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 easiest section, while Part B2 was designed to be the most difficult section. The total number of candidates attempting Paper 1 was 68,616. A total of 36,443 candidates chose to do Part B1 while 32,173 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[1]. The overall results are given in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Paper 1 overall results

	Full Mark	Mean Score (%)	S.D. (%)
Part A	40	49.42	19.67
Part B1	40	50.85	20.32
Part B2	40	45.80	17.95

Part A

Part A comprised two reading passages about two different books written by the author Daniel Tudor, a British expatriate living in Korea. The first passage was about his latest book, 'A Geek in Korea', and the format of the text was an interview between Tudor and a newspaper journalist. The second reading passage was a book review about an earlier book written by Tudor called 'Korea: the Impossible Country'.

The interview was presented in a question-and-answer format, with questions bolded to highlight the different sections of the text. Topics covered include Korean popular culture, such as K-pop and Korean TV dramas, which would be familiar to most candidates. Reading skills tested in this section included identifying basic factual information, interpreting Tudor's choice of words, and relatively straightforward interpretation of his opinions.

In contrast, the review discussed the content of Tudor's other book, which is more focused on the rise and development of wider Korean society. The written discourse of the review was more challenging than the interview. In this section, candidates were required to make inferences about the writer's evaluation of the book.

Candidates were able to interpret Tudor's words and opinions (in Q.5 and Q.14i-iii respectively) when the item followed the multiple choice or True/False/Not Given format. Some of the easiest items were typically those which required candidates to locate information given explicitly in the text. Q.12, Q.15 and Q.17i-iv are examples of these, in which well over 70% of candidates found the correct answers. In Q.17i-iv, candidates had to complete a summary of a paragraph by filling in blanks with words taken from the original text. Candidates successfully understood both texts involved (the original and the summary). They copied the relevant information accurately from the original text, without spelling or grammar mistakes, addressing a concern of previous examination reports. They were less successful in Q.17v (44% of candidates gained this mark), possibly due to the more abstract nature of the word 'marry', which candidates were required to find.

Many candidates appeared to miss the contextual clues that would have helped them answer Q.2 ('How many more books is Daniel planning to write?'). This item tested candidates' ability to interpret Tudor's words "[he] has several other volumes in the pipeline". Many candidates gave incorrect answers of '2' or '1', apparently distracted by either the nearby reference to two books he has already authored, missing the present perfect tense used here, or the reference to his latest book, about which he is being interviewed. The less obvious answer of 'several' was instead required, with the synonym 'volumes' used to refer to the books, and helping to explain the meaning of the phrase 'in the pipeline'. Only 9% of candidates answered this question correctly.

Items requiring candidates to interpret implications also proved difficult, with fewer than 30% answering Q.13, Q.28 and Q.31 correctly. Examiners' reports each year tend to highlight that these types of items are amongst the most challenging, and candidates should ensure they are able to interpret implication and inference, especially as these are

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[1] Figures provided for test items are taken from the onscreen marking system. There may be slightly variations between these figures and the final scores.

common tasks for readers of many genres. For instance, Q.28 asked what was implied by the list of must-read books about North Korea being longer than the list of books about South Korea. Candidates commonly copied the exact wording of the statement in the original text, rather than trying to interpret what this statement was illustrating (that North Korea is a more interesting country, for example).

One other question that proved extremely difficult for candidates was Q.27, which asked for the meaning of a 'canon' (a list of must-read books). There were multiple context clues to assist candidates here: the reference word 'that' in the topic sentence referring to both the phrase 'a list of must-read books' in the previous paragraph, and an actual list of must-read books given in the coming paragraph; the referential phrase 'the other indispensables' which is used to introduce this list; and the words 'the list of must-read books' repeated at the end of the paragraph in comparison to North Korea. Only 4% of candidates found this answer. This perhaps indicates a tendency for candidates to focus on the immediate vicinity of keywords and specific details when reading the texts, rather than on inter-paragraph and other wider contextual clues. Candidates are reminded that an overall 'macro-focus' on the text can be just as important as a 'micro-focus' on details.

Part B1

Part B1 also comprised two reading passages linked by a theme: driving and safety. The first passage was a 'Witness Statement', a short text written in the first person. The statement provided factual details about the accident and candidates needed to answer simple questions such as identifying the name of the witness, where the car accident took place, when it took place, and which car was responsible.

The second passage was an article which introduced the concept of self-driving cars and their advantages and disadvantages. Candidates were required to identify facts in the report, including some simple figures, what problems self-driving cars may cause and the main concerns which are preventing the introduction of driverless vehicles.

Candidates were very successful in finding basic facts in both texts. Over 70% of candidates answered Q.32, Q.37, Q.38 and Q.50 correctly, illustrating strength in this item type. That over 70% also answered Q.40 correctly suggests confidence in handling the genre of the first text, with this item testing whether candidates understood that this was a legal text. Quite possibly the simplicity of this text, and its straightforward language, aided the understanding of a less familiar genre.

Q.53 required candidates to identify four main concerns which are holding back the introduction of self-driving cars. This was a very open question, with candidates able to extract possible answers from the entire second text. However, there were many possible variations in the correct answers for this item, and most of these focused on the final third of the text, logically concentrated under the sub-heading 'The problems of self-driving cars'. It is possible that candidates did not notice this organisational clue, as a number of candidates left this question answered: 53% scored at least one mark, and 28% scored all four marks. Candidates are reminded to attempt all questions as there are no penalties for incorrect answers, and to be aware of wider textual clues such as sub-headings that can assist them.

Some candidates seemed to misread the instructions for Q.54. Candidates were asked 'when is it better for a vehicle to be controlled by a person rather than a computer', and to provide a reason from the text for their answer (with the correct answer being a variation of 'in complicated situations, as humans are safer drivers'). However a number of candidates seemed to interpret the question as 'Which are better at driving, humans or computers?' This misinterpretation led to further incorrect responses to an already difficult question, with only 4% of candidates being able to correctly justify their answers. Candidates are reminded to read the questions carefully before answering them.

Candidates had mixed results for the MC and True/False/Not Given items in the paper, with two of these items being relatively easy, Q.40 and Q.48.iv, answered correctly by over 70% candidates. Two were difficult, Q.48.i and Q.51, answered correctly by fewer than 30% of candidates. Q.51 (asking about the meaning of the phrase '[self driving vehicles] have a lot of hoops to leap through') highlights the difficulty of choosing from four choices when they are similar in their tone (all being negative statements about the future of autonomous cars), but subtly different in their specifics. 37% of candidates were distracted by option C, which focuses on the cost of time needed to develop the cars, rather than the correct answer B, which focuses on the amount of work that has to be done to counter the various problems faced. The 'leaping through hoops' phrase is part of an introductory sentence to the section of the text which expands on the problems and hurdles that need to be overcome before self-driving cars can become a reality.

Part B2

Part B2 was an essay written by Michael S. Roth, an American academic and commentator on higher education. The essay looked back at the state of Liberal education in America and how criticism has become too dominant in the classroom and work culture. Candidates were required to work through Roth's arguments and answer questions such as the dangers and outcomes of liberal learning, and the different definitions of 'critical'.

Following the essay by Roth were two very short texts, comments written by readers of Roth's essay. Candidates were required to interpret the opinions of the two readers, who had different responses to Roth's argument.

