

Number of candidates and examination subjects

Participation

This year, 43 779 school candidates from 481 participating schools and 8 107 private candidates entered the HKDSE. Of the total candidature of 51 886, 49 976 candidates sat the examination. School and private candidates, on average, entered for six and three subjects respectively.

Examination Subjects

Three categories of subjects were offered in the HKDSE: Category A Senior Secondary subjects, Category B Applied Learning subjects and Category C Other Language subjects. Altogether 24 Category A subjects were examined this year, with 19 subjects offering both Chinese and English versions. The percentage of subject entries taken in Chinese was 53%. A total of 39 Category B subjects and six Category C subjects were offered. Category C subjects were examined using the Advanced Subsidiary level question papers from Cambridge Assessment International Education (Cambridge International).

Registration of entries

Registration

Registration was conducted in two phases. The June registration covered six Category C (November 2020 series) subjects while the September registration covered Category A and Category B subjects. Schools submitted the examination entries of their students via the HKDSE Examination Registration System at the HKDSE Examination Online Services. Private candidates also registered for the examination through the same Registration System.

Handbook for Candidates

Electronic version of the *Handbook for Candidates* was made available for candidates in mid-December 2020. The Handbook contains examination regulations and important instructions to candidates including offences which could lead to mark penalties or disqualification from the examination.

Examination centres and invigilation staff

Examination Centres

Examination centres were set up in 426 schools, including 520 halls and 740 classrooms. The majority of schools were used for 6 to 12 days. Seventeen examination centres were also set up in Cheung Chau and Tung Chung for the convenience of candidates from these two areas.

A total of 450 halls and 392 classrooms were used as examination centres for the English Language listening examination while 432 halls and 260 classrooms were used for the Chinese Language (Cantonese) listening examination. The listening examinations were broadcast by RTHK Radio 2 in the majority of these centres. A total of 85 and 80 halls with unsatisfactory radio reception used infra-red (IR) transmission system to deliver the English Language and Chinese Language (Cantonese) listening examinations respectively, providing an additional 8 260 places. Candidates sitting the listening examinations at these IR centres listened to the broadcast using the receivers provided by the HKEAA. In addition, some centres used Public Address (PA) system, USB players or computers to deliver the listening examinations. The quality of broadcast at non-radio listening examination centres was comparable to that at radio listening examination centres.

The Chinese Language (Putonghua) listening examination was conducted via the PA system, USB players or computers in 23 school halls and 41 classrooms.

To safeguard the health and wellbeing of candidates and invigilation staff against possible infections, precautionary measures were taken at examination centres which included maintaining at least 1.5 metres spatial separation between candidates in halls and classrooms, dividing the hall into different zones and assigning candidates to different zones for crowd control purposes.

Centre Supervisors and Invigilators

Centre supervisors were nominated by the participating schools. Each centre supervisor was given a Centre Supervisor's Handbook, which contains details of the examination regulations, points to note and specimens of examination documents. Separate handbooks were also issued for English Language, Chinese Language and Other Language subject examinations. In addition, a set of handbooks was specially provided to centre supervisors serving at special centres for candidates with special needs.

Centre Supervisors' Conferences were held on 12, 14, 15 and 16 April 2021 via webinar to brief centre supervisors and their deputies on the procedures for the conduct of examinations as well as the contingency and precautionary measures at examination centres. Besides, the online Training Workshops for Cross Invigilators at SEN centres were held on 13 and 14 April 2021 to familiarise the invigilators with the invigilation duties at SEN centres.

The number of invigilator-sessions for the written examinations (including listening examinations) was 13 648, of which 92.3% was provided by participating schools while the remaining 7.7% was filled by external invigilators hired by the HKEAA. Teachers serving as invigilators at examination centres outside their own schools were given a travelling allowance.

To enhance the provision of effective and real-time support to examination centres and to facilitate the reliable and efficient tracking of candidates' attendance and collection of answer scripts in written examinations, the 'Public Examinations Communication & Support System (PECSS)' and 'Attendance & Script Tracking System (ASTS)' were fully implemented in around 520 hall centres in 2021. In general, the feedback from the examination centres and examination personnel on the systems was favourable.

