘damaged’ and were awarded the mark for this item.

In general Part A worked very well, with a mean score close to 50% and a good range of item difficulties. The tasks became progressively more difficult as intended. The test made use of different spoken text types and different item types, including gap-fill, multiple-choice, short and long answer 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, e.g. 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

Parts B1 and B2 shared the situation where the candidate adopted the role of Nico, the Secretary of the Inter-School Visual Media Society. Candidates were tasked with composing three written tasks on the Society’s annual Visual Media Festival. Candidates attempting Part B1 focused on one aspect of the Festival, the Youth by Youth Short Video Competition, and were asked to complete a poster design checklist, write an email of rejection, and compose an announcement about the Competition’s prize giving ceremony. Candidates attempting Part B2 focused on the screening of the film ‘The Electronic Durian’. They were to write a report on a proposed screening venue, a text for the festival programme about the film, and a speech to be given at the start of a discussion following the screening.

In both parts, candidates were judged on their ability to effectively identify, adapt and relay relevant information from a variety of written texts (in the Data File) and a spoken text. Accuracy of language use, coherence and organisation, and appropriacy, were also assessed by markers. Candidates were expected to demonstrate that they could effectively manipulate content from the Data File in a 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

Candidates attempting Part B1 focused on the Youth by Youth Short Video Competition, a main feature of the Visual Media Festival. Tasks included completing a poster design checklist, writing an email of rejection for an entrant, and composing an announcement about the Competition's prize giving ceremony. Data File texts included a recording of a video conference discussion between Ms Mira Ray, the Chair of the Inter-School Visual Media Society, and Ringo Chow, the Audio-Visual teacher at the school where Nico (the candidate's character) is studying. Candidates first had to listen and take notes on this recording. The other texts in the Data File were an email from Ringo to Nico ('the task email'), Maude's Poster Design for the Youth by Youth Video Competition (Maude being a Cinematic Consultant to the Society), Minutes of the Meeting of the Society's Committee, a text from film and video website FideoVerse, the Rules of the Competition, an online submission form from entrant Akira Wong, an exchange from the Committee's WhatsApp group, a fact file of Hong Kong-based celebrities, and the results of an online survey for the personnel of the prize giving ceremony.

The candidates' performance is summarised in Table 4:

Table 4: Paper 3 Part B1 results

| Task | Full Mark | Mean Score (%) | Standard Deviation (%) |
|------|-----------|----------------|------------------------|
| 5 | 16 | 47.4 | 26.8 |
| 6 | 19 | 44.3 | 25.9 |
| 7 | 18 | 34.7 | 27.0 |

From Table 4, it can be seen that Task 7 proved to be the most challenging for this year's candidates, whereas Tasks 5 and 6 were more comparable in difficulty. The overall mean was about 42% for all of Part B1, which proved to be successful in discriminating weaker from stronger candidates and in terms of its own internal reliability.

Task 5

In this task, candidates were required to complete a checklist that would serve as instructions to Maude to change her design for a poster advertising the Competition. This involved identifying relevant information from the recording, via candidates' listening notes, and four written texts in the Data File to complete the task.

Items 5.3, 5.5, 5.7 and 5.9 required candidates to identify whether the current poster included the relevant information. Items 5.3 and 5.7 were answered correctly by a majority of candidates as they simply needed to write the word 'yes'. Items 5.5 and 5.9 were only answered correctly by around half of the candidates, which might indicate a misunderstanding of this element of the task as many candidates wrote 'yes' for all four of these items (i.e. some candidates may have been considering the final poster rather than Maude's draft). Candidates struggled with items 5.11a and 5.11b, most likely because they could not interpret the sentence 'The name of your organisation or society must be really big so people know who you are', or else did not see its relevance to the prompt 'Font size'. Many candidates left this answer blank or wrote an answer which was irrelevant.