Several items towards the end of the paper (Q.70, Q.71, Q74, Q.76, Q.77) focused on higher order skills, especially those requiring knowledge of metaphor or subtle implication. These often caused candidates the most difficulty, as in previous years, with around 30% or less of candidates answering these items correctly. These items require candidates to move away from a literal interpretation of the text and notice meanings that are not explicitly stated. For example, Q.74 required candidates to state the two implications of 'critical' in the title of Roth's article, 'Young Minds in Critical Condition'. A clear understanding of the key messages of the text as a whole was useful in answering this correctly; many young people tend to criticise others' work rather than develop their own, and this is a potentially dangerous situation.

Q.76 contained an element of summary, asking candidates to extract and reformulate points from the text, which was a short comment criticising liberal education. It was attempted reasonably well by candidates overall, with most getting one or two marks out of the total of four. However candidates struggled to get all four marks, and some did not attempt this item. Answers suggested they did not notice the four distinct points in the original text. Candidates should remember to note how many marks are awarded for items, especially when they are open ended, and use that to guide their answers. In this item, one mark was awarded for finding each of the four points, or for finding three of the points whilst also providing a clear statement of the writer's (negative) stance. Candidates were allowed to replicate short chunks of the original text here, as long as they were restructuring the writing in their own words, and not copying long extracts from the original text. Some of the most successful candidates were able to paraphrase the points concisely in their own language constructions. Candidates overall were extremely successful at summarising 'in their own words' in this way.

Q.77, the final item of the test, also proved to be one of the most difficult. Candidates were asked to state whether the writer of a short comment agreed with Roth or not, and to provide a reason for this answer. Fewer than half of the candidates realised that she did agree with Roth, and only 4% could provide a reason why. Many candidates misinterpreted the word 'structure' as a reference to a 'liberal education course' as described by Roth. However, 'structure', in this context, refers to the creation and criticism of ideas, not building or destroying a course.

Overall recommendations

Since this paper tests reading skills, perfect spelling and grammatical accuracy were not required in the longer open-ended questions. Marks were awarded if the message was clear. However, single word answers and short answers which could be copied directly from the text were expected to be more accurate.

There were slightly more open-ended questions across the three papers this year than in previous years. Many of these could be answered using single words or very short answers, and could sometimes be copied from the texts if carefully and selectively done. Candidates are reminded not to copy excessively from the texts, which is possibly the single biggest point of concern with candidates' performance on this year's paper. This damages candidates' chances in two ways: firstly, excessive copying can lead to correct answers being written down, but lost within a mass of incorrect or confusing details, and therefore being scored as incorrect overall. Items Q.8-Q.10 in paper A, Q.53-Q.54 in paper B1 and Q.66 and Q.68 in paper B2 are all examples of where short answers were possible (and could be copied from the text if the section copied was short and concise), but less confident candidates often provided long, rambling answers, sometimes lifting several sentences straight from the text. Secondly, copying large sections of the original texts accurately takes a long time, and doing so repeatedly might easily lead to the candidates running out of time in the examination. This seems to be the case for candidates across all three papers, who sometimes left the last pages of their papers blank.

As touched on above, an understanding of a text as a whole is often as important as a close reading of specific information. Candidates would likely benefit from interpreting the overall stance or message of a text, taking into account organisational features such as sub-headings or introductory sentences, and being aware of cohesive devices such as pronoun referencing and use of synonyms that link various parts of the texts. These are natural strategies used by readers of the kind of texts to be found in these papers, so would naturally tend to benefit candidates. Even if not directly tested, these elements are indirectly useful in helping to confirm whether an answer is logical or not in response to its question.

Paper 2

Part A

Paper 2 Part A is a short writing task. This year, candidates were required to write a letter to the editor of Young Post in response to an article suggesting that an 8am start to the school day makes students feel tired and sleepy. Candidates were asked to express their views in two areas, namely why students feel tired and whether or not a 9am start would solve the problem. The task asked for reasoning, elucidation and arguments, which made it slightly formal in style.

Marks between 0 and 7 were awarded in three domains: content, language and organisation.

General comments

The mean score for Part A was 57.1%. In general, markers thought that the question was quite straightforward and that the topic was relevant to students' school life experience. To achieve high marks, candidates had to demonstrate successfully their ability to make a compelling argument, present valid reasons for it, and clearly elaborate on these reasons. The majority of candidates completed the tasks and addressed the issue with a high degree of relevance. However, some failed to use an appropriate tone or chose an inappropriate genre in their answer. A number of candidates started the letter with informal openings like 'Hi!' or 'Hello, I'm Chris Wong.' A few wrote in the genre of a debate, while some wrote letters of advice. Some weaker candidates wrongly thought that Young Post was the person who had suggested the idea and that they should write to 'him' in response. Some candidates indiscriminately used wording given in the rubric, without regard for the grammatical structure of the resulting sentence, e.g. 'School start to the school day early makes students feel tired'. Some candidates chose to supply a complimentary close of their own, but not all who did this chose an appropriate phrase.

Content

Markers commented that candidates wrote more, and performed better, on the first area – why students feel tired – as they were better able to explain the reasons for this than they were able to comment on the proposal to begin school later. The second part seemed to be more challenging as candidates needed to evaluate the feasibility of the proposed solution and substantiate their claims. Stronger candidates gave equal attention to the two parts, while weaker ones tended to add the evaluation in a short final paragraph.

Candidates were expected to make reference to the article at the beginning of their letter responding to it, but quite a number of candidates failed to do so.

Explanations for students' tiredness included the quantity of homework, suffocating study pressure, tight schedules of after-school activities, part-time work, and overuse of computer-related gadgets. Some candidates impressed markers by citing information about changes in the body clock in adolescence. Most candidates were not in favour of the proposal to start school at 9am as the solution to the problem. Many proposed alternatives such as a change in the education system or better time management instead.

Stronger candidates scored high marks in content due to their well-developed ideas and originality. Their work was generally more persuasive and strongly supported by relevant details than that of weaker candidates, and some strong candidates referred to research studies to add weight to their arguments in an persuasive way, e.g.
'According to a study by the University of Minnesota, teenagers are designed to be 'night owls'.'

Weaker answers tended to have very limited ideas which were developed weakly. Candidates should bear in mind that it is not the length of the answer which determines the scores in content. In fact, it is often the case that exceedingly long pieces of writing score poorly because there are issues with relevance. Some answers contained repeated points, while a few had sections which were well-written but irrelevant. Candidates are reminded to allocate their time well for the two writing tasks in Paper 2, and to note that the short task carries less weight than the long task.

Language

Candidates' performance varied a lot in terms of language. The best scripts were almost error-free and very successful at communicating ideas, whereas the very weak ones were totally unintelligible due to serious language problems.

Problems related to spelling were commonly found, for example 'writting' (for writing) and 'habbit' (for habit). Another problematic area was related to verbs, for example verb form following modals ('I can said....'), formation

of negatives ('They not have.....'), subject-verb agreement ('Students is...'), and tense ('Students were always under pressure').