To familiarise centre supervisors, invigilators and school IT technicians with the set-up and operation of the PECSS and ASTS, the online briefing session and eight training workshops were conducted. Positive feedback was received from the participants.

The Chinese Language and English Language speaking examinations in the 2021 HKDSE were cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Distribution of Question Papers and Collection of Scripts

Question papers were delivered by courier in the morning of each examination day to 425 (99.77%) examination centres which had opted for this service. A depot was also operated in San Po Kong to distribute question papers to the centre supervisors of the remaining examination centres who had opted for self-collection prior to the commencement of the examination.

Eight collection centres were set up in Heng Fa Chuen, Yau Ma Tei, San Po Kong, Tsuen Wan, Shatin, Tai Po, Tuen Mun and Yuen Long for the return of scripts and other examination documents from the centre supervisors after the examination.

Special arrangements were also made for the return of scripts from the centre in Cheung Chau.

Services for candidates with special needs

Same as previous years, special examination arrangements (SEAs) were made for candidates with special needs so as to enable them to be equitably assessed under suitable conditions. This year, SEAs such as extra time allowance, supervised breaks during examinations, provision of braille/ enlarged question papers and special answer books were made for 3 001 HKDSE candidates with special needs including those with physical, visual, aural, oral, specific learning disabilities (SLD) or other disabilities (e.g. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention-Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD), etc.). This year, 224 SLD candidates used the speech-to-text software for answering questions in the relevant subject examinations.

To serve candidates with special needs, 355 SEN centres were set up for written examinations this year. Some candidates were exempted from component(s) / part(s) of an examination such as listening examination. Their results for the affected component(s) / part(s) were assessed based on their performance in the other component(s) / part(s) of the examination sat. The component(s) exempted were indicated on the candidates' certificate. However, the reasons for granting the exemption and the special examination arrangements made were not recorded.

One candidate being hospitalised during the examination period was given permission, with the consent of the doctor, to sit the examination in hospital under the supervision of an invigilator hired by the HKEAA.

Arrangements were made for 48 candidates serving sentences to take the HKDSE inside the correctional institutions, under the supervision of invigilators provided by the Correctional Services Department and the HKEAA.

Marking and grading

On-screen marking was adopted for all 24 Category A subjects.

This year, 4 649 markers and marking assistants, mainly secondary school teachers, were recruited for marking 680 000 scripts from the written examinations. The same marking scheme and grading standard were adopted for the English and Chinese versions of subjects with bilingual versions.

Examination irregularities

All cases of irregularities reported by centres, schools or candidates were processed by the Standing Committee chaired by the Director – Public Examinations in accordance with the Public Examinations Board's guidelines for handling irregularities. The cases were then presented to the Public Examinations Board for final decisions.

Statistics on candidates who were penalised for offences committed during the examination are given in Table 1 – Statistics Overview on page 2.

Examination results

Release of Results

The examination results for Category A and Category B subjects were released on Wednesday, 21 July 2021. Results notices were issued to school candidates through their schools while private candidates' results notices were sent by post. Schools could obtain softcopies of Examination Results Data File, School Results List as well as Analysis of School Results via the Results Dissemination System at the HKDSE Examination Online Services.

Private and evening school candidates were able to view their results online from 7:00 am on 21 July to 31 August 2021.

This year, the HKEAA had put on trial of using Short Message Service (SMS) to send out examination results and rechecking and remarking results to both school and private candidates who provided their SMS phone numbers as an optional service and a back-up in case of contingency. Candidates choosing this service received text messages of their examination results starting from 9:00 am on 21 July 2021.

Private and evening school candidates who had not received their Category A and Category B results notices on 21 July 2021 could come to the HKEAA Southorn Centre office for re-issue of their results notices.