Task 6

Candidates were asked to write a rejection email to Akira Wong, an entrant to the Competition, whose video had a number of issues that candidates had to identify and explain. Information for this task came from the candidate comparing Akira's online submission form with the Rules of the Competition, supplemented by information from the Committee's WhatsApp group and information about the Competition deadline contained in the recording.

Stronger candidates were able to follow the parameters of the task by constructing an email that was firm but polite and encouraging in tone, including an appropriate subject line (referencing the competition, but not the rejection of her entry, which was best tackled in the body of the email). Candidates generally showed good awareness of the conventions of a formal email, including the need for an opening referring to the situation, a main body outlining the issues of the video and a closing that suggested a further submission before the new deadline, as guided by the WhatsApp exchange.

Items for this task can broadly be grouped together in pairs, since the candidates were required to state the relevant Competition requirement and why Akira's entry was in violation of that requirement. Most candidates referred to the length of the video as being a problem (item 6.1) but not all explained that '8 minutes 30 seconds' was the stated length of Akira's video (item 6.2). Similarly, a high percentage of candidates could identify that 'Music must be copyright free' (item 6.7), but only stronger candidates were able to link that to the statement on Akira's entry form about music 'by my favourite pop band in the whole world, Bubblegum!' (item 6.8). Weaker candidates tended to rely on copying large sections of text from the Data File without due concern for relevance or appropriacy.

More difficult item pairings included 6.3 and 6.4 (the Competition is about young people, but her video is about a grandmother) and 6.5 and 6.6, which is the regulation that the video should not contain foul language, revealed to be an issue with Akira's video in the WhatsApp exchange. Finally, many candidates seemed to miss the extension of the Competition deadline. Indeed, identifying the relevance of information is a core competency required for this task and it seemed only the very strongest candidates were able to do this consistently.

Task 7

Task 7 proved to be the most difficult of the three 3B1 tasks. Candidates were required to write an announcement for the prize giving ceremony of the Competition to appear on the Society's website. This could be achieved using a number of different approaches. Some candidates used a more personal, informal tone:

'Do you know about our ceremony?'; 'Hope you can come and join the ceremony'; 'hope to see you on that day and have fun!'

Other candidates used a more objective 'invitation-style' announcement tone:

'We believe that many people are looking forward to this ceremony. This announcement will mention the details'

Only stronger candidates were able to successfully adapt the relevant information from the Data File and recording into an appropriate promotional text for the event (i.e. into a text with a consistent and relevant tone). Many weaker candidates tended to write the text in an inappropriate text type, such as a personal invitation letter ('I am writing to...'), or as text for a spoken announcement ('Good morning all full time teachers and students'), which suggests a misreading of the brief and the intended readership. In addition, the order in which information appears in the announcement is important in constructing a coherent text. Most candidates tended to either begin or end the announcement with key information (date, time, venue), whereas weaker candidates would inadvertently highlight relatively minor details by including them in an opening statement or statements.

Candidates needed to identify details from the recording video conference, the minutes of the Society Committee Meeting, the Hong Kong-based Celebrity fact file, and the SurveyApp results. The standout feature of the candidates' response to this task was that no items were answered consistently well by a majority of candidates. There were some difficult and very difficult items in the task, especially item 7.1, which very few candidates were able to get correct, and items 7.2 and 7.3, all of which came from the recording. Identifying the judge of the event (item 7.7) and that the attendees would get free gift packs (item 7.9) were also items only answered correctly by stronger candidates.

Weaker candidates included irrelevant, inappropriate information, such as that the host ‘Hates spiders’ and ‘Refuses to fly on planes’, when the task instructions and the nature of the text clearly exclude these. Other inappropriate information that appeared in answers to this task was the ‘hiring cost’ of the judge. Whilst this information was necessary for candidates – in the role of Nico – to identify the best choice of judge, this is not something which should appear in a promotional document.