Other language problems included mistakes of countability/plurality (e.g. 'homeworks'), parts of speech (e.g. 'relax is important'), Chinese-influenced phrasing and run-on sentences (e.g. '8am go to school, can listen to teacher said is very good'), and sentence structure (e.g. 'I am writing to express my views about your article suggested that an 8am start to the school day makes students feel tired and sleepy is wrong').

This year, there were only a small number of blank scripts and few cases of memorised answers. There was some overuse of stock phrases/clichés (e.g. 'flying colours', 'burn the midnight oil'), as well as intrusive inversion and some Latin expressions (e.g. '*de facto*'), which were not always used correctly. It is important to reiterate that stock phrases and uncommon vocabulary are not a reliable means of getting high marks and may indeed have the opposite effect if used inappropriately.

Organisation

Stronger candidates impressed markers with well-structured paragraphs and their ability to establish good connections between the two parts of the question. In this example, the candidate uses anaphoric reference to link the problem and solution: 'Students suffering from exhaustion and fatigue as well as lacking concentration in class are some acute problems. In my opinion, a 9am start to the school day is a key measure to alleviate the aforementioned situation.'

Weaker candidates relied heavily on sentence-initial connectives to link ideas, paying little attention to the logical flow of the writing. This often resulted in fuzziness and incomprehensibility.

Recommendations for Part A

As in previous years, it is necessary to mention the importance of writing legibly, though cases associated with this problem were less frequently reported this year.

To help them become more independent learners, students should be made aware of their own grammatical and spelling mistakes. They should proofread their own work at all times.

Relevance and fluency are equally important in this paper. A piece of highly accurate and fluid writing will not be awarded a high mark if it is off-topic. Relevance is one of the criteria which helps markers differentiate original from memorised materials, so candidates should read the question carefully and make a good plan to make sure all their ideas fit the purpose of writing. Candidates should consider the target audience and the genre required in order to ensure that their answer is relevant and appropriate. Similarly, it is unwise to use low-frequency linguistic features indiscriminately in the hope of impressing markers.

To facilitate effective communication, mastery of the language obviously plays a crucial role. It is commonly agreed that language learning is a process involving the integration of different skills, which influence each other. For example, *extensive* reading is a prerequisite for success in writing, and reading a wide variety of genres can contribute to the development of good writing technique. Attention should also be paid to *intensive* reading, where practices such as taking notes, writing logs and letters to newspapers to share ideas are useful for developing critical and communication ability in writing.

Part B

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

A total of 68,211 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	Popularity %
2	Sports Communication	17.36	26.8%
3	Drama	17.78	6.5%
4	Social Issues	22.05	42.9%
5	Debating	24.69	7.1%
6	Workplace Communication	17.96	5.0%
7	Popular Culture	22.46	5.9%
8	Poems and Songs	15.68	2.5%
9	Short Stories	15.01	2.8%
Unattempted			0.5%

The following is a summary of candidates' general performance in each question of this section of the exam. The subsequent two sections provide general comments about student performance across all the questions as well as recommendations for candidates who are taking the exam in the future.

Content

Question 2: Learning English through Sports Communication

This question was very popular with candidates and, for the most part, was reasonably well handled. Most candidates were able to suggest new activities and give reasons for their inclusion in PE lessons, and stronger candidates were able to demonstrate their lexical range. Many candidates struggled, however, with audience awareness and appropriate register and tone. Many letters were not written as if the student's principal was the audience – the letters seemed to 'lecture' the principal and were not appropriately polite and persuasive.

Question 3: Learning English through Drama

This question produced the widest variety of answers, which suggests some candidates were able to construct a story with a plot while others found this difficult. The stronger candidates were imaginative and creative with their stories and produced rich dialogue. They also used vivid vocabulary appropriate to a story. Weaker candidates wrote about old people fulfilling their dreams but were unable to tell a story that had a plot or a climax. Some candidates also did not read the question correctly and talked about themselves rather than old people fulfilling their dreams.

Question 4: Learning English through Social Issues

This question proved to be by far the most popular. Candidates seemed well-prepared to talk about issues in schooling and were therefore generally able to score well under the 'content' domain. The content also seemed very familiar to students, as evidenced by the higher overall mean score for this question. Stronger candidates seemed well aware they were writing an article for a school magazine that would likely be read by other students and were able to adopt a style and make language choices that were appropriate for such a text. Weaker candidates sometimes did not address the issue of the impact on local schools adequately, emphasising the importance of reading the question carefully.

Question 5: Learning English through Debating

This question, while not very popular, produced the highest overall mean score. Candidates seemed well-prepared to argue for or against a point, supporting their view with logical reasons. Many students also seemed to be familiar with the 'letters to the editor' section of newspapers where readers give their views on current affairs. This familiarity meant that students were able to adopt a suitable tone, while giving clear justifications for their points. The weaknesses in this answer, as with many other questions, centred on an overuse of stock phrases and clichés that were inappropriate for this text type.

Question 6: Learning English through Workplace Communication

Most candidates answering this question were able to structure an email that informed and suggested actions. Some candidates did not read the question carefully enough and sometimes described more than one complaint or did not develop solutions thoroughly enough. The stronger answers were well-organised and ensured that the reader would have no problem identifying the best action to take to deal with the complaint, and no problem understanding why this action was the most appropriate.

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Question 7: Learning English through Popular Culture

This was another well-answered question, as demonstrated by the mean score. As with Q.5, candidates seemed well-prepared for this kind of task. The topic of cinemas was obviously familiar to students, as was a task where candidates were required to make suggestions and to support those suggestions. However, many responses scored lower than they might have done through irrelevant content, often describing films or shops or the importance of popular culture, which was not appropriate for the task. Irrelevant content, added just to boost the word count or to show off some memorised phrases, is rarely successful and can lead to lower marks on domains such as content and organization.

Question 8: Learning English through Poems and Songs

This was the least popular question. Candidates who attempted this question frequently did so without great success. Many candidates did not suggest two activities but rather planned whole days. This meant they were not able to elaborate sufficiently on how the suggestions would help enhance students' interest in learning English. Stronger candidates were creative and imaginative and suggested very interesting activities such as booths decorated as poets' houses.

Question 9: Learning English through Short Stories

This was not a very popular choice for candidates and on the whole was not well answered. Some responses did not mention an author, which was an essential part of the response. This made it difficult to give convincing reasons why the author was chosen and what activities they could help with. In contrast, the stronger candidates gave compelling reasons for their invitations based on how well-known the author was among pupils and what themes they often wrote about.

General comments

The comments below relate to all answers (2-9) from this section of the exam and focus on where candidates can perform better. The comments focus on candidates' choice of language, the accuracy of their language and their strategies for developing coherent and cohesive text.

Choice of language

One area where the quality, and consequently the marks, of candidates' responses suffered was through poor choice and use of stock phrases, clichés and quotes. While it is not wrong for a candidate to build up a rich lexical resource, it is vital that candidates also know where such lexis can be appropriately used. Good writing is about expressing clear meaning in text in ways that are appropriate for the audiences that read them. Stock phrases at times obscure meaning, and can have negative impacts on readers.

Some examples of inappropriate phrasing are:

'it is conspicuous that we should do something to wrestle with the aforementioned rub'
'every coin has two sides'
'a blessing or a curse?'
'a boon or a bane?'
'it goes without saying that...'

