

Candidates' Performance

Principles of Question Design

The assessment of this subject is based on the Liberal Studies Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4-6). According to the Guide, 'the curriculum aims at integrating, applying, consolidating and broadening the foundational knowledge of every student through studying a range of contemporary issues in different contexts' (Section 2.1). Questions in the public examination of Liberal Studies are designed in accordance with the principles of being issue-driven and assessing candidates' thinking skills, such as their ability to 'analyse issues, solve problems, make sound judgements and conclusions and provide suggestions, using multiple perspectives, creativity and appropriate thinking skills', and to apply 'relevant knowledge and concepts to contemporary issues' (Section 5.3).

Questions in Paper 1 provide data about contemporary issues in various forms, such as tables of figures, graphs, cartoons and texts, to provide candidates with contexts for analysis in answering questions. Paper 2, which uses stimulus materials, requires candidates to draw on a more extensive range of knowledge and concepts to discuss issues in depth.

The public examination aims at assessing candidates' thinking skills and their ability to apply the knowledge and concepts they have learnt in the curriculum. The assessment objectives related to the public examination are broadly reflected in its various assessment items and question papers. Candidates need to apply relevant knowledge and concepts when making judgements about issues but the examination does not aim at assessing factual knowledge. A key assessment requirement of the public examination is candidates' ability to transfer their skills and concepts acquired from learning to the task of analysing a variety of contemporary issues.

Paper 1

Question Number	Performance in General
1	Satisfactory
2	Fair
3	Weak

- Question 1
- (a) Most candidates were able to point out the differences in the level of acceptance by citing appropriate data. Stronger candidates were able to categorise the data appropriately and describe the pattern comprehensively.
 - (b) In general, candidates were able to identify some factors affecting the future of the ethnic minorities from the sources. However, some candidates did not have adequate understanding of the aspirations and so were unable to explain the relationship between the factors and aspirations.
 - (c) In general, candidates were able to answer using the sources. Stronger candidates were able to offer critical arguments with a good use of various sources. However, some candidates merely copied some content from the sources, without offering an in-depth discussion from different perspectives, reflecting a relatively superficial understanding of the various ethnic groups in Hong Kong and their integration.

- Question 2
- (a) The majority of candidates were able to point out the gap between the rich and the poor, and to cite support from data. Stronger candidates were able to further identify the gap between the urban and the rural, as well as the gaps within the cities and within the rural areas, from the data.
 - (b) Candidates were able to describe briefly the environmental impact of poverty reduction, but some merely copied from the source without explaining clearly how poverty reduction led to such outcomes.
 - (c) The majority of students were able to explain the arguments using some of the sources and gave different analytical perspectives. However, weaker candidates merely offered descriptions without conceptualising the sources. Some candidates' answers deviated from the requirements due to their misinterpretation that opposing the claim referred to the negative impact of rural relocation.
- Question 3
- (a) The majority of candidates were able to compare concretely the happiness levels and the patterns of satisfaction with the quality of life in the two places. Stronger candidates were able to point out various areas with similarities and relatively large differences in satisfaction levels, offering a comparison from a wider perspective. However, some candidates were only able to give brief descriptions of the figures without comparing the patterns of satisfaction with the quality of life in the two places.
 - (b) The majority of candidates were able to understand the question and to explain with reference to the source why the two dimensions should be given priority, and offer suggestions for enhancement. However, some candidates failed to address the requirements of the question and merely focussed on either explaining the problem or offering suggestions. Stronger candidates were able to explain how their suggestions might enhance the quality of life in Hong Kong in a clear and logical manner. Weaker candidates were only able to offer general descriptions of the problems with vague suggestions unrelated to the current situation of Hong Kong.

Paper 2

Question Number	Popularity %	Performance in General
1	19.2	Satisfactory
2	71.3	Fair
3	9.5	Weak

- Question 1
- (a) Most candidates were able to identify different aspects of environmental impact, such as creating waste, waste disposal problems, pollution, and increasing energy and water consumption. However, the connection between environmental impacts and 'fast fashion as a globalized industry' was a bit weak. Only a few stronger candidates were able to explain clearly how 'fast fashion' could cause the environmental problems. Many candidates merely explained how the manufacturing industry in general might lead to environmental problems, missing the gist of the question. Another weakness of many candidates was the failure to elaborate on the features of 'fast fashion' as a globalized industry when explaining how it might bring about huge environmental impacts worldwide.
 - (b) Many candidates were able to make their views clear, and there were some reasonable arguments, but a number of candidates failed to show a thorough understanding of the culture of disposability. Some shifted the focus of the question to overconsumption while others narrowed the discussion to how 'fast fashion' led to the culture of disposability. A common weakness was the failure to analyse the question from multiple perspectives, such as the global economic, educational, technological and legal perspectives. Taking these perspectives into account might have helped candidates to formulate their arguments and rebuttals, and substantiated their views. Many candidates were weak in constructing a conceptual framework for their arguments.
- Question 2
- (a) The performance of candidates in this part was generally satisfactory. A majority of candidates were able to explain the possible factors for young people to use e-cigarettes. Stronger candidates were better at using concepts such as peer influence and mass media reinforcement in their answers. They were also able to highlight some features of young people, such as immaturity, curiosity and heroism which might lead them to use e-cigarettes. Weaker candidates just described briefly the popularity of e-cigarettes among young people by using the sources without giving a clear explanation why they used them. On the whole, the answers focussed more on factors related to personal development, while other factors such as accessibility and price were generally overlooked by candidates.
 - (b) Most candidates were able to provide the pros and cons of banning the sale of certain products to safeguard the public health of young people in Hong Kong. However, some candidates did not compare banning the sale with other ways of safeguarding the public health of young people, such as education and taxation. Some candidates did not propose a set of common criteria to compare banning the sale with other ways, nor did they weigh the relative importance of different criteria and so the analysis was inconclusive. Finally, some candidates did not focus the discussion on safeguarding the public health of young people.