Part B2

Part B2 consisted of three tasks on the screening of the movie ‘The Electronic Durian’. Tasks included writing a report on a potential screening venue, drafting text for the Visual Media Festival programme, and composing the introductory speech of a discussion to take place after the screening. Candidates were expected to show awareness of their roles, the aims of the texts, and the audience. They needed to select and adapt the relevant information from the B2 Data File, which comprised a number of text types, in addition to the recording. Data File texts included an email, a thread from an online forum, committee meeting minutes, notes from a site visit, an extract from a magazine interview, an extract from the government regulations for cinemas and theatres, and an exchange from the Committee’s WhatsApp group.

The candidates’ performance is summarised in Table 5:

Table 5: Paper 3 Part B2 results

| Task | Full Mark | Mean Score (%) | Standard Deviation (%) |
|------|-----------|----------------|------------------------|
| 8 | 18 | 49.3 | 24.5 |
| 9 | 17 | 36.7 | 23.7 |
| 10 | 18 | 36.3 | 21.6 |

From Table 5, it can be seen that Task 8 was more successfully attempted by candidates, whereas Tasks 9 and 10 were of about the same level of difficulty. The paper proved to be successful in discriminating weaker from stronger candidates and in terms of its own internal reliability.

Task 8

With a mean of just under 50%, Task 8 was the easiest of the three 3B2 tasks. Candidates were asked to write a report on the Brighthouse Cinema as a potential screening venue, with the explicit instruction ‘to persuade the committee not to take this venue’. As an internal report, candidates could choose to write in a more or less formal register, with bullet points, sections and headings as a possible, but by no means necessary, way of structuring the text. In terms of register, the challenge to the candidates was to write in a dispassionate and objective text type – a report – while clearly guiding the reader towards a rejection of the proposed venue. Candidates would have to realise the need to either remove or adapt inappropriate, candid phrases from the recording, including ‘a terrible cinema’ and ‘end up being a nightmare’.

It was accepted that, as a report, the document might not be wholly negative and many stronger candidates were able to identify and use positive aspects of the venue in their text, usually in a section marked for this purpose. Stronger candidates were also able to recognise the usefulness of a title and introductory section showing the purpose and context of the report, and a concluding recommendation not to use the venue. Weaker candidates tended to be more abrupt, or else use language unsuited to the genre (‘Hello Everyone!’).

It seems that candidates found items 8.1 and 8.5 the most challenging. These were both items containing information from the recording and that consisted of a number of pieces of information that needed explicitly stating to get the mark (‘Isabel Luna is in a wheelchair and needs access to the stage’; ‘we require at least ten ushers to hand out 3D headsets’). Candidates performed best on items that consisted of a single, discrete failing of the cinema, such as item 8.2 (there is ‘no wheelchair access onto stage’) and item 8.4 (‘Brighthouse Cinema will not allow outside food’).

In all, stronger candidates were much better able to present a coherent, sometimes balanced, case for why the cinema should be rejected according to the confines of the genre and appropriate selection of criteria from the texts presented to them. Weaker candidates tended to extract points verbatim from the texts, with little concern for the readership or the conventions of a report. They also tended to be less discerning in identifying relevant information about the cinema, including listing information about the design of the building, the colour of ushers' uniforms and the names of personnel, information that would hold little or no interest for the committee.

Task 9

Task 9 proved to be one of the most challenging tasks in the paper. Candidates were asked to write a text for the Visual Media Festival programme, outlining the plot, theme and 'stand-out scene' of 'The Electronic Durian'. The text needed to have a promotional tone, or else to create interest in the film among its readership, as some stronger candidates were able to skilfully establish:

'Have you ever imagined that there can be an electronic durian?'

'Read on to find out more about the new film The Electronic Durian by Isabel Luna'

'a thought-provoking and hilarious movie'

A key element of the coherence of the text would be the candidate's ability to extract the key plot points from the texts and rearrange them in a logical order. Weaker candidates found this especially challenging. In addition, candidates were expected to be able to describe the plot using the simple present tense, which would avoid possible confusion. Only the strongest candidates were able to do this consistently, resulting in comparatively lower means for language, coherence and organisation, and appropriacy for this task.