Assessed Subject Results of Candidates

School candidates who are unable to take the examination of a subject due to illness or other special circumstances may apply through their schools for assessment of results based on their school internal results. A total of 75 applications were approved this year. With effect from the 2020 HKDSE, the assessed subject levels were extended to Level 1 for the HKDSE Category A core subjects, i.e. Levels 1, 2, 3 and 4 for Category A core subjects whereas for Category A elective subjects, assessed subject levels were confined to Levels 2, 3 and 4 only. Candidates with assessed results below Level 1 or Level 2 (as appropriate) were not awarded any assessed results.

Due to the special circumstances arising from COVID-19, school candidates who could not sit the examinations due to medical reasons or special circumstances but fulfilled the documentation requirement for application were given an assessed subject level up to Level 5. In the 2021 HKDSE, 8 candidates received Level 5 in 12 subjects. The assessed results of the subjects concerned were listed in the candidate's certificate.

Rechecking and Remarking

Candidates may apply for rechecking or remarking of their examination results within five days after the release of results. School candidates apply through their schools while private candidates submit their applications directly to the HKEAA. A candidate may apply for rechecking or remarking (which includes rechecking of marks and remarking of answer scripts) for up to four subjects. Requests for rechecking or remarking for more than four subjects may be considered if there are extenuating circumstances supported by documentary evidence and the requests are submitted within the application period for rechecking and remarking. A total of 157 and 14 969 applications were received for rechecking and remarking respectively this year. The results for rechecking and remarking were released on 18 August 2021 as scheduled. School candidates collected their notification letters of rechecking / remarking results from their schools while private candidates received the letters by post. Private and evening school candidates were also able to view their rechecking / remarking results online from 8:30 am on 18 August to 31 August 2021. The JUPAS / tertiary institutions concerned and EDB were informed of the upgraded results of the candidates concerned at the same time.

Candidates who had applied for rechecking and / or remarking and provided their SMS phone numbers received text messages of their rechecking and remarking results starting from 9:00 am on 18 August 2021.

Appeal Review Committee

Candidates who disagreed with the decisions of the Public Examinations Board on examination irregularities or had doubts about the process of rechecking and remarking or had queries regarding the marking of examination scripts provided through Data Access Request may submit an appeal review application to the independent Appeal Review Committee. In 2021, a total of six, one and 51 applications were received for review of the processing of examination irregularities, the process of rechecking and remarking, and the marking of scripts respectively.

Certificates

The 2021 HKDSE certificates were issued to school candidates in October 2021 via their schools while private candidates received the certificates by local courier post.

For Category A subjects, results were reported in 5 levels (1-5), with Level 1 being the lowest and Level 5 the highest. Achievements below Level 1 were designated as 'UNCL' (unclassified). Among Level 5 candidates, the highest achieving ones were awarded Level 5** while those with the next highest level of performance were awarded Level 5*. Component levels for Chinese Language, English Language and Combined Science were reported on the certificates.

For Category B subjects, assessments were undertaken by course providers. After moderation by the HKEAA, the final results were recorded on the HKDSE certificates. Starting from 2018, results of Applied Learning subjects (except Applied Learning Chinese) are reported in three levels, namely 'Attained', 'Attained with Distinction (I)' and 'Attained with Distinction (II)'. Performance of 'Attained with Distinction (I)' is deemed comparable to Level 3 while 'Attained with Distinction (II)' is deemed comparable to Level 4 or above in Category A subjects. For Applied Learning Chinese, the existing levels of results, i.e. 'Attained' and 'Attained with Distinction', will continue to be used.

For Category C subjects, marking and grading were conducted by Cambridge International. Results were reported in five grades ('a'-'e'), with grade 'e' being the lowest and grade 'a' being the highest. Achievements below grade 'e' were designated as 'ungraded'. A separate speaking endorsement grade (With Distinction/Merit/Pass in Speaking) was reported for candidates who satisfied the conditions as stated in the syllabus. Achievement below 'Pass in Speaking' was not reported.

For the following subjects, components results in addition to the overall subject results were also provided:

Chinese Language

Combined Science (Biology, Physics)

English Language
Combined Science (Biology, Chemistry)

Combined Science (Chemistry, Physics)

The language medium in which a candidate entered a subject was not recorded on the certificate.