- Question 3
- (a) Quite a lot of candidates did not have a clear idea about the ‘modernisation of traditional wet markets’ and so they did not know the similarities and differences between a modernised wet market and a traditional wet market. Similarly, some candidates were not able to identify the changes in traditional wet markets under modernisation. Some other candidates did not explain in detail how the changes to traditional wet markets might have improved the quality of life of people in different ways, such as improving hygiene, providing multiple services, and accommodating different needs. This might reflect that some candidates had a vague idea on the concept of quality of life.
- (b) Most candidates did not fully understand technological innovations and traditional culture. Therefore, they were not able to give a clear account of the relationship between various forms of technological innovation and traditional culture. It was generally observed that their answers placed more focus on societal changes than on the impact on traditional culture. Quite a lot of candidates failed to fulfill the requirements of the question, which was to evaluate the impact of technological innovations on traditional culture in terms of clearly defined assessment criteria, such as the importance and sustainability of traditional culture. As a result, most candidates were not able to formulate cogent arguments to support a clear standpoint.

General Comments

In general, candidates’ performance suggested that they understood the requirements of the questions.

Paper 1 required candidates to have good data interpretation skills. Among the various forms of data in the sources, candidates generally performed better in handling figures and texts. They also showed understanding of the relationships of different sources in a question. However, common weaknesses included incomplete use of the source data, failure to highlight outstanding features and copying from the sources without appropriate adaptations in response to the questions.

Candidates need to strengthen their explanation and argumentation skills. They should make good use of the data to illustrate the explanations and justify their arguments clearly and logically. They should also use relevant concepts (for example, ‘ethnic integration’ in Paper 1, (Q1c) and ‘quality of life’ in (Q3b)) to substantiate their explanations and arguments.

In Paper 2, candidates performed better in part (a) than part (b), in general. Candidates were able to handle questions about the explanation of some impacts (Q1a), factors (Q2a), and ways (Q3a). However, some candidates relied too much on the sources and did not think beyond them. As questions in Paper 2 are extended response in nature, candidates should also try to go beyond the stimulus materials provided in their answers. Another observation is that the conceptualisation and generalisation ability of candidates is a bit weak. In this regard, candidates should develop a conceptual framework for more in-depth analyses.

Questions in Part (b) are generally testing critical thinking and evaluative ability. These questions require candidates to justify their arguments from multiple perspectives, for example rebutting counter-arguments as part of their own argument. However, candidates were generally weak in developing rebuttals and should be encouraged to work on this skill, as well as their ability to weigh the significance of different arguments and dimensions.

Answers in Paper 2 demonstrated a basic knowledge of the subject. However, some candidates seemed to lack in-depth understanding of the major values underpinning each question. They did not elaborate much on some of the major values such as sustainable development in (Q1), personal liberty and public interest in (Q2), and cultural heritage preservation in (Q3). A narrow focus was adopted in the answers, which suggests that, in many issues, candidates seemed to lack a broad perspective.

On the whole, candidates are encouraged to broaden their horizons and exposure by engaging in activities such as reading, debating and attending seminars.

Independent Enquiry Study

Independent Enquiry Study (IES) is assessed in four domains: Problem Definition and Identification of Concepts/Knowledge, Explanation and Justification, Presentation and Organisation, and Initiative, which constitute 30%, 50%, 10% and 10% respectively of the total IES Mark.

A total of 485 schools participated in IES this year. The Initiative mark was not moderated. Data on the moderated marks of the other three assessment domains show that 61.3% of schools fell into the 'within the expected range' category, with 17.9% of schools giving marks higher than expected and 20.8% giving marks lower than expected. However, among the schools awarding marks higher or lower than expected, the majority only deviated slightly from the expected range, indicating that most teachers were able to use the revised marking standard.