Candidates on the whole found this task challenging, with both conceptual and linguistic difficulties evident. For example, many candidates struggled to extract the theme of the movie (item 9.1) from the Forum and then express it in a clear and appropriate way. Weaker candidates also tended to confuse Sammi – the main character in the film – with Rebecca, the actress who played her. This was especially true for items 9.5, 9.6 and 9.7, points related to contact lenses, which are linked with both the actress and the character. Candidates were best able to answer the items 9.2, 9.3 and 9.4, with only stronger candidates able to clearly express the remainder of the content points.

Task 10

Task 10 was likewise challenging. Candidates were asked to draft an introductory speech for a discussion to be held after the film screening. Candidates needed to show an awareness of the context of this speech, i.e. after the screening, but before the discussion, for instance:

'After watching such a fabulous film, we are honoured today to have invited the film maker Isabel Luna to conduct a discussion session'

Candidates were directed to write on the topic 'The Current State of Cinema', which was then broken down into two sub-topics of 'Going to the cinema vs watching films at home' and 'Blockbusters vs low-budget films'. These essentially provided the structure of the speech. Most candidates were comfortable with the genre conventions of speechwriting ('Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen'; 'Thank you so much for coming to the screening'), but only the strongest candidates were able to clearly express an awareness of the speech's context and its purpose (i.e. to introduce the discussion).

Items from the recording (items 10.3, 10.5 and 10.6) were the least-well answered, items 10.5 and 10.6 especially so, requiring candidates to express relatively complex ideas and coming towards the end of the recording discussion. In addition, many candidates confused film studios with directors and blockbuster films, which hampered their efforts to effectively discuss the 'Blockbusters vs low-budget films' section of the speech (items 10.5 to 10.9).

Recommendations for Part B

It seems that one of the biggest challenges for candidates is extracting relevant, sometimes key, information from the recording. This is an important skill which needs to be developed. Candidates should make good use of the time given before the recording is played to acquaint themselves with the nature of each task and the information they will likely need to listen for. Strong indicators of this are also given by the subheadings on the note sheet in the Data File. Especially important is the focus and concentration required to listen to the very end of the recording for information related to the tasks.

Another challenge is the skill of identifying information relevant to both the task and the text type. This is especially true for tasks where candidates have to write texts for a public audience, such as texts for websites or other promotional publications. In these cases, such as when outlining the plot of a movie for promotional purposes, irrelevant information can have a direct impact on the appropriacy of the text or on coherence. It is recommended that candidates acquaint themselves with as broad a range of texts as possible so as to gain an appreciation of these aspects.

When reading through the texts and instructions associated with a task, candidates should take time to try and understand the relationship between the pieces of information they encounter, especially in terms of their relationship to the instructions of the task. This would help mitigate the common error – and temptation – of copying large chunks of text from the Data File without regard to its coherence, appropriacy or relevance to the task in hand. Finally, candidates should try to appreciate the role they are asked to play in the situation and, most importantly, the intended readership of their texts, all of which will impact upon the appropriacy of tone and register.

Paper 4

The speaking examination consists of 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 improvements, giving opinions, comparing and contrasting, identifying pros and cons, or discussing problems and solutions. After Part A, each candidate is asked one question in turn by an examiner and has up to one minute to respond to the question, without any preparation.

Candidates' speaking performances are judged in four domains, as detailed in the Paper 4 (Speaking) Assessment Guidelines: Pronunciation & Delivery; Communication Strategies; Vocabulary & Language Patterns; and Ideas & Organisation.

A total of 47,921 candidates took part in the public speaking examination in 2019, which was conducted over ten days, including two days for candidates with special needs. Around 30 different sets of question papers were used.

The mean scores for each domain (out of a total of 14) were 7.6, 7.4, 7.3 and 7.8 respectively. The percentage mean score was 54%.

