

## Candidates' Performance

### Principles of Question Design

The assessment of is based on the Liberal Studies Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4-6) for this subject. 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, with the help of 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	Fair

- Question 1 (a) Candidates were assessed on their ability to interpret graphs, recognise the changes in the data, and describe the trends in agriculture as reflected in the data.

Most candidates were able to identify and describe the specific trends of the declining cultivated area, the drop in local vegetable production, and the increasing total vegetable consumption. However, not many candidates were able to point out the increasing gap between total demand for vegetables and local vegetable production.

Weak candidates repeated the numbers shown in the graphs without describing clearly the trends, or they described the trends very briefly without making full use of the data.

- (b) This question assessed the ability of candidates to generalise the factors that might be influencing the current development of agriculture in Hong Kong from the sources.

Strong candidates were able to generalise the factors implied in the sources which might positively or negatively influence the current development of agriculture in Hong Kong. Few candidates were able to generalise some relevant factors and then fully explain how these relevant factors promoted or hindered the current development of agriculture in Hong Kong.

Many candidates correctly cited data from the sources to explain the current development of agriculture but did not attempt to generalise or conceptualise the factors. Weak candidates copied the sources without a clear explanation of how the current development of agriculture was influenced.

- (c) This sub-question tested the ability to select and explain evidence from the sources that supports the claim 'Urban Farming will improve the quality of life of people in Hong Kong'.

Strong candidates understood the question well and cited evidence from the three given sources. However, not many candidates were able to broaden their answers by considering different aspects of quality of life, such as the living environment, material life and spiritual life. Many candidates correctly cited evidence from the sources to support the claim but only from the limited perspective of the quality of life, or they made use of only one or two sources.

Some candidates wrongly interpreted the question as an argumentative one, while some confused the concepts of urban farming and organic farming.

### Question 2

- (a) This question aimed at assessing the ability to observe and describe the characteristics of the data. Candidates had to describe the performance of democracy and global competitiveness in Hong Kong with reference to the various components of the indexes.

Generally, candidates were able to describe the performance of democracy and global competitiveness in Hong Kong, but their answers differed in terms of depth. Not many candidates were able to recognise the important features of the data, for example, the high percentage score in the area of civil liberties enjoyed by Hong Kong people and the relatively low percentage score in the area of electoral process. Most answers did not compare the sub-indexes/ categories within a certain index.

Weaker candidates did not give a full picture of the performance of democracy and global competitiveness, mentioning only a few items in the tables.

- (b) This part of the question required candidates to describe and use the source to explain whether or not there is any relationship between the democracy index and the global competitiveness index.

Candidates in general gave answers including 'strong relationship', 'weak relationship' and 'no relationship'. While all these answers were acceptable, stronger candidates were able to give a fuller picture by considering all the data in the source. Weaker candidates mentioned only limited data, meaning that their answers were not adequately explained.

- (c) In this question, candidates were expected to argue, using critical and objective reasoning. Candidates had to present their views taking into consideration the arguments and counter-arguments from different perspectives. Candidates were expected to use the data from the sources and their own knowledge to support their viewpoint.

Not many candidates performed well in this question and most candidates did not seem to be familiar with the composition of the Election Committee for the Chief Executive and the Legislative Council. Most candidates seemed not to understand how the members of these two organisations are returned; nor did they have a good understanding of the concepts of representation, direct election or indirect election. Many candidates gave general comments on democracy in Hong Kong, but they did not discuss the implications of direct / indirect elections for the global competitiveness of Hong Kong.

Another common weakness was that many candidates did not pay enough attention to the words 'a more representative composition of the Election Committee... and the Legislative Council'. Not many candidates were able to analyse the positive or negative effects of a more representative composition of the two organisations on the global competitiveness of Hong Kong. Most candidates who agreed with the view failed to explain why they think the current composition of the two organisations should be more representative in order to enhance the global competitiveness of Hong Kong; and how their current composition could be more representative. Few candidates used concepts like legitimacy, efficiency, checks and balances, fair competition and leadership to develop their arguments. Most answers did not establish a strong link between representativeness and global competitiveness.