There may be a time and a place where these are appropriate but mostly they are just clichés or verbose. The type of text the candidate is writing should guide the choice of language. More vivid language might be welcome when telling a story, for example.

It was noted that this year there were far fewer quotations, which is a welcome trend. Lengthy quotes are not candidates' own language and so cannot be used as examples of candidates' language ability. If the quote seemed inappropriate to the audience, like the stock phrases, they tended to have a very negative impact on candidate performance.

Accuracy of language

Candidate responses continue to be hampered by grammatical inaccuracy and poor spelling of commonly used vocabulary. Problems frequently occurred in the use of tenses, subject-verb agreement, parts of speech, singular/plural/uncountable nouns and spelling. Some examples are:
'Complaint'/'complain' (parts of speech)

'Their children is incapable of standing out in the crowd' (subject-verb agreement)
'golden chance to learn extra knowledges' (uncountable noun)
'this not only help equipped us physically' (verb form)
'though they are escape from HK education' (voice)
'Can travelling' (verb form)
'Let them to trying it' (verb form)

Quizes/quizzes (spelling)
Boardening/broadening (spelling)
Aboard/abroad (spelling)
Attrack/attract (spelling)

Stronger candidates were able to use a range of vocabulary and sentence patterns in appropriate ways according to the text type. They skillfully chose language that was appropriate for the audience and to the required style and register. Candidates who knew lots of expressions but had little awareness of their appropriacy did not score top marks.

Strategies for developing coherent and cohesive text

As in previous years, many candidates' responses could have been enhanced with better organized text. Typically candidates relied on a few simple discourse markers to organize text such as 'besides, furthermore, moreover'. These were often overused, however, with some paragraphs containing as many as four or five discourse markers. Stronger candidates who read more widely would notice that far fewer discourse markers tend to be used in real text. More cohesive and coherent text typically makes use of synonyms, lexical repetition, pronouns and sophisticated placement of ideas within sentences that make reference to earlier ideas before expressing new ones (given-new sentence patterns). It is these more sophisticated features of coherence and cohesion that score highly in the organization section of the marking criteria because of the logical development of ideas.

Recommendations for Part B

There are several areas where candidates can improve their performance in this section of the paper. Candidates should read the questions carefully in the exam in order to ensure that they are addressing them fully. Candidates are unable to score well on content if their answer contains unwanted information (irrelevance) or if the answer is missing some key points (content only partially satisfies the requirements of the question). Careful reading and possibly a simple plan will help ensure that candidates are addressing each part of the question and are giving the each part of the answer an appropriate weight.

It is also vitally important that candidates are able to edit their work during the exam. Too many candidates focused on writing as many words as they could (sometimes twice as many as required) rather than writing something closer to the correct word count and leaving time to ensure that the language choices and organisation were fully appropriate. Candidates should leave time to make changes to word choice and should also carefully edit so that simple, common vocabulary is correctly spelt and there are no obvious subject-verb agreement problems. It was clear that many candidates, in focusing only on the length of their answer, left themselves little time to revise or edit their work. Such revising and editing is likely to have a positive impact on candidates' overall scores.

There are also several things candidates can do to prepare for the writing paper. Candidates should attempt a balanced approach to enhancing their writing skills rather than merely focusing on vocabulary, stock phrases and quotations. Knowledge of vocabulary or stock phrases is not evidence of clear, effective writing that is appropriate for its audience. Writing is so much more than just vocabulary. Reading different kinds of texts, and reading often, will help candidates notice what is appropriate for each text type and help them begin to recreate that style for themselves in their own writing. Wide reading is likely to help with matters of spelling, grammatical accuracy and word choice. There is a clear connection between reading and writing and so to become a better writer it is important to read more and read widely.

Candidates should also be careful about what they read and should not limit themselves to materials specifically designed for exam preparation. In such books, effective writing is often subordinate to issues of grammatical form or vocabulary choices, leading to stilted or inappropriate language for certain kinds of writing task. In other words, such books often present a very restricted range of both writing tasks and language used to complete these tasks. They can therefore provide a very artificial view of the nature of writing in English. In order to maximise their exposure to authentic English, candidates should read different text types (magazines, newspapers, reports, letters) from different sources and not just read textbooks or exam preparation books. Candidates should balance the study of grammar and vocabulary with activities such as extensive reading which will help improve their awareness of appropriacy.

Paper 3

Paper 3 consisted of three parts; Part A, Part B1 and Part B2. All candidates were required to complete Part A and then choose either Part B1 or Part B2. Part B1 was designed to be the easiest section, while Part B2 was designed to be the most difficult section. A total of 25,443 candidates chose Part B1 while a total of 42,519 candidates chose B2, meaning that around 37% of candidates chose B1 and around 63% of candidates 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 (%)	S.D (%)
Part A	58	47.9	25.6
Part B1	54	42.1	22.9
Part B2	54	43.3	16.7

Part A

In Part A, candidates had to listen to four recordings in which a representative from the Hong Kong Cultural Arts Foundation (HKCAF), Nancy Chow, spoke about a music concert the HKCAF was organising and about her role as a judge on a TV music show. As in the previous year's paper, the four tasks In Part A were designed to be progressively more difficult.

Task 1 (Mean = 66.1%)

Candidates were required to fill in a note sheet while listening to a meeting between Nancy Chow and Paul Caruso, a web designer, to discuss creating a web site for the concert. As most of the items in this Task were related to the comprehension of specific information, the majority of candidates were able to handle it well. The first item required candidates to complete the name of the event, "Music: A *night to remember*". This (which was repeated) proved to be relatively easy with 72% of candidates able to provide the correct answer. The next section required the details of the concert. The date, which was also repeated, was also an easy item (87%) as was the age range (80%). Other items proved more difficult. Item 3 (*Central Theatre*) and 4 (*interval*) were answered correctly by only about a third of candidates, with either no answer provided or incorrect spelling making it difficult to determine if the candidate actually understood the content. Most candidates were able to provide information such as "*independent* groups", "*solo* participants", the "Types of performance" and that "*dance groups*" were not allowed. For Item 10, candidates needed to add to the two bullet points provided to complete the sentence "Artists to send a video, which should contain:" with the answer "*a performance*". Markers accepted answers such as "*a video of performance*", which though grammatically incorrect, conveyed the meaning clearly.

The next part, dealing with how to buy tickets, proved quite straightforward, except for Item 12 (*shopping trolley/cart*), which was only answered correctly by 24% of candidates. This may have been an unfamiliar term to many, particularly the second word, which many misconstrued as "car", which was not accepted. Item 15 (*box office*) also proved a little tricky for some (49% correct). Answers such as *booking office* or *ticket office* were accepted but "book office" was not. The multiple choice items for "Logo design" and "Background colour" proved relatively easy (65% and 76% respectively).

Task 2 (Mean = 53.4%)

Task 2 consisted of two parts. In Part A, candidates listened to a meeting between Nancy and her colleagues as they discussed the criteria for acceptance of artists on the show, while in Part B, they discussed which company to choose as a sponsor for the show. As expected, the task proved to be more challenging than Task 1.