Part A Group Interaction

Strong candidates spoke with a reasonable speed of delivery, and appropriate phrasing and intonation. Their pronunciation was usually clear and understandable. Some candidates spoke very quickly and so did not provide enough time to enable other candidates to understand their ideas. Candidates in general projected their voice satisfactorily, although some were noticeably hesitant and less at ease. Words which were commonly mispronounced included 'women', 'traditional', 'packets', 'mature', 'athletes', 'privacy' and 'inequality'.

Many candidates actively participated in the group interaction, even those with low language proficiency. Some candidates were reticent, however; they were more reluctant to speak, and tended to make fewer turns, sometimes contributing little more than formulaic expressions such as 'I agree'.

There were instances of candidates speaking over other candidates or not allowing others to take their turn, as well as reading from prepared notes. As candidates are expected to interact with each other in Part A, these actions are not considered appropriate and resulted in lost marks.

Stronger candidates were able to speak with a wide range of grammatical structures and use vocabulary specific to the topic. Errors in subject-verb agreement, plurals and the use of tenses, however, were relatively frequent. Some very weak candidates had difficulty producing an intelligible utterance and were only able to say a few words.

Candidates had little difficulty generating ideas on common topics like online scams, screen time control for phones and translation apps as these reflected the everyday lives of young people. Topics such as space travel, the culling of wild animals and age limits for political leaders were less familiar and therefore more challenging. Candidates who scored well tended to give responses which were more insightful or creative, drawing on their personal experience or observations to elaborate on their ideas. They were also able to organise and express their ideas in a logical and clear manner.

Part B Individual Response

Candidates were each given one minute to respond to a question asked by the examiner. Examiners reported that most candidates were able to make full use of the one minute and their responses were generally comprehensible and audible. Some stronger candidates were able to give spontaneous responses which were relevant and supported with sound reasons or examples. Some weaker candidates read from their notecards or repeated information previously mentioned during the discussion.

Recommendations

During the preparation time, candidates should read the text and prompts given and try and think about the topic from different perspectives. This will generate more ideas and may also help anticipate what other group members may say.

Listening to what other candidates say is critical to good communication so candidates should try to understand what others say, and decide whether they agree or disagree with the ideas presented. Oral communication often needs participants to work together to reach a joint understanding, so candidates should be prepared to seek clarification or help rephrase something said so that the discussion can proceed with all participants on board. Everyone should contribute and respond in a way that is polite and constructive.

The notecard is a good way to organise ideas but it should be used as an aid to recall rather than as a place to write out a prepared speech. Candidates should try to make eye contact with the other candidates when speaking.

Candidates are reminded to take advantage of English language media and other online resources which allow for endless meaningful reading, writing and communication possibilities.

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, one 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 47,971 students participated in SBA. The mean of the moderated mark was 63% and the standard deviation was 16.7%. According to the statistical moderation reports and district coordinators' reports, the marks submitted by the participating schools were accurate and reliable on the whole. Based on the statistical moderation of the marks submitted by the schools, it was found that 84% of schools fell into the 'within the expected range' category, 9% were higher than expected and 7.1% lower than expected.

Comments and Recommendations

Individual Presentation

Students took the individual presentation seriously and prepared well for it. All were able to give a presentation of about 3 minutes, with some strong students giving longer presentations of up to 7 minutes. Stronger students were able to speak fluently and naturally with clear and accurate pronunciation and intonation. They had audience awareness and used body language to maintain audience interest. They had a wide range of vocabulary and language patterns which they were able to use effectively, and their ideas were clear, well-developed and organised, which made it easy for the audience to follow them. Presentations were often made without referring to notes or with only occasional, unobtrusive reference to a note card. Some otherwise strong students memorised their presentation, however, so their final score was lower than it could have been had they simply presented their ideas naturally based on some brief notes on their note card.