- Question 3 (a) Candidates were assessed on their ability to summarise the pattern of HIV infection as shown in Source A. Candidates needed to make full reference to the source in order to describe the pattern clearly.
- Most candidates were able to describe some characteristics of the HIV infection with respect to age, gross domestic product, literacy rate and region. However, not many candidates were able to present fully the pattern of HIV infection by making use of the data in the source. Strong candidates were able to identify and describe the pattern by integrating data in different columns and rows in the table.
- (b) This question assessed the ability to identify and explain two difficulties in tackling HIV as a global problem with relevant information from the sources.
- Most candidates were able to identify the difficulties in tackling HIV. Stronger candidates were able to conceptualise the difficulties as poor governance, inadequate financial resources etc. and to elaborate on how these difficulties hindered the tackling of HIV. Weaker candidates simply copied from the sources or described the information conveyed in the sources but did not give a clear explanation of the difficulties.
- Only a minority of candidates were able to address HIV as a global problem when explaining the difficulties in tackling it. Candidates had to explain why HIV is a global problem and why the difficulties in tackling HIV are worldwide and not just in one region or country. However, many candidates did not understand the question well and focused only on Africa. Candidates needed to take a global perspective when answering this question.

## Paper 2

Question Number	Popularity %	Performance in General
1	25.3	Fair
2	43.9	Fair
3	30.8	Fair

- Question 1 (a) Candidates showed some basic understanding of China's population control policies, such as the objectives, situation and possible consequences of implementing population policies. They were also able to identify the stakeholders relevant to the one-child policy, such as the government, parents and foreign investors, suggesting that they had knowledge of the possible positive and negative effects on stakeholders. However, candidates' understanding and mastery of the more unique stakeholders, such as religious people and experts, was relatively weak. They often pointed out their identities but failed to point out clearly the specific conflicts between these 'experts' and other stakeholders.
- In general, candidates were relatively weak in generalising the values of different stakeholders. They were more familiar with the traditional Chinese family values such as valuing men more than women, ensuring continuation of family lineage, and desiring numerous sons and grandsons. However, they were unfamiliar with the values of other stakeholders, and so were unable to compare their values.
- Candidates were weak in handling comparison questions. They often merely elaborated on the views of two different stakeholders on the one-child policy separately. However, very few candidates were able to suggest an appropriate platform for comparison, such as the fairness of civil rights, maintenance of social justice, heritage of Chinese traditional values, and the need for sustainable development in China, to analyse the conflicts of values between a certain pair of stakeholders. Besides, some candidates only recited certain facts in their answer, failing to analyse and discuss why the beliefs represented by the values of different stakeholders are conflicting.
- (b) Candidates were in general familiar with the two-child policy, and were able to point out the main differences between the one-child and the two-child policies. However, they had an inadequate understanding of the permission for a second child granted to minority groups or parents who themselves are single-children under the one-child policy. Therefore, they cited wrong information in their answers.
- Candidates showed a basic understanding of the effects brought about by the two-child policy. However, they were vague about China's long-term development, and were unable to outline its features, such as China being in a transformational stage of economic development and society demanding an enhancement of the relationship between the people and the government. Instead, most tried to discuss whether the policy would or would not facilitate China's long-term development, without giving detailed explanations.
- Candidates in general were able to analyse the issue from different perspectives, such as the political, economic and social aspects. Their language was also clear. However, the linkage with the two-child policy was not well developed, and there was insufficient exemplification.

- Question 2 (a) Some candidates explained why local traditional businesses have been declining from a narrow perspective. Some of them briefly gave an overview of the phenomenon of globalization and the reasons for the decline of a certain traditional business (for example, a lack of customers, the difficulty in learning traditional handicrafts such as making paper lanterns), instead of fully responding to the question from a macro-perspective by explaining how the factors have led to the decline of traditional businesses. Such answers did not discuss the development and popularity of technology leading to the emergence and wide application of new products, and the decline of traditional cultural values reducing the demand for and importance of the services and products of traditional businesses under globalization. Most candidates did not conceptualise the factors. They did not understand what traditional businesses are, and failed to address the question by offering examples of traditional businesses, resulting in a superficial explanation of the decline.

