

# Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (English Language) 2021

## Assessment Report

### Introduction

1. The purpose of this report is to consolidate the Chief Examiners' observations on the performance of candidates who sat the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (English Language) in 2021.

### General Observations

2. Candidates achieved different proficiency attainment<sup>1</sup> rates in different papers. The approximate attainment rates for individual papers were: Reading 73.1%; Writing 48.5%; Listening 81.1%; Speaking 71.0%; Classroom Language Assessment 95.2%.

### Paper 1 (Reading)

3. The paper comprised three reading passages on different topics.

4. Candidates' performance

- 4.1 Paper completion

The vast majority of candidates completed the questions for all three reading passages although there were a few questions left blank, possibly reflecting time management issues.

- 4.2 Understanding what was being asked and hence what was required in a response  
Overall, candidates' responses indicated that they had an understanding of what the questions asked. Questions which were less well handled included the following:

- 4.2.1 Passage A, Q.5 asked the candidates to identify what 'civil engineering' was used as an example of. The required answer was 'a profession / professional field'. Unfortunately, most candidates copied the noun phrase 'The range of general basic techniques' from the beginning part of the same sentence as their answer. This would seem to demonstrate candidates' inability to identify the clause relation: Statement-Example when stretching across two paragraphs, as was the case here.

- 4.2.2 Passage A, Q.9 asked "Who would need the 'rare qualities' mentioned on lines 26-27?". Many candidates copied 'professional engineer' rather than the correct answer 'apprentices'. This answer could be extracted both morphologically from the word 'apprenticeship' and from inferring in lines 27-28 that the person in question needs the qualities to carry them 'through that route to an engineering career'. It would seem that, rather than trying to comprehend the paragraph in its totality, these candidates

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<sup>1</sup> Scoring Level 3 or above in the Reading and Listening papers, and Level 2.5 or above on any one scale and Level 3 or above on all other scales in the Writing, Speaking and Classroom Language Assessment (CLA) papers.

simply looked for a term to be copied directly from the paragraph which could answer ‘who’, instead of genuinely trying to understand the paragraph.

- 4.2.3 Passage B, Q.26 asked ‘According to the writer, who would be considered part of ‘a high level of human capital (line 27)?’, to which the correct response was ‘well educated people’ or ‘people with a high degree of formal education’. Some candidates incorrectly answered the question by simply copying out ‘a high degree of formal education’ without addressing the question word ‘who’.
- 4.2.4 Passage C, Q.35 asked the candidates to list all the other tools other than dogs. Those who provided a wrong answer wrote ‘wolves’ instead of ‘jackal/wolf hybrid’, while some candidates missed ‘electronic noses’.

#### 4.3 Drawing inferences from the writer’s words

- 4.3.1 Passage A, Q.4 asked ‘What’s the writer’s purpose in asking the question beginning ‘But is that an argument...?’ Strong candidates referred to a specific function such as ‘to raise doubts’ or made reference to the discourse function of the question, such as ‘to introduce his opinions’. In contrast, those candidates who failed to score a point wrote answers which were too vague, such as ‘to argue’ or ‘to prove something wrong’.
- 4.3.2 Passage C, Q.44 asked what the attitude of the writer was to the way that the police and security services gather evidence, as implied in the final sentence of the passage. Candidates who performed well on this question were able to produce an answer relating to the writer’s negative attitude such as ‘critical’, ‘negative’ or ‘doubtful’.

#### 4.4 Identification of referents

Candidates generally understood what was wanted when a question asked for identification of specific information in the passages. However, the following proved to be challenging:

- 4.4.1 Passage A, Q.7 asked ‘On line 24, “The case...” What case?’ The referent here occurred in paragraph 1 relating to ‘pre-career certification / qualification / training’. Correct responses indicated that candidates were able to understand the flow of propositions from paragraphs 1-3.
- 4.4.2 Passage B, Q.20 asked what ‘two components’ the writer was referring to on line 13. Most candidates got the first referent ‘the super-creative core’ correct but some candidates mistakenly took the second to be ‘thought leader’, instead of the correct answer ‘creative professionals’.
- 4.4.3 Passage C, Q.30 asked what ‘this operation’ referred to. Most candidates identified the correct referent, which was ‘encouraging dogs to sniff the passing commuters’. In contrast, some simply wrote ‘sniff the passing commuters’ and were not awarded a point.

#### 4.5 Understanding figurative language

Performance on questions requiring interpretation of figurative language in Passage A was satisfactory. Passage C, Q.39 asked which word was referred to as ‘mammalian sensory apparatus’. In the text, this *faux* scientific term was intended to be used for comic effect. Most candidates gave ‘nose’ as the correct response. Those who were not awarded a point typically wrote ‘electronic nose’ reflecting a lack of understanding of the use and effect of the term in the text.

