

## Candidates' Performance

### General comments and recommendations

On the whole, candidates seem to have been well prepared for the examination. Most answers displayed knowledge relevant to the issues/topics covered by the curriculum. However, the performance was not always commensurate with the effort made. To achieve good results in History examinations, candidates need the following skills: identifying the key term(s)/phrase(s) 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; in contrast, when the question required the use of both sources and their own knowledge, they used one but not both. Similarly for essay-type questions, candidates should make sure that they grasp the gist of a question before producing the answer. Candidates are advised to read *A Manual of Question Words Used in History* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2007; online version 2011), in order to familiarise themselves with various command words and other commonly used words that appear in HKDSE History questions.

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

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

### Question Choice Pattern

Question Number	Popularity
Paper 1	
1	Compulsory
2	
3	
4	
Paper 2	
1	24%
2	18%
3	1%
4	67%
5	53%
6	17%
7	20%

### Paper 1 (Data-based questions)

- Q.1 (a) Performance was good. Most candidates were able to identify one trend in medical development in Hong Kong, with valid clues from the Source as evidence.
- (b) Performance was good. The question required candidates to prove that the Kwong Wah Hospital enjoyed high social status at the time. Most candidates were able to make inferences based on the officiating guests' high social ranking. However, some weak candidates used inappropriate clues, such as the guests' ethnic background, which was irrelevant.
- (c) Performance was fair. The question required candidates to discuss how modernity and tradition shaped the Hong Kong society in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Candidates were able to make good use of the Sources. However, discussions based on own knowledge tended to be too general (for example, 'There were buildings of Western architectural style in Hong Kong'). Candidates should at least give specific names for such examples, in this case the names of the buildings. Candidates are reminded that whereas 'modernity' is always associated with the West, 'tradition' is not necessarily all oriental. For example, Christianity was to the Chinese in the 1930s a symbol of modernity, but it was itself a tradition from the West and Middle East.
- Q.2 (a) Performance was below expectations. The question required candidates to identify the view of the Nobel Committee on the situation of the USSR in 1990. Only a minority of candidates were able to describe the situation of the USSR based on clues from the Source. Some weak candidates misunderstood the gist of the question and discussed the positive attitude of the Nobel Committee towards the USSR, hence losing marks.
- (b) Performance was fair. The question word 'nature' seemed to be difficult for many candidates. Only a minority of candidates were able to identify the nature of Gorbachev's governance, with an effective explanation. Some weak answers mistook policy initiatives for nature; some merely quoted from the Source without further elaboration; some wrote that the nature of Gorbachev's governance was to dissolve the USSR, so scored no marks.
- (c) Performance was satisfactory. The question required candidates to evaluate whether Gorbachev was an able leader of the USSR. Here, 'able' should be understood in the context of 'leader of the USSR' who would work for the interest of this superpower. Some able candidates were able to make good use of the Sources and relevant historical facts to discuss how Gorbachev's policy initiatives affected the development of the USSR. Some candidates agreed that Gorbachev was an able leader, but wrongly emphasised that his policies led to the dissolution of the USSR, thus missing the fact that these approach actually implied Gorbachev's inability to save the USSR, hence contradicting their viewpoint. Some weak candidates misinterpreted the Sources. For example, Source C, which mentioned some difficulties faced by the USSR, was said to be blaming Gorbachev for causing such difficulties.
- Q.3 (a) Performance was good. Most of the candidates were able to infer one characteristic of the Red Guards from one relevant clue from the Source. The weakest candidates copied from the Source but did not answer the question.
- (b) Performance was good. Most of the candidates made good use of the Source to prove that the Shenzhen government welcomed the opening of China's first McDonald's in the city. However, some weak answers cited the excitement of the Shenzhen *people* to prove the *government's* attitude. This misuse of evidence scored low marks.
- (c) Performance was fair. The question required candidates to compare China before and after the Reform and Opening-up Policy of 1978, in order to conclude whether China was transformed (fundamentally changed). Only the best candidates were able to provide a balanced treatment of both periods and focus on the key word 'transform'. Many answers, however, displayed one or more of the following flaws: narrating facts

about the two periods without making any comparisons; discussing the impact of the Reform and Opening-up Policy without considering developments before it; not distinguishing Sources from own knowledge.

- Q.4 (a) Performance was satisfactory. The question required candidates to suggest a caption for the cartoon, and justify their choice with reference to Source G. Most candidates made good use of the clues to justify the captions they suggested. Some weak candidates wrongly identified the country represented by the characters of the cartoon, and so lost marks. Others ignored the Source and gave irrelevant answers.
- (b) Performance was satisfactory. The question required candidates to explain whether the author of Source H would support Germany's participation in the First World War with reference to the language used in the Source. Many candidates pointed out the author's negative attitude, with appropriate clues related to 'language' used in the Source. A small number of candidates missed the key word 'language', and so wrote irrelevancies.
- (c) Performance was fair. The question required candidates to discuss whether the First World War was caused primarily by the miscalculations of the European powers. In other words, candidates were required to assess the importance of such miscalculations relative to at least one other cause of the First World War. Almost all candidates stated and explained their standpoint clearly by referring to the Sources and their own knowledge. The best candidates were able to discuss the relative importance of causes of the War in a balanced manner. Some weak candidates ignored the key words 'miscalculations' and 'primarily' in the question, and merely gave prepared answers on the causes of the First World War.