Stronger candidates were able to identify and explain the factors that might be leading to the decline of local traditional businesses from various perspectives, such as factors related to the intrinsic nature of the business, the introduction of new technology and the influence of foreign cultures. They also referred to the impact of globalization and appropriate examples, such as handmade mahjong tiles and manual photo-editing, in their answers.

- (b) The majority of candidates understood the requirements of the question. Stronger candidates were able to address the question by making use of proper examples and arguments, such as the role of government in the preservation of cultural heritage and the priority in the use of public resources, to explain whether the government should support the survival of such traditional businesses. Weaker candidates seemed to have misinterpreted the question, merely listing and explaining the measures that the government could adopt to support local traditional businesses, such as publicity and promotion, rental subsidies and education, instead of explaining whether the government should support the survival of such traditional businesses in the first place. Most candidates also merely argued unilaterally whether such businesses should be supported or not, failing to consider arguments from another standpoint and respond to these arguments. Answers without multi-perspective thinking were not convincing and thus scored fewer marks.

- Question 3 (a) Some candidates failed to address the issue of globalization, and were unclear about the need to apply the concept of 'globalization' in their answers. They merely suggested 'peer pressure', 'celebrity effect', etc. as reasons for the rise in participation in global charitable activities, without linking it closely to the concept of globalization. Some candidates cited improper examples of local charitable activities or the 'Ice Bucket Challenge' copied from the source provided in the question, and failed to further elaborate on their views or support them with other proper examples. Some candidates also failed to discuss the issue from different perspectives. For example, they focussed on discussing the technical aspects, such as the impact of information circulation and the convenience of online donations, neglecting the universal values shared among people and the need for international cooperation in a globalized world.

Stronger candidates, nevertheless, were able to elaborate on various features of globalization and explain how people's participation in global charitable activities could be increased by offering examples of various global charitable activities, such as Médecins sans Frontières and Orbis.

- (b) In general, candidates failed to devise evaluative criteria or an evaluative platform in response to the question. They merely listed the general functions of electronic social media and their impact on the socio-political participation of youngsters. Most of the answers focussed on what kind of 'influence' social media may bring about and how social media may 'influence', instead of evaluating 'the effectiveness'. Therefore, they missed the gist of the question, which required candidates to evaluate the effectiveness of electronic social media in enhancing the socio-political participation of Hong Kong young people. Stronger candidates were able to devise evaluative criteria and give more diversified examples to illustrate the role of electronic social media when evaluating their positive and negative impacts on the socio-political participation of youngsters.

Some candidates focussed their discussion on people in Hong Kong in general, instead of young people. As such, they failed to highlight the characteristics of young people and the features of their use of electronic social media, such as the use of multiple electronic social media, sending and forwarding messages actively, and long-time usage, and thus did not meet the requirements of the question. Weaker candidates gave a brief response to only one of the key elements of the question, 'electronic social media' or 'socio-political participation'. For example, they discussed the features and impact of electronic social media or the reasons for the socio-political participation of young people without delineating the linkage between them.

## General Comments

Paper 1 required candidates to have good data interpretation skills and their answers indicated that this is an area of study requiring further work. For example, in Paper 1 Questions 1(a), 2(a), 2(b), and 3(a), candidates were required to recognise the key features of the data, make some observations, and integrate and compare the data to make generalisations. Common weaknesses included incomplete use of the source data, failure to highlight outstanding features, misunderstanding and incorrect use of the sources.

Candidates need to improve their explanatory ability. Many questions required candidates to give explanations of various kinds, for example of factors (Paper 1, Question 1(b)), a claim (Paper 1, Question 1(c)), a relationship (Paper 1, Question 2(b)), an argument (Paper 1, Question 2(c)), and difficulties (Paper 1, Question 3(b)). It is therefore very important for candidates to present an explanation clearly and logically. However, a common weakness this year was that candidates tended to skip steps in their arguments. They did not elaborate on the processes, consequences and reasons leading to the conclusion. Candidates should make good use of the data to illustrate the explanations (for example, decreasing cultivated area in Paper 1, Question 1(b)). They should also use relevant concepts (for example, 'representation' in Paper 1, Question 2(c)) to substantiate their explanations.