In Part A, candidates completed the explanations provided by the discussants for each of a number of criteria. Answers required varied from single words to short phrases. The easier items were Item 18 (No *mistakes*) (72%), Item 23 (The audience can learn about *different/new types of music*) (62%) and Item 25 (Duration: *10-15 minutes*) (77%). Item 23, though quite complex semantically, was repeated and rephrased a number of times, making it easier to process and giving candidates more time. The more challenging items were Item 21 (The audience should *like the performance/have a good time*) (35%) and Item 27 (We need *different types of act/a variety of music*) (36%). The information in these items was also rephrased a number of times but many candidates seemingly found the ideas conveyed too difficult to process and were unable to write acceptable paraphrases of the main ideas.

Task 3 (Mean = 37.9%)

In Task 3, Nancy Chow and her colleagues discussed some of the performers that had applied to perform at the concert. The first part of the task consisted of three short stories of events that had happened to three of the contestants. Candidates had to complete the short summaries of each story with short phrases and clauses. This was a more challenging task than the previous two as it required candidates to understand the narrative they heard and the summaries provided and then complete the summaries so that they conveyed the appropriate meaning. For Item 32 (30%), the answer required was related to the singer in the group 'Liberty Sisters', Amanda, being late because she had overslept and so an answer such as "Amanda *slept in/got up late/woke up late*" conveyed this. However, many candidates simply wrote "was late", which could have been guessed from the context and was not a complete answer. Similarly, Item 24 proved to be very difficult (19%) as candidates wrote simply "dance" rather than the more complete "*dance with the people on stage*" or "*join the show*", both of which expressed the point of the story. Items 35-37 were less difficult with around half the candidates being able to follow the story of "Selena Cheung" and provide the correct answers. However, Item 38, which asked for the information "but in the end [she] *didn't get the part/failed the audition*" was only answered correctly by 19% of candidates, most probably because the point was only mentioned once and it came quite quickly after the previous point. Stronger candidates were able to separate the ideas here and, again, understand that a summary would end with the point of the anecdote. The story of the "Hilton College Band" mirrored this as at least half of candidates were able to get the first two items, Item 39 (son of a *famous Hong Kong actor*) and Item 40 (*forgot all the words*), but the other details of the story came quite quickly and so for Item 41 (*fell into the swimming* pool) (32%), many candidates either missed it or wrote "jumped into the swimming pool". Item 42 proved even more difficult (20%) as candidates had to paraphrase from the recording "It was then they decided they needed a new singer" and put it into a form such as "the band made a decision to *find a new singer/replace the singer*. Most candidates were unable to do this with many writing what they heard such as "the band made a decision to *need a new singer*".

In the second part of Task 3, candidates listened to descriptions of three groups and completed a table with a description of the group and a special feature of it. Items 43 (51%) and 45 (68%) were relatively well answered. Item 44 (31%) required candidates to write something about the group "Cheerful Glee Club" "*creating drum beats/violins/animal sounds*". Only 31% of candidates got this item correct, with many not understanding "drum beats" in particular. Likewise for Item 46 (24%) (They play their instruments *while they march.*) and Item 47 (*form different shapes*), it seems that the concepts were rather too difficult for most candidates to grasp.

Task 4 (Mean = 27.1%)

In Task 4, candidates listened as Nancy Chow engaged in a debate on a radio programme. Nancy was debating against the motion "Music reality shows are killing the music industry". As expected, the items in this Task proved to be very challenging for most of the candidates, with only one item answered correctly by more than half the candidates. Rather than having to complete notes through gap filling or variations on multiple choice, the candidates were asked questions related to what the speakers said and had to answer these in their own words and/or words drawn from the recording. Without the scaffolding of provided notes many candidates found such constructed response items very difficult. It should be noted, however, that, despite their difficulty, all the items in this task (and indeed in Part A) discriminated well between weaker and stronger candidates.

Candidates first listened to Nancy's arguments, divided into three main points. The first point that Nancy made related to what reality music shows provide. Item 48 (29%) required the answer "*a way to hear great pop music*". Many candidate simply wrote *great pop music* or just *pop music*, which was not the point that Nancy was trying to make. Item 49 proved easier (49%) as candidates needed to state why Nancy thought that pop music is important for young people, with an answer such as "*they can develop a love for music*" or "*at least they are listening to something*". Almost half the candidates were able to provide an appropriate paraphrasing of these ideas. Item 50 proved to be very difficult conceptually as candidates had to respond to the question "According to Nancy what do opponents of these shows often say about them?" with an answer such as "*they stop other artists from getting a chance to have a successful career*". Nancy made this point only once and though she did elaborate on it a little, the candidates had to grasp the idea straight away. Another acceptable answer for this item was "*they are destroying the music industry*", as Nancy did say this also. Item 50 was answered correctly by 20% of candidates. Item 51 was also very difficult (18%) as candidates were unable to compose a complete answer to the question "In what way does Nancy say these programmes can help people become better singers?", such as "*They provide information about singing techniques*". It would seem that vocabulary such as "techniques" was beyond many candidates. The last item about Nancy's position asked "what myth these programmes helped dispel". The answer required was that "*talented singers do not have to work hard*". Only 12% of candidates could answer this item. It may have been that many did not understand what a myth is or what dispelling a myth means, though these are the words that Nancy used. The key word here was "talented", and those answers which did not include it, and there were many, did not gain a mark.

The arguments in favour of the motion were put by Wendy Craik from the Hong Kong Chamber Orchestra. Item 53 (29%) ("*get enjoyment from how bad the contestant is singing*") was quite difficult for candidates as it is only mentioned once and not elaborated. Item 54, on the other hand was relatively easy (54%) as the concept of "*copying famous artists*" or "*not being original*" seemed to have been quite familiar to candidates. Item 55, however, was the most difficult item on the whole test, with only 9% of candidates writing correctly the answer that "*winners achieve instant fame*" after the end of the series. The key word "winners" was missing from many answers. The Item 56 asked why this was unfair and just 16% were able to say it was because "*other singers don't get as much publicity*" or "*have worked just as hard*". Many answers to this said something like "other singers work hard", which was close but did not get at the same meaning as the required answer. The penultimate item, asking for the "lie that these programmes are selling", Item 57 (46%) ("*success is easy in the music industry*) proved to be a little tricky conceptually as it dealt with a positive statement that Wendy felt was a lie. Finally, Item 58 (20%) ("*many musicians will give up easily*" or "*won't keep going when things get tough*" proved difficult as the key words "easily" or "when things get tough" were frequently left out.

Recommendations for Part A

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

Part B

In both Parts B1 and B2, the situation was similar, with the candidate adopting the role of Starsky Chung, an employee at North Star Artists, an international agency that manages pop bands and singers. However, the tasks in B1 and B2 were different (see below for a detailed description of each task).

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

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

Table 4: Mean scores in Paper 3 Part B tasks

Part B1 (easy section)			Part B2 (difficult section)		
Task 5	Task 6	Task 7	Task 8	Task 9	Task 10
46.78%	44.61%	35.0%	42.23%	48.44%	39.06%

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

Part B1

Part B1 consisted of three tasks:

- Completing a whole-day schedule for a British band coming to perform in Hong Kong
- Writing a biography of a band member for a fan website
- Writing an email to confirm a request and supply further information.