#### Paper 2 (Essay-type questions)

- Q.1 Performance was fair. The question required candidates to discuss the extent to which the political development of Hong Kong in the period of 1967-2000 was a result of the China factor. A lot of candidates were able to point out and explain the influence of the Cultural Revolution and the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration on the political development of Hong Kong. Better candidates also covered the June Fourth Incident and the PRC government's reaction to Governor Patten's political reform plan. This shows that the candidates were well prepared for this topic. However, many candidates failed to properly handle the key question phrase 'to what extent', and they tended to discuss either the China factor or other factors (such as internal factors of Hong Kong). Good answers discussed both and assessed their relative importance, thus giving grounds for any conclusion about the 'extent' of influence.
- Q.2 Performance was fair. This was a straightforward question that required candidates to compare two modernisation efforts in terms of their aims and programmes. Only the best candidates demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of the question and compared the aim and programmes in a well-substantiated and balanced manner. Many answers displayed one or more of the following flaws: focusing on only part of a modernisation effort (for example, the Great Leap Forward of the Second Five Year Plan); confusing modernisation efforts with ordinary historical events (such as the May Fourth Incident); discussing the regimes of given historical figures (such as 'Mao's era' and 'Deng's era') without focusing on specific modernisation efforts; producing separate accounts of the two modernisation efforts without drawing any comparisons; discussing the background and effectiveness rather than aim and programmes of such efforts; producing statements which were too general for the aims (such as 'strengthening China').

Q.3 Performance was poor. This was a straightforward question that required candidates to compare the ways in which two Southeast Asian countries achieved independence. A few able candidates made appropriate comparisons as required, with good substantiation, but many candidates failed to focus on the 'methods' of independence and instead gave separate chronological accounts of independence movements without comparing them, as required by the question. The weakest candidates did not seem to understand the term 'Southeast Asia' and discussed countries such as Japan and South Korea.

Q.4 Performance was fair. The question required candidates to discuss whether the Second World War was unavoidable. Besides giving an account of factors that led to the outbreak of the Second World War, candidates had to go one step further and assess whether such factors were really strong enough to make the War unavoidable. Only a handful of the best candidates did well in both parts. Most candidates did well in the first part, but tended to be weak in the second part. A small number of candidates responded to the question using the 'to what extent' approach, but the answer tended to be unbalanced and weak in organisation. The weakest answers listed all the factors that led to the outbreak of the War, but ignored the key word 'unavoidable'.

Q.5 Performance was good. The question required candidates to trace and explain the relationship between the US and the USSR during the period 1943-91. Many candidates were familiar with the US-USSR relationship in the said period, and they were able to trace and explain the relationship. However, many did not pay heed to the starting year stated in the question (1943-), with some mentioning this year but actually discussing the period after year 1945. In doing this, these candidates missed an important period in which the US-USSR relationship was generally cordial as they attempted to defeat their common enemy – Nazi Germany – in the Second World War. Some weak candidates did not strike a good balance between 'tracing' and 'explaining' the relationship; others merely gave a chronology of the major events and failed to periodise and describe the features of each sub-period.

Q.6 Performance was fair. The question required candidates to compare relationships between superpower influence and economic cooperation in Eastern and Western Europe, in the period 1945-2000. Candidates had to discuss whether there was superpower domination of economic cooperation in Eastern and Western Europe, and, if there was, the extent of such domination. Generally speaking, candidates were quite familiar with historical facts about economic cooperation in Western Europe, but not in Eastern Europe. Candidates tended to give prepared answers on economic cooperation in general without focusing on the relationship between superpowers and economic cooperation in Europe. Only the best candidates understood the gist of the question. Another common weakness was inadequate coverage of the period in question. The weakest answers did not distinguish between Eastern and Western Europe, and made fundamental factual errors such as 'Western Europe was dominated by the USSR'.

Q.7 Performance was far from satisfactory. The question required candidates to discuss how a chosen example of a human-made disaster led to new policies and developments. Only a handful of candidates discussed the concept of 'human-made disaster', how the chosen example was a disaster, and the new policies and developments it led to, with good substantiation and a sensible demonstration of the causal relationship behind it. Most answers failed to discuss the concept 'human-made disaster', which meant that they tended to be general, and only vaguely elaborated on the subsequent policies and development.

## 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 2016 HKDSE History Examination, participating schools have to submit SBA marks for inclusion in the subject result. We are happy to report that 56.2% of schools fall into the 'within the expected range' category, while the marks of 23% of schools are higher than expected, and 20.8% 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 2016 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 Comparatively Studies.

In 2016 HKDSE History, no serious plagiarism was identified. To avoid SBA malpractice, students 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-2016-HIST-E-Aug14.pdf>), and should make analysis and presentation in their own words as far as possible.

## Acknowledgements

Material from the following publications has been used in question papers in this volume:

香港文匯報	《文匯報》，1990
深圳新聞網發展有限公司	《深圳特區報》，1990
Daily Mirror	W.K. Haselden, <i>Bad Experience of Big and Little Willie No.3</i> , 1914
Flamingo	Nien Cheng, <i>Life and Death in Shanghai</i> , 1995
Pimlico	Tony Judt, <i>Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945</i> , 2007
The Nobel Foundation	Gidske Anderson, <i>Award Ceremony Speech</i> , 1990
Wadsworth	Marvin Perry, <i>Sources of the Western Tradition: Volume II: From the Renaissance to the Present, Eighth Edition</i> , 2012

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