Paper 2 requires candidates to flexibly apply higher order thinking skills and related concepts and knowledge in response to the questions. However, some candidates attempted to merely reproduce certain facts, concepts and definitions. When answering questions, they failed to carefully analyse the issues and interpret their focus. For example, in Paper 2 Question 1(a), some candidates did not seem to understand clearly the value conflicts among stakeholders. As a further example, in Paper 2 Question 1(b), some candidates merely gave the effects of the two-child policy, while ignoring whether such effects would promote China's long-term development.

When answering questions, candidates should first study the question carefully and then make comprehensive and in-depth analyses from different perspectives, justifying their arguments and standpoints with examples. For instance, in Paper 2 Question 3(b), some candidates were unable to elaborate with examples Hong Kong young people's socio-political participation, which was related to the use of electronic social media. As a result their performance was relatively weak. There were also candidates who failed to suggest reasonable evaluative criteria or platform for evaluating effectiveness, thus failing to meet the requirement of the question.

In accordance with the assessment objectives specified in the Liberal Studies Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4-6), there are no prescribed approaches to answering questions in the Liberal Studies examinations in order to achieve higher marks. To perform well, the key is that candidates should know what issue enquiry means, understand the question requirements, apply relevant concepts and knowledge in response to the questions, and supplement their answers with appropriate examples for illustration. Candidates should comprehensively consider and make analyses from various perspectives, contexts or positions. They should also provide comprehensive elaborations with arguments to justify them. By doing this, they will be able to master an appropriate answering approach without having to memorise and reproduce answering frameworks and notes that may not be relevant.

Though candidates have demonstrated a certain degree of understanding of the issues in different areas, they are encouraged to broaden their knowledge base, enhance their multiple-perspectives and high-order thinking skills, and provide appropriate examples to illustrate their viewpoints in response to the requirements of the questions, so as to further improve their performance in this subject.

## Independent Enquiry Study

Independent Enquiry Study (IES) has two assessment stages: the Project Proposal Stage and the Product Stage. Each assessment stage comprises two assessment items, Process and Task, which account for 20% and 80% of the total IES mark respectively.

A total of 488 schools participated in IES this year. The Process mark of IES was not moderated. Data on the moderated Task mark shows that 62.2% of schools fell into the 'within the expected range' category, with 17.2% of schools giving marks higher than expected and 20.6% giving marks lower than expected. However, among the schools with marks higher or lower than expected, the majority only deviated slightly from the expected range. The proportion of schools in the 'within the expected range' category remains about the same as that in 2015.

As in previous years a seminar was held to brief teachers on the general performance of IES in the 2015 examination to enhance their understanding of the requirements of IES. In the seminar, the Structured Enquiry Approach and the corresponding marking guidelines, which are applicable to the 2017 Examination and beyond, were explained. The IES Supervisor and District Coordinators shared some strategies to help students of various abilities to conduct the IES. District Coordinators held group meetings with School Coordinators to share their experience of using various teaching tools to facilitate the conduct of IES. In addition, annotated exemplars of Products and samples illustrating various levels of performance were uploaded to the HKEAA websites <http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/hkdse/assessment/>. Teachers and students may refer to these samples to gain a better understanding of the requirements and marking standard of IES.

Below, we comment on students' Process performance and their Task performance in the Product Stage.

### Performance in Process

District Coordinators have continued to liaise with schools in order to understand how they help students to complete their Tasks with school-based Process assessment activities, such as mind-maps and group discussions on formulating the enquiry question. After reviewing the Process marks submitted by schools, a small number of schools were found to have awarded narrow mark ranges, an issue which also arose last year. For these cases, District Coordinators reviewed the assessment documents and discussed methods of improvement with the School Coordinators.

### Task Performance in Product Stage

A prerequisite for producing a good Task is having an enquiry topic with a clear focus and an appropriate level of difficulty. This year, the proportion of student's tasks achieving this prerequisite continued to be high. This reflects that teachers and students had a good understanding of the learning objectives of IES, and as a result were able to formulate feasible topics worthy of enquiry. However, some Products were undermined by being too wide in scope or having unclear focus questions. This situation should be brought to the attention of students.