The B1 Data File included the following kinds of texts: a Skype conference call, which candidates listened to; emails; screenshots of WhatsApp conversations; a letter; an iTunes screenshot; charts; and an extract from a transcript of a podcast.
The candidate's performance is summarised in Table 5:

Table 5: Paper 3 Part B1 results

Task	Full Mark	Mean Score (%)	S.D. (%)
5	18	46.78	25.7
6	18	44.61	27.8
7	18	35.0	25.2

From the table it can be seen that Task 5 proved to be easier this year for this year's candidates as compared to the equivalent task last year, whilst Task 7, with a mean of 35.0% proved to be significantly more difficult than the equivalent task last year. Overall, however, with a mean of 42.13% for all of Part B1, the test can be seen to be broadly similar in terms of difficulty compared to last year. More importantly, the paper proved to be successful in discriminating weaker from stronger candidates and in terms of its own internal reliability.

Task 5

In this task, candidates were required to use information from the Data File to complete a whole-day schedule for a visiting British pop band called Bubblegum. The task, which was worth 18 marks, was divided into 16 marks for task completion, and 2 marks for language. Language was judged according to the comprehensibility and accuracy (grammar and spelling) of the answers in items 5.1 – 5.3. Items in 5.4 were deemed to be a test of identifying the appropriate information only. The main skills tested were the identification and appropriate presentation of information.

The task was divided into three different sections, all of which presented slightly different challenges to candidates. Section 1 involved completing an appointments schedule for the whole day. This challenged candidates to select the correct appointment for the correct time and provide a brief description of the appointment in grammatically correct and appropriate English. Section 2 involved completing a set of special instructions for the band. This challenged candidates not only to identify relevant information but also to present their answer in a stylistically coherent way, for example, using parallel structure when constructing each of the bullet point responses.

Section 3 involved completing a song list and challenged candidates to locate the information and put it into the correct order for the band's performance.

Task 6

This task required candidates to write a biography of a member of the pop band Bubblegum for the fans' website. The task therefore involved carefully reading the instructions about what to include and who the reader was (teenage fans of the band). Candidates had to identify relevant information from the Data File and in this way they combined information from different sources in the Data File, in order to create an appropriate biography. One of the further challenges in the task was to interpret and summarise visual information from two charts in the Data File.

The better candidates demonstrated a good understanding of the genre, including organising the text in a chronological order and demonstrating consistent use of semi-formal register to address the teenage fans. Candidates varied in their ability to manipulate the language from the Data File. Stronger candidates were able to manipulate tenses and voice, as well as using their own language. For example:

After she joined Bubblegum, Chiba and her members released an album called 'Meet the Bubblegum'.

Weaker candidates demonstrated an ability to locate information, but difficulty with control of tenses, plus summarising the visual information from the charts in the Data File. For example:

After two years she have a solo album which called 'Oh So Pretty'. However, sadly, this album was the worstest album in the Buzz Online Worst Albums of 2012 by listener votes.

In this example, the candidate has difficulty manipulating tenses and is relying heavily on the Data File to express the visual information.

Task 7

As noted above, this proved to be by far the most challenging task of the three with a mean score of 35.0%. This was due, in no small part, to the large number of candidates who either left the script blank for this task or wrote nothing of any relevance and so received zero marks.
In this task, candidates were required to write a reply letter in response to a request from a group of students at a local school asking to interview the pop band Bubblegum. In addition, the candidates needed to include some extra

information about the interview with the band (place, date, questions for the band, interview rules, etc.). This task tested candidates' ability to locate relevant information and synthesise it with other information in the Data File and organise it coherently, whilst using language appropriate to a formal reply letter.

The best candidates were able to produce a concise, relevant, organised text whilst maintaining a formal tone. The opening and closing paragraphs were appropriate for the genre. Weaker candidates demonstrated some difficulties in addressing the email to correct person/using the correct salutation, and opening the email by referring to the original request from St Godfrey's School. For example:

> *Dear Mrs Bonnie,*
> *We would be able to have a interview for you.*

More specifically, the task required the candidates to communicate the parameters of the interview, including question topics to avoid and rules to be followed. Better candidates were able to achieve this without causing offence to the reader. For example:

> *Besides, we have some rules for the interview, and we hope you and your clubmates can follow them*
> *seriously.*

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

Part B2

Part B2 consisted of three tasks:
* Writing an email to a company to place an order for souvenir items for an upcoming tour by a British band in Hong Kong
* Writing an email as part of on-going correspondence to respond to questions and persuade a well-known landmark in Hong Kong to grant permission for a band to use the premises to film a music video
* Writing a short article for a fan website to refute claims about a band member's behaviour.

The B2 Data File included the following kinds of texts: a Skype conference call, which candidates listened to; a webpage; emails; a social media webpage; a newspaper article; Skype chat extracts; a magazine article; and an extract of a transcript of a news programme.

The candidates' performance is summarised in Table 6:

Table 6: Paper 3 Part B2 results

Task	Full Mark	Mean Score (%)	S.D. (%)
8	18	42.23	18.2
9	18	48.44	20.6
10	18	39.06	20.1

From Table 1 above, it can be seen that with a mean score of 43.3%, Part B2 proved to be more difficult for this year's candidates than Part B2 last year with Task 10 proving to be the most difficult with a mean score of slightly over 39%. The paper proved to be successful in discriminating weaker from stronger candidates and in terms of its own internal reliability.

Task 8

Overall, this task proved to be reasonably challenging, with candidates scoring a mean of 42.23% In the task, candidates were required to write an email to a manufacturing company to place an order for souvenirs for a British pop band's up-coming Asian tour. Candidates had to identify relevant information (e.g. which souvenirs were the best choice to order) by synthesizing sources in the Data File, including the listening input (Skype conference call). They then needed to present this information appropriately, using formal register. Candidates were asked to provide an appropriate subject line for the email and the best candidates were able to choose one that included the reason for writing (placing an order), as in the following example:

> *Ordering souvenirs for Bubblegum's concerts*

The content of the email needed to include several points, including which items were being ordered, whether the band's name/logo was required on the product, the deadline, etc. In the better answers, the reason for writing was clear, the information was correctly selected and organised well (e.g. by product) and the register was consistently appropriate for an email to a company with which the writer had had no prior contact. For example:

> *We are interested in ordering some products for Bubblegum's Asian tour.*

Weaker candidates struggled to maintain the register in the email and/or state the reason for writing clearly enough as there was some difficulty manipulating the passive form 'to have something made/manufactured'. For example:

> *I hope your company can do a good job.*
> *We would like to manufacture five types of souvenirs*

As a result, the purpose of placing an order and taking steps to establish a business relationship with the reader were less successfully achieved.

Task 9

This task proved to be the easiest of the three, with a mean of 48.44%. This task involved writing an email, as part of on-going correspondence. Candidates were required to respond to questions from and persuade the management of the Peak Sky Deck, a well-known landmark in Hong Kong, to grant permission for the band Bubblegum to use the premises to film a music video. Candidates had to synthesise information across a range of sources, including the representation of visual information (i.e. tables of data) in textual form. The better candidates referred to the previous correspondence well, were able to answer the questions from the Peak Sky Deck and successfully persuaded and reassured them about the filming process. These candidates also demonstrated strong ability to understand and summarise the relevant visual information, including commenting directly on it and relating it back to addressing the concerns of the Peak Sky Deck. For example:

> *According to the survey, many respondents recognise famous landmarks, such as Statue of Liberty in New York, through TV, movies and music videos. This shows that taking part in a music video may benefit the Peak Sky Deck by increasing its fame.*

Weaker answers demonstrated either a lack of concision when summarising visual information or a tendency to over-summarise meaning that key statistical data was overlooked. A further challenge for candidates was to persuade the writer appropriately throughout the text. Weaker candidates failed to consistently persuade/reassure the reader, especially in the main body of the text (i.e. when directly addressing the concerns of the Peak Sky Deck management).