- 4.6 Grasp of global meaning – reading beyond the sentence level  
Candidates generally performed satisfactorily in this area. Passage C, Q.45 asked for the best alternative title for the passage. Candidates who chose option A, ‘Animal Research to Fight Crime’ appeared to have overlooked the emphasis put on ‘smell’ and its peripheral words like ‘nose’ and ‘olfactory’ discussed in the passage.
- 4.7 Appropriateness of responses  
Strong candidates identified the material that was relevant to the question being asked. In general, there was relatively little evidence of indiscriminate copying, although where this did happen, the response was often inappropriate and attracted no marks.
5. Advice to candidates
- 5.1 Note that the length of passages and the number of questions for each will vary. The passages can be tackled in any order so candidates could start by answering questions that they feel most confident with.
- 5.2 Pay attention to how ideas are constructed in a passage. Sometimes it may be necessary to read back and forth to build an understanding of the points made by the writer.
- 5.3 Be aware that the first answer to a question is the one which will be marked. There is no point in listing items or information in the hope that something within that list or information will attract a mark.
- 5.4 If more than one mark is awarded to a question, it will probably be necessary to provide more than one point in the answer.
- 5.5 Where questions in a sequence seem at first sight to be asking for the same information, check them again to find what, specifically, is being asked. Each question is different and will require a unique response.
- 5.6 When responding to a question about the *meaning* of something in a passage, make sure that the *context* of the passage is taken into account, not simply personal experience or general understanding. The paper does not test vocabulary or meaning without reference to the context.
- 5.7 Note that ‘phrase’ does not refer to a complete sentence; if a whole sentence is copied as a response then it will not attract a mark. ‘Phrase’ also means more than one word; a single word will not serve as a correct response.
- 5.8 Pay attention to the grammatical structure and spelling of responses. While errors

in structure and spelling are not considered in the mark scheme, markers cannot give credit to responses that are not intelligible or to misspellings which result in a different word from the correct one.

- 5.9 If the best response to a question is contained in words from the passage, candidates should use those words. If candidates choose to paraphrase the passage, they should make sure that the meaning is as similar as possible to the original. For example, in Passage A, Q.15, the correct responses were ‘high(er) fees’ and ‘improved social status’. Rephrasing this as ‘higher service fees’ is an incorrect response as service fee refers to something different.

## **Paper 2 (Writing)**

6. This paper consists of two parts, Part 1: Task 1, Composition, and Part 2: Task 2A Detection and Correction of Errors/Problems, and 2B, Explanation of Errors/Problems in a student’s composition.

### **Part 1: Composition**

7. In Part 1 of the paper, candidates are required to write a coherent text using accurate grammar. The task given for the 2021 examination was for candidates to write an article for a school PTA newsletter on how they could renovate existing classrooms by describing at least two innovations other than e-technology. Candidates needed to provide at least two examples of innovations that they felt would help prepare students for an increasingly dynamic world and enable them to become collaborators, creative thinkers, problem solvers and critical information consumers. The text length was to be about 400 words. To help candidates, some background information on students’ future needs was included in the question. This was meant to help candidates frame their response and to consider innovations and classroom renovations that not solely related to e-technology. The task not only allowed candidates to demonstrate their English language ability, but to show their understanding of contemporary teaching pedagogy and educational contexts. This was not a requirement of the test, as candidates were required to simply write a response from a consistent perspective. Markers noted that the test paper was well designed and gave candidates the opportunity to frame a response around a topic of interest.
8. Markers commented that many candidates were able to show a good understanding of the need to consider different innovations that were not only connected to e-technology. These included changing the layout and design of the classroom such as having more open plan spaces with circular desks to allow for more discussion and collaboration among students. Some candidates described the advantages of more personalised classrooms where students could work together in more comfortable surroundings with sofas and chairs. There were references to developing multi-purpose rooms where schools could promote speech, debate, performance and art. There were also other examples of classrooms with video walls, visual arts exhibits, STEM and science activities, meditation rooms, aquaria and even pet corners to help reduce the anxiety of students and to promote greater responsibility among classmates in looking after the animals.
9. Unfortunately, some candidates appeared to overlook the underlined prompt in the task

to consider innovations other than e-technology and focused their responses on having more computers, iPads and e-learning software/programmes in the classroom. These items had already been mentioned in the background information and were therefore redundant. Some candidates appeared to have prepared for an answer on teaching and learning under COVID-19, but this was not the focus of the task.