Similar to previous years, a seminar was held to brief teachers on the general performance of IES in the 2016 examination to enhance their understanding of the requirements of IES. In the seminar, samples adopting the Structured Enquiry Approach and the corresponding marking guidelines, which are applicable to the 2017 Examination and beyond, were also explained. District Coordinators held group meetings with School Coordinators at which authentic samples of IES Reports were used to standardise marking. In addition, annotated exemplars of reports and samples illustrating various levels of performance were uploaded to the HKEAA website <http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/hkdse/assessment/>.

Comments on students' performance on IES in the four domains are given below.

Performance in Problem Definition and Identification of Concepts/ Knowledge

Students should pay attention to the scope of the enquiry and focus questions. A prerequisite for a good enquiry study is having an enquiry topic with a clear focus and an appropriate level of difficulty. There are still some reports with their enquiry effectiveness undermined by being too wide in scope or having unclear focus questions.

In the identification of concepts and knowledge, besides formulating academic definitions, stronger students were able to further point out the relationship between relevant concepts/knowledge and the content of their enquiry.

Many students used a variety of data collection tools and there was less reliance on questionnaire surveys. The number of students using second-hand data for analysis also kept increasing. However, some students submitted as their report the template used by their teacher when teaching the subject, and failed to fulfill the marking criterion.

Performance in Explanation and Justification

Some students did not fully utilise the data in their analysis, and so failed to justify the findings with the data gathered. Some of them failed to quote different sources to support their stances, and did not properly acknowledge the sources of their data with footnotes, endnotes or annexes. As a result, their arguments appeared arbitrary and some might have been suspected to have plagiarised. Students need to be aware that they will be subject to severe penalties for plagiarism in IES. The HKDSE Examination Regulations stipulate that a candidate may suffer a mark penalty or downgrading, or may be liable to disqualification from part or the whole of the examination, for breaching the regulations. This year, the IES report of one student was confirmed to be plagiarised work and eventually a penalty was imposed in the subject. Therefore, teachers should guide students on how to acknowledge references correctly when using other people's data in their work. Students can better understand how to acknowledge references in the correct format by referring to the examples in the booklet *HKDSE Information on School-based Assessment* (<http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/sba/>).

With regard to presenting their justification and findings, most students were able to discuss from appropriate and multiple perspectives, and present data and viewpoints clearly. Some weaker students merely offered a rough analysis or presented the raw data they had collected, or even without conducting an effective and appropriate data collection. A small number of students were unable to complete their data collection and the Parts on Explanation and Justification. Some students seemed to have merely submitted some concept maps or worksheets of the enquiry-learning activities in school, or collected a few articles related to their enquiry issue, summarised the positive and negative viewpoints in them, and noted some brief conclusions at the end. These

reports did not fulfill the requirements of IES, nor did they demonstrate the students' enquiry process or findings. Possible explanations for this state of affairs may be that these students overlooked the importance of IES to the study of the subject.

Performance in Presentation and Organisation

The majority of students were able to complete their Report in four parts in accordance with the Structured Enquiry Approach. However, some students presented a lot of textual content using tables due to their inability to effectively control the number of words, thus affecting their performance in presentation and organisation. Furthermore, presenting content in tabular form inappropriately may also cause ambiguity in explanations and justifications, thus affecting the performance in the marking domains of Problem Definition and Identification of Concepts/Knowledge, and Explanation and Justification. Students should note that it is the quality of their justification and analysis rather than the length of their report that is taken into consideration during marking. Reports of excessive length will only be awarded a maximum of 3 marks for Presentation and Organisation. It should also be noted that school and personal information must not be revealed in the report so as not to jeopardise the fairness of the assessment. Students are also reminded to acknowledge the sources of their data, and understand how to respond to different focus questions with data from different perspectives and views.

Performance in Non-written Form Reports

There were very few non-written form reports, and most were text-based PowerPoint presentations. It is hoped that in future students adopting the non-written form will be able to present their enquiry findings through other methods, such as video clips or narration.

Performance in Initiative

District Coordinators liaised with schools in order to understand how they help students to complete their IES reports with school-based enquiry learning and/or assessment activities, such as mind-maps and group discussions on formulating enquiry questions. A review of the Initiative marks submitted by schools revealed that a small number of schools awarded marks within a narrow range. In these cases, District Coordinators reviewed the IES assessment documents and discussed methods of improvement with the School Coordinators.

Conclusion

The Structured Enquiry Approach was used to generate reports for the first time this year, and most students were able to fulfill the basic requirements of IES. Stronger students displayed effective enquiry skills by conducting an in-depth enquiry into a topic with a clear focus and using multiple perspectives to analyse their findings, and adhering to the stipulated word limit. To fully master the requirements of IES and enhance their performance, students should formulate focussed and clear enquiry questions, be able to identify appropriate concepts and knowledge, and apply them in the enquiry process. They should also deploy appropriate methods to collect, analyse and utilise data to justify their arguments. The enquiry findings should also be closely linked to the analyses.