Task 10

This was the most challenging of the tasks in Part B2, with a mean of 39.06%. The lower mean compared with previous tasks can be attributed to a much larger number of candidates scoring either zero or one point compared to the other two tasks.

Candidates were required to write a short article for the British pop band Bubblegum's website, which is read by the fans of the band. The purpose of the article was to refute claims made about a Bubblegum band member, Mark Nelson, and an alleged clash he had had with a photographer from Gossip Week magazine (Ruari King).

One challenge that candidates encountered related to the higher level skill of constructing a clear claim and counter-claim structure in the text. For example, in the Gossip Week article, it was claimed that Mark Nelson pushed over the photographer. To counter-claim this statement, candidates had to first acknowledge that there was an incident, and clearly reference that what Gossip Week said took place was only a claim. This therefore required careful reading to determine what the claims were in the Gossip Week article, what the counter-claims were based on the evidence available in the Data File, and communicating them clearly in the text. Stronger candidates were able to signal the claims and counter-claims clearly to the reader. They were also able to maintain audience awareness in the text. For example:

> *According to Gossip Week...*
> *We would like to reveal the other side of the story...*
> *As fans of Bubblegum, we believe that you readers know very well which side to believe in.*

Although many candidates began their articles appropriately, some candidates lost sight of the task as they progressed, producing texts which were more similar to essays (e.g. side-tracking into comments on the paparazzi) or texts which were not written bearing in mind the audience of teenage fans.

Recommendations for Part B

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

Many weaker candidates (in both B1 and B2) copied information from the Data File, sometimes actually quoting from it using quotation marks. As advised last year, candidates should not do this since language marks are awarded for paraphrasing or summarising the Data File, not for copying it.

Other main areas which require comment this year are reading of the Data File, checking task instructions, and expressing visual information in written form. In terms of reading, it was noted that some candidates had difficulty locating information if they were required to follow links from one document in the Data File to another (e.g. tasks 5, 6 and 8). Therefore, candidates need to practise the skill of reading information contained in the Data File carefully as some data may be linked.

Candidates are advised to read the prompt carefully to ensure they understand all elements of the task. For example, in tasks 7 and 9, the need for reference to previous correspondence was overlooked or mishandled by some candidates. In paper B2, awareness of the audience challenged a number of candidates this year. For example, despite clear instructions in the task, candidates did not pay sufficient attention to *maintaining* register and audience awareness in tasks 8, 9 and 10, thus affecting the appropriacy of the texts. When faced with genres of an unfamiliar nature, candidates should be deciding on register by asking themselves questions such as 'what is the context here?', 'who am I?', and 'who is my reader?'

Regarding the summarising of visual information, common errors with language were centred around sentence structure (e.g. attempting to manipulate verb/noun phrases) and selecting correct tense. An element of reading carefully (including reading for inference) is also worth noting here, as some candidates summarised too generally, could not summarise well enough, or failed to make links between the summarised information and the rest of the paragraph / text.

Paper 4

Over the nine-day examination period, a total of 27 versions of the question paper were used. The examination comprised two parts: Group Interaction and Individual Response. The Group Interaction discussion tasks were set based on a variety of short texts. These occasionally included statistics, tables and pictures to aid comprehension. Depending on the questions given, candidates were required to perform a variety of functional tasks, such as giving opinions, making suggestions, solving problems, making and explaining choices, preparing arguments for and/or against a motion, and discussing the advantages and disadvantages of a proposal. For Part B, candidates were each given one minute to respond to a question asked by the examiner.

The candidates' performance was judged based on four domains namely Pronunciation & Delivery; Communication Strategies; Vocabulary & Language Patterns; and Ideas & Organisation (see the Paper 4 [Speaking] Assessment Guidelines for more details). This year, the mean scores for each of the domains (out of a total of 14) were 7.28, 7.12, 6.95 and 7.49 respectively. The mean score achieved out of a total score of 56, derived by adding up the domain scores, was 28.83.

Examiners' comments on candidates' performance in each of the four domains in the two parts are reported as follows.

Part A Group Interaction

Pronunciation & Delivery
Strong candidates tended to deliver their speech at a reasonable pace, with correct phrasing and sufficient intonation. Their delivery was usually clear and natural.
Although most of the candidates satisfactorily projected their voice, many struggled with fluency and some had difficulty with intonation. Some candidates equated rapid delivery with fluency but this usually resulted in poor

articulation, affecting the clarity and accuracy of their pronunciation. Some candidates added the Cantonese particle 'la' at the end of utterances.

Below is a list of common pronunciation problems reported by examiners:

Problem	Examples			
Lexical items	raft (pronounced 'redft') daughter (pronounced 'doctor') effort (pronounced 'edfot') gadget (pronounced 'getget') game (pronounced 'gam') traditional (pronounced 'trade-ditional') career (pronounced 'korea') robot (pronounced 'robert')		healthy (pronounced 'heavy') penguin (pronounced 'pengen') youth (pronounced 'young') lack (pronounced 'lick') job (pronounced 'jog') horizon (pronounced 'horisong') definitely (pronounced 'definately') tyres (pronounced 'ties')	
Consonant clusters and digraphs	proposal (pronounced 'poposal') think (pronounced 'fing') place (pronounced 'pace') friends (pronounced 'fans') drama (pronounced 'jaama')		shower (pronounced 'sour') crime (pronounced 'kime') children (pronounced 'childen') try (pronounced 'chai')	
Word stress in multi-syllabic words	Antarctica military photography veterinarian persuade	loyalty censorship ugliness compulsory	Switzerland simulation celebrities elegance	astronomy authority enthusiastic astronaut
Final consonants	because	experience	nowadays	think
'ed' endings	celebrated	marketed	published	adopted

Communication Strategies

As in previous years, most candidates relied on formulaic expressions like "Do you mind if I begin?", "What do you think?", and "That's a good idea". However, in some instances, these expressions were not correctly used. For example, some candidates responded "I agree with you" but continued with an opposite point of view, which affected the coherence of the group discussion. Some very weak candidates gave irrelevant ideas and either repeated what had been mentioned by the other candidates or summarised it without any new or different ideas.

Some candidates were tied to their notecards, making very little eye contact with the other candidates and reading out what they had prepared. Turn-taking was a limited in groups where the candidates gave 'mini-presentations', in the order of their candidate labels, 'A', 'B', 'C' and then 'D'. Such discussions were often mechanical without much spontaneous or genuine interaction.

Very weak candidates often waited for others to invite them to participate in the group discussion and therefore received a low score in this domain.