Some students had a low level of English but still made an effort to do their best in this part of the assessment by preparing seriously. Many had difficulties in pronunciation, phrasing and intonation, so it was often difficult for listeners to understand what they were saying. In addition, as many of the weaker students simply wrote out their script or copied chunks of information onto the note card and then just read aloud what they had written, they were unable to maintain meaningful eye contact with the audience, although they did look up from time to time. Language accuracy is another area that weaker students need to pay attention to. Their major problems are tenses, agreement, the use of correct pronouns, word forms and correct sentence structures. Their low standard of English naturally affected their ability to express their ideas clearly and even when they were able to express some simple ideas, they did not have the ability to elaborate on them.

More students used PowerPoint presentations during their SBA assessment this year. This is fine if the slides enhance the presentation. Unfortunately, in most cases the slides were filled with information which the students read aloud, so the slides were more of a distraction than an aid and did nothing to enhance quality.

Students should remember that the focus of the assessment is on speaking skills and not on the amount of information provided. Some had so much information that they had to constantly refer to their note card and did not maintain good eye contact with the audience. It is better to just have two or three main ideas which can be expanded upon.

Students who have problems with Pronunciation and Delivery should try listening to simple audio books, paying attention to how the words are pronounced and the intonation patterns used. Ideas can be clearly expressed using simple vocabulary and simple sentence structures, so weaker students need to understand that they can achieve good marks too if they are willing to make an effort and work hard to improve. They need to believe in their ability and be more confident.

Higher ability students can still challenge themselves by taking their presentation to a higher level. They can try to do their presentation without referring to their note card and focus more on the use of intonation and body language to engage the audience. They can further improve their presentation skills by making use of online resources such as TED talks, recordings of public speaking competitions and podcasts. Exposure to a wide range of authentic materials can help students understand the different techniques that can be used to give good presentations and also the value of effective speaking skills. Students could also record themselves making a presentation and ask someone else to listen to them and give feedback.

Group Interaction

On average, students were relaxed and performed well during group interactions. Even weaker students tried hard to make some contributions using some formulaic expressions, stating a simple idea or answering a question which was directed to them. Students who attained the top marks had very good English which enabled them to understand what other members of the group were saying and they were able to respond to what had been said by further developing the points, thus contributing to a more coherent discussion. They had a wide range of communication strategies such as rephrasing, summarising, asking questions and drawing others into the discussion so that

the flow of the interaction was maintained. Their ideas were clearly and fluently expressed as they had the necessary vocabulary and accurate sentence structures.

Some groups made use of written scripts and simply read out what they had prepared regardless of what the preceding candidate said. While other group members were speaking, these students usually just focused on their note card instead of listening to others, so they were not able to respond appropriately to what had been said and there was no real interaction among the group members. Formulaic expressions like 'I agree' or 'That is a good idea' were often used without any elaboration or justification. Turn-taking was very mechanical and the order of speaking followed a fixed pattern, and students followed the prompts given in the task without understanding the overall purpose of the discussion. The group interaction became four mini-presentations on the given topic with little overall coherence.

To perform well in group interaction it is important to listen to what others are saying as what each student says should follow on from what the preceding speaker has said, and the whole discussion should form a coherent whole. With the use of better communication strategies and turn taking, and by making the discussion flow better and more coherently, students can engage in a genuine discussion with appropriate eye contact which can then help all the group members achieve higher marks. Self and peer evaluation are effective ways of helping students understand their areas for improvement; if they are willing to work hard on these areas, they should be able to improve.

With the implementation of SBA, schools and teachers are putting more emphasis on speaking, and in many schools teachers integrate speaking into the teaching of the other components and offer additional forms of practice. This is good as students are then given more opportunities to speak English and their confidence is boosted. Through hard work and determination, students can make progress and become more proficient English speakers.

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 9 marks on the 1B2 scale.

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

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

Paper 1B

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

Paper 3B

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

Paper 3B

| 3B1 (easier) | 3B2 (more difficult) |
|-----------------|-------------------------|
| 43 | 21 |
| 44 | 23 |
| 45 | 25 |
| 46 | 27 |
| 47 | 29 |
| 48 | 31 |
| 49 | 33 |
| 50 | 35 |
| 51 | 37 |
| 52 | 40 |
| 53 | 44 |