

## Candidates' Performance

### General comments and recommendations

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

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

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

Last but not least, candidates should pay special attention to logic, coherence and clarity in presentation. They should learn not to muddle through their answers or cram facts into their answers without making their arguments clear. All in all, they should improve their language and presentation skills.

### Question Choice Pattern

| Question Number | Popularity |
|-----------------|------------|
| Paper 1         |            |
| 1               | Compulsory |
| 2               |            |
| 3               |            |
| 4               |            |
| Paper 2         |            |
| 1               | 10%        |
| 2               | 24%        |
| 3               | 9%         |
| 4               | 28%        |
| 5               | 23%        |
| 6               | 2%         |
| 7               | 4%         |

### Paper 1 (Data-based questions)

- Q.1 (a) Performance was average. The question required candidates to identify two characteristics of modernization in Hong Kong in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some candidates could not identify the characteristics, and/or could not use relevant clues from the Source to support their answers.
- (b) Performance was average. Candidates were required to discuss Hong Kong's contributions to the development of Asia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with reference to Sources A and B and using their own knowledge. Answers tended to be general. Some answers mistakenly discussed the significance of Hong Kong's development to itself, and thus were not awarded any marks. Candidates should have mentioned certain Asian countries or regions as examples and related Hong Kong's contributions to their developments.
- Q.2 (a) Performance was good. The question required candidates to explain why Hitler was not a man of good faith according to Source C. Most candidates made good use of the Source to point out that Hitler always broke the promises he made. However, some candidates merely quoted the Source without further elaboration, hence losing marks.
- (b) Performance was good. The question required candidates to infer the purpose of the appeasement policy according to the author of Source E. Most candidates were able to make good use of clues in the Source to determine that the appeasement policy, in the eyes of the author of Source F, aimed at diverting German aggression eastward to the Soviet Union. However, some candidates misunderstood 'Go east!' in the Source as suggesting aggression towards Eastern Europe in general or even Asia, and/or mistook the wolf in the cartoon as a symbol for Italy, and so lost marks.
- (c) Performance was far from satisfactory. This question required candidates to compare the three Sources and determine which had the least negative view towards the appeasement policy in the 1930s. Some candidates merely described the three Sources without going one step further to compare them, therefore any conclusions reached were ungrounded. The weak candidates misread the Sources, for example, regarding the author of Source C as not against the appeasement policy, mistaking Chamberlain in Source D for Hitler, and mistaking Source E as appraising the peace-keeping efforts of the appeasement policy. Only the best candidates read the Sources correctly, did substantiated comparisons and determined the correct answer.
- Q.3 (a) Performance was good. The question required candidates to identify one view from Source F regarding the People's Commune. Many candidates were able to appropriately describe the painter's view. Some weak candidates misunderstood the Source and wrote that the People's Commune was bad in the eyes of the painter. Answers like this were not awarded any marks.
- (b) Performance was average. This question required candidates to describe two trends in China's economic development in the period 1953-75 as shown in Source G. Generally speaking, candidates were able to conclude valid trends from the Source. However, many did not cover the whole period as specified in the question. They tended to tackle the beginning and the end of the period in question only.
- (c) Performance was average. This question required candidates to comment on the validity of the statement that 'both the Great Leap Forward Movement and the Cultural Revolution had good intentions but yielded bad results', with reference to Sources F and G and using their own knowledge. Only the best candidates presented balanced answers and based their discussions on 'intentions' and 'results'. Some weak candidates attempted to discuss 'intentions' and 'results', but performance was affected by obvious mismatches.

- Q.4 (a) Performance was below average. This question required candidates to explain the way in which the year 1954 was a turning point in the history of UNESCO. Most candidates were able to cite relevant materials from the Source, but not many of them succeeded in contrasting the situations before and after the year and identifying the change.
- (b) Performance was below average. This question required candidates to discuss whether ideological factors were the most important ones that had affected international cooperation in the period 1945-2000, by comparing it with other factors. Many answers displayed one or more of the following flaws: failing to clearly differentiate Source from own knowledge; giving a one-sided discussion of the impact of ideology on international cooperation, in most cases biased towards its negative aspect; presenting unsubstantiated discussions; failing to evaluate the relative importance of the ideological factor by comparing it with other factors. Only the best candidates fulfilled the requirements of the question by referring to both the Source and their own knowledge.