Vocabulary and Language Patterns

Although willing to speak, candidates struggled to construct grammatical utterances and often had difficulty using the correct word to express their ideas. Examples of common problems in language patterns reported by examiners are listed below:

Problem	Examples	
Commonly misunderstood word(s)/phrase(s)	compulsory military service measures (noun)	upcycling endless city
Chinese English	use my eyes to see foreign country people There have many people … Some people are difficult to … I very enjoy it	
Comparatives	more better more easier	
Modals	may getting can making they may be can do	
Agreement	she don't	
Verb 'be'	I'm agree with you they are lack of …	
Transitive verb	discuss about	
Singular/plural nouns	a children many money many information many experience	
Connectives	although … but/however	
Gerund and infinitive	let us to do make me to do want to doing	
Parts of speech	I felt boring	

Some candidates, aiming to give a variety of sentence structures, wrote complete sentences in their notes. However, this resulted in formal structures which made their speech somewhat unnatural. Examples include "On the other hand" and "Nonetheless".

Ideas and Organisation

A majority of examiners found the range of topics and the level of difficulty appropriate. Familiar topics like selfies, mobile devices and YouTube usually produced good discussions. However, less familiar topics such as city designs, upcycling and compulsory military service, posed more challenges for some candidates. In such cases, candidates tended to stray off topic or to repeat the ideas given in the reading material. Moreover, some candidates performed poorly on topics requiring them to prepare for a debate, as they did not discuss arguments both for and against the motion. Very often, these discussions were not well organised.

Stronger candidates were able to give elaborated, creative ideas, and referred to their personal experience. Their ideas flowed more logically and naturally, and were more clearly presented.

Part B Individual Response

Candidates were each given one minute to respond to a question asked by the examiner. They are allowed to ask for the question to be repeated or to be given another question, but this in included in the one-minute response time. Examiners reported that some candidates, after being asked a question, requested another question without giving the question much thought.

It was reported that candidates' responses were generally comprehensible and audible. Some candidates relied on formulaic expressions such as "Thank you for your question" or "This is a good question" at the beginning of the individual response, and ended with "This is the end of my presentation". Candidates are encouraged to focus on a main idea and drawn on their own experience and creativity to form a response.

General recommendations

During the 10-minute preparation time, candidates should take time to understand the discussion task and to study the reading materials. When making notes, they should use point-form or graphic organisers to help them plan their ideas, rather than writing out an entire speech.

During the discussion, candidates should pay close attention to what other candidates are saying, and show genuine interest in and understanding of what is being said. If a point is not clear, it would be appropriate for to ask for clarification.

To add more variety to the discussion and to generate more lively and informed responses, candidates are encouraged to read and listen to a wide range of subject areas. They are also encouraged to practise conversing in English in their everyday lives.

School-based Assessment (SBA) Report

This year, a total of 61,950 candidates participated in the School-based Assessment, approximately 4,300 fewer than in the previous year. This is the fourth year that the SBA component has been included in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination, and it seems that the majority of the teachers have a good understanding of the procedure for implementing SBA and have no problem assessing their students accurately and reliably. According to the moderation statistics, which analyse the marks submitted by the participating schools, 80.4% of the schools are in the 'within the expected range' category, while the marks of 11.2% of schools were higher than expected, and 8.4% lower than expected. Among the schools with marks higher or lower than expected, the majority only deviated slightly from the expected range. It is encouraging to see that there are improvements every year and that the marks submitted by the schools continue to be accurate and reliable.

Support to schools and teachers still remains an integral part of the SBA process. The HKEAA continues to provide professional development courses for both new and experienced teachers to ensure that SBA is implemented effectively and efficiently. As in previous years, briefing sessions were held to keep the teachers up-dated on developments and to enable teachers to share ideas on teaching and learning. In addition, standardisation, feedback and sharing sessions were conducted by district coordinators for Secondary 5 and 6 teachers to ensure that schools implement SBA according to the mandatory guidelines. Close contact with the school coordinators is continually maintained through emails and school visits.

General Comments and Recommendations

SBA is now a fairly successful means of assessing the students' speaking ability but it seems that some teachers are simply treating SBA as an assessment tool. They are not putting enough emphasis on teaching students how to develop the good speaking habits which will allow them to use English in their future lives, as well as score well in SBA.

It is noted that some students simply copy large chunks of information onto their note cards in preparation for the individual presentation, and then just read aloud everything they have copied, sometimes with no understanding of what they are reading. Some students also engage in over-rehearsal and memorisation in the hope of getting a better result during the actual assessment; but the reality is that such performances are usually stilted and unnatural, and if they forget part of what they have memorised, they become flustered and find it difficult to continue, especially if they do not really understand what they are saying.

Even during group interactions, some students read aloud or recited what they had prepared earlier, ignoring what others were saying. What is said in these cases may not be relevant to what other members of the group are saying and so may not get high marks. So writing out a short passage and then reciting or reading it aloud does not help students score high marks in most cases as doing so prevents them from taking part in a real discussion.

In order to help students achieve high marks in their individual presentations and group interactions, teachers need to put more emphasis on the fundamental speaking and interactional skills. Although SBA is part of the senior curriculum, the teaching of speaking skills could be started in junior forms so that students can build a stronger foundation. Teachers could teach students how to generate ideas for the topic that they want to talk about, guiding them in their search for relevant information, note-taking and organising the points in a coherent manner. Lower ability students may need to be taught the pronunciation of key vocabulary and simple sentence structures to help them express their ideas clearly. Then they should be given a chance to rehearse what they plan to say based on their notes a few times. Since students have generated their own ideas, have made notes and thought of the organisation

by themselves, they should be familiar with what they want to say and therefore they should be confident when doing their presentations or taking part in group interactions.

In the case of group interactions, in addition to the skills mentioned above, students need to be taught to listen to others, get the gist of what they have heard and then learn to make appropriate responses. They should also be taught the proper ways to agree and disagree with the points made by others, how to introduce new ideas and justify their points, and how to make sure everyone is involved. Discussions might then become meaningful interactions instead of unrelated presentations that do not form a coherent whole, and students may have a better chance of getting a high mark.

Simply teaching the fundamental speaking skills mentioned above is not enough to help students develop good speaking skills, however. They need to be given time to put into practice what they have been taught. In the beginning, students may find it hard to express their ideas when just referring to their notes, especially if they have been allowed to prepare written scripts for their presentations and group interactions in the past. This is to be expected because it takes time to develop good speaking habits. That is why teachers should start training students as early as possible. In order to be able to speak fluently and naturally, students need to practise using the language in a spontaneous, natural and meaningful context on a daily basis. Every chance to speak in English gives students an opportunity to practise their speaking skills and it also helps them gain confidence, which will definitely lead to better results in their SBA assessment and in Paper 4. Students should have a chance to practise speaking in every English lesson and not only when they have an oral or SBA lesson.

Conclusion

SBA is a form of summative assessment but at the same time it is a part of the learning and teaching process. Teachers should be using SBA to help students develop good speaking habits so that they will be able to use the language fluently and meaningfully during the examination and also in their future lives. Students should not treat SBA only as a means to attain a high mark in the HKDSE but should take this chance to develop into really proficient speakers of the language. Only if teachers and students believe in the importance of developing good speaking skills can the true spirit of SBA be realised.

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 5 marks on the 1B2 scale.

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

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

Paper 1B

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

Paper 3B

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

Paper 3B

3B1 (easier)	3B2 (more difficult)
47	28
48	30
49	32
50	34
51	36
52	39
53	45
54	54