With regard to the tools for data collection, many students used a variety of tools and there was an improvement in the situation of over-relying on questionnaire surveys. When conducting questionnaire surveys, students should pay attention to the relevancy and reference value of their survey targets. When conducting online surveys, they must consider the characteristics of Internet users and the limitations of the sampling process. The number of students using second-hand data for analysis keeps increasing. Students are reminded to acknowledge the sources of their data. They should also understand how to respond to different focus questions with data from different perspectives and views. In most cases, students who were able to make good use of the hypothesis for enquiry and expected enquiry findings effectively selected appropriate data for analysis.

With regard to data analysis, some weaker students either used statistical charts to present their findings, or merely copied from secondary sources, without organising and analysing them. Stronger students, however, were able to effectively utilise data collected from various sources, analyse the enquiry question from different perspectives, deliberate and discuss it thoroughly, and subsequently arrive at the enquiry findings. In their analysis, students need to address the focus of the enquiry question, instead of merely presenting data without demonstrating their relationship to the question. The enquiry findings must be based on the data collected, and students should pay particular attention to establishing the logical relationship between data analysis and enquiry findings.

With regard to the formulation of opinions, viewpoints and arguments, stronger students were able to establish their stances with convincing arguments. However, some were unable to make good use of the data in their analysis, and present findings based on the data collected. Many 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 were 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 down-grading, or may be liable to disqualification from part or the whole of the examination, for breaching the regulations. This year, the IES Products of two students were confirmed to be plagiarised work and eventually a penalty of downgrading by one level 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 some examples in the booklet *HKDSE Information on School-based Assessment* (<http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/sba/>).

When presenting the framework of their enquiry process and results, the weakest students only provided a rough enquiry plan or were unable to revise the enquiry question. As a result, they failed to collect, analyse data and present their enquiry process and results appropriately and effectively. A small number of students failed to complete the enquiry process or write their report, submitting only the collected data, incomplete analysis or project proposal as the Task for this stage. Some students merely submitted some worksheets of the Process activities or concept maps, or collected a few articles related to their enquiry issue, summarised the positive and negative viewpoints in them, and drew some brief conclusions in the reports. These Tasks did not fulfill the requirement of IES, nor did they demonstrate the enquiry process or results. Possible explanations for this state of affairs may be that students did not understand the importance of IES to the study of the subject.

With regard to the reflection on the IES work, it seems that an increasing number of students are able to reflect on issues related to their enquiry topics and content, such as the enquiry process, findings and assumptions. They are able to point out the limitations of the enquiry study, analyse their understanding of the enquiry topics and methodology, as well as discuss possible approaches to future enquiries with reference to what they have learnt. Quite a number of students adopted an appropriate approach of incorporating their reflection into the analysis and data collection sections of their reports, evaluating the limitations and means for improvement. Nevertheless, there were a number of students who merely reflected on the more technical issues, such as their data collection process and personal preparation.

Students should note that it is the quality of their enquiry rather than the length of their report that is taken into consideration during marking. Starting from 2017, 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 Tasks so as to avoid jeopardising the fairness of the assessment.

This year, fewer students presented their Tasks in a 'standardised' manner, but some IES reports were completed by filling-in the-blanks or were in a Q & A format. While appropriate guidance from teachers helps students complete their Tasks, over-standardised or over-specific guidance might affect students' independent enquiry as it might encourage them to copy their teachers' ideas without contributing their own thoughts.

## Performance in Non-written Form Products

Similar to last year, there were very few non-written Products, and most of them were text-based PowerPoint presentations. It is hoped that in future, students adopting the non-written form will be able to effectively present their enquiry findings through various methods, such as videos clips and narration.

## Conclusion

In general, most students were able to fulfill the basic requirements of IES. Stronger students displayed a high degree of enquiry ability by being able to conduct an in-depth enquiry into a topic with a clear enquiry focus and using multiple perspectives to analyse their findings. To fully master the requirements of IES and enhance their performance in it, students should formulate focussed and clear enquiry questions, collect data using appropriate methods, and ensure that the enquiry findings of their report are related to the data they collect.