10. Candidates' performance was graded on three scales for Part 1: (1) Organisation and Coherence, (2) Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range, and (3) Task Completion.
11. The performance in scale (1) Organisation and Coherence was the best out of the three scales with many candidates achieving Level 3 or above. However, some markers commented that candidates' organisation of ideas and information would benefit from the use of more planning. Candidates occasionally focused more on the paragraph level and as a result would not devote enough attention to sentence level organisation. In these articles, markers noted that candidates would include too many ideas and the writing seemed to be more of a list than a well-thought-out response. Articles that were written this way usually suffered because the ideas were not clearly connected and explained and could be hard to follow. The reverse would also occasionally happen where candidates focused on the details and paid less attention to the larger structure of an article. In these cases, markers commented that while individual paragraphs were well written, there could be limited connection between these larger ideas. The result was an article that had connected writing, but had limited focus or relevance. Candidates should have started with an overall organisation plan so that they could integrate and develop their two examples of classroom innovations. Some weaker answers relied too heavily on a limited number of sentence-initial connectives (e.g. Firstly, Secondly, Moreover, Furthermore etc.), which made their writing appear mechanical and rather formulaic. Stronger candidates used other types of cohesive devices (e.g. lexical chains, pronouns, synonyms, ellipsis, etc.) to organise their ideas in a more natural manner.
12. The performance on scale (2) Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range, was generally acceptable. Markers reported errors in such areas as: the spelling of reasonably high frequency words, the use of articles, subject-verb agreement and verb patterns. Markers commented that there were examples of candidates obviously proofreading and correcting their text after they had finished writing. In these cases, at least some of the simple grammatical mistakes listed above seemed to have been avoided or eradicated. Candidates are reminded that it is very important to make sure that they do a careful proofread at the end of the writing process. Taking less time to write and using more time to proofread would be very beneficial. Markers also commented that the choice of language and the tone adopted was occasionally inappropriate to the task. Most commonly, the tone and choice of lexis was more akin to a school essay than an article written by a teacher for a PTA newsletter. A number of memorised stock phrases and expressions could be found in weaker answers, e.g. future pillars of the society, unleash their potential, of paramount importance, and think out of the box.
13. The performance on scale (3) Task Completion, was the lowest of the three scales. The majority of candidates wrote an article from the perspective of a school representative and considered their audience's concerns and interests while using a persuasive and inclusive tone to introduce two or more possible innovations regarding classroom renovations. However, some candidates did not make their position clear and this made their articles read more like a letter to the editor or a discursive essay. Some candidates spent too much time responding to the example of rapid changes in society provided in

the prompt and as a result did not add sufficient examples to illustrate their ideas for renovating the classrooms. Other candidates failed to offer appropriate justification for their views and were unable to extend their arguments with appropriate evidence. Some focused solely on one innovation and hence did not complete the requirements of proposing two ideas. The weakest candidates only wrote about e-technology and did not address the task as stated in the prompt.

14. Several markers stated that they found some arguments to be superficial and weak. Candidates are not tested on the pedagogical or philosophical value of their ideas for renovating classrooms, but candidates would do well to avoid making simple and general statements of fact and to note that claims need following up with examples and support. Additionally, candidates should never confuse hollow rhetoric or an exaggeration of the facts with a well-constructed argument. Several markers commented that at a surface level, many of the innovations suggested were relevant, but candidates did not always explain how these innovations might help improve learning and teaching.
15. Candidates are reminded to follow the guidelines regarding the number of words to write, use other names when referring to schools as well as themselves, not write in the margins and leave sufficient time to proofread their writing at the end of the test.

## **Part 2: Correcting and explaining errors/problems**

16. Part 2 of the Writing Paper is divided into two parts: Task 2A, Detection and Correction of Errors/Problems and Task 2B, Explanation of Errors/Problems. For Part 2A, candidates are given a student composition that contains errors/problems and are asked to correct those that appear in the first part of the composition. For Part 2B candidates are asked to fill in incomplete explanations of some of the errors/problems in the remainder of the composition. Markers considered the instructions for Part 2 to be clearly stated and felt that the composition contained a balanced and fairly comprehensive range of testing items.
17. Candidates performed strongly overall in Part 2A, but some candidates struggled with the following items:
  - 4(ii): In this item, candidates were tested on their grammatical knowledge of the lexical verb 'hang'. In particular, the verb 'hang' has two distinct past tense forms. One is the regular past tense, i.e. 'hanged'. In this form, the verb refers to the act of killing someone by placing a rope around their neck. The other form of the past tense is the irregular form 'hung', meaning that something, such as