### Paper 2 (Essay-type questions)

- Q.1 Performance was far from satisfactory. This question required candidates to select two issues from the question and examine how the Hong Kong government tackled the problems arising from these issues. In many cases, candidates did not have a basic understanding of the selected issues. Many candidates did not focus on 'problems' as required by the question; instead, they merely presented factual accounts of the major developments in the relevant periods and then 'concluded' that all events in the periods concerned were the result of government initiatives. Excellent answers were rare. Candidates should have read the question more carefully and followed the instructions.
- Q.2 Performance was average. The question required candidates to comment on the validity of the statement that 'the Qing government failed to transform China in period 1900-12, whereas the Nanjing government succeeded in transforming the country in the period 1927-37.' With appropriate historical evidence, candidates might choose to agree or disagree with either or both of the two sections in the statement. Generally speaking, candidates made a good attempt to handle the question. Many answers were substantiated with reasonable coverage of China's political, economic, social, military and diplomatic developments in the two periods. However, there were two common weaknesses: firstly, candidates were not always able to grasp the meaning of 'transformation', which involves fundamental changes. Secondly, candidates did not always compare developments during and before the period under discussion; without such comparisons it was difficult to show any transformations. Students should note that 'transformation' is a focus of Theme A (Modernisation and Transformation in Twentieth-Century Asia) of the HKDSE History curriculum. They should be well versed in transformation as an aspect of historical development and transformation as a question word that requires elaborate comparison skills.
- Q.3 Performance was average. This question required candidates to discuss the factors that worked for and against the development of the relationship between the People's Republic of China and Japan in the period 1949-2000. Many candidates listed relevant events related to the bilateral relationship. This showed that they were well prepared for the examination. However, not many went one step further to conceptualize 'factors' that worked for and against the development of this relationship. Another common weakness was disproportionate discussion of either country instead of both in terms of their responses to a certain development. Candidate should note that History essay questions do not merely require regurgitating facts; in most cases processing facts and making analyses are required in order to fulfil the question's requirements and get high marks.

- Q.4 Performance was average. The question required candidates to comment on the validity of the statement that ‘Germany was more aggressive in the 1930s than it was before the First World War.’ Candidates were expected to compare German diplomacy in the two periods to determine which period reflected a higher degree of German aggression. Generally speaking, candidates did better in the period 1930s. The better answers demonstrated the required facts and comparison skills, whereas some weaker answers treated the question as one that asked for the rise of Hitler instead of the expansionary policy under his rule. Answers that presented separate accounts of German aggression in the two periods without making any comparison were awarded low marks.
- Q.5 Performance was satisfactory. The question required candidates to discuss whether the Cold War was a US response to USSR challenges or a USSR response to US challenges. Generally speaking, the candidates were familiar with historical facts about the Cold War, but they tended to regurgitate such facts without paying due attention to the key words ‘challenges’ and ‘response’. Only the best candidates clearly examined the Cold War in the light of the statement in the question. Another common weakness was inadequate coverage of the period specified in the question. Students are advised to read the questions more carefully, especially those that are set on familiar topics but use a different approach.
- Q.6 Performance was average. The question required candidates to discuss the relative importance of nationalism and foreign intervention in shaping Arab-Israeli relations in the period 1945-2000. Candidates should have evaluated the two factors and determined the extent to which they were important in shaping the relations. Generally speaking, the candidates were quite familiar with this topic. However, some merely regurgitated prepared answers without paying due attention to the key phrase ‘relative importance’; they produced separate accounts about how nationalism and foreign intervention shaped Arab-Israeli relations and did not make any comparisons. Of those who did make such comparisons, some introduced other factors, a task that was not required by the question. Some candidates divided their answers into several periods, which was an acceptable strategy, but not many answers using this approach were effectively organized. Candidates are advised to make elaborate comparisons when handling questions that require discussion of ‘relative importance’.
- Q.7 Performance was average. This question required candidates to select one regional intergovernmental organization and explain its formation and development up to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The question was straightforward, but many answers displayed one or more of the following flaws: selecting a wrong organization (such as the League of Nations or the United Nations, which were not regional); adopting the ‘trace and explain’ approach without paying due attention to the ‘formation’ of the selected organization as required by the question; describing the contribution and/or influence of the selected organization, which was not a focus of the question; giving inadequate coverage of the specified period. Having said this, some outstanding candidates were able to discuss the formation and development of the selected organization.

### School-based Assessment

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

In the 2014 HKDSE History Examination, participating schools have to submit SBA marks for inclusion in the subject result. We are happy to report that 57.0% of schools fall into the ‘within the expected range’ category, while the marks of 22.0% of schools are higher than expected, and 21.0% lower than expected. However, among the schools with marks higher or lower than expected, the majority only deviate slightly from the expected range. This showed that the majority of the teachers do have a good understanding about SBA implementation, and hence the marking standards are generally appropriate.

The implementation of SBA in 2013-14 HKDSE History was generally satisfactory. SBA District Coordinators (DCs) were appointed to support schools in implementing SBA. Messages were conveyed to subject teachers through post-mortem seminars, SBA conferences and briefing sessions. Teachers, subject heads and School Coordinators (SCs) were informed of the mark submission arrangement and the format of submitting students’ sample works to the HKEAA. Effective communication among DCs, SCs, supervisor and subject manager was maintained via emails and phone calls.

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

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

In 2014 HKDSE History, one case of serious plagiarism was identified. Eventually, zero marks were given to Task Two and downgrade by one level was imposed for the candidates’ result. To avoid SBA malpractice, HKDSE History candidates should properly cite sources they have used and quoted (refer to the Appendix H, SBA Teacher’s Handbook: <http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/DocLibrary/SBA/HKDSE/SBAhandbook-2014-HIST-E-Oct13.pdf>), and should make analysis and presentation in their own words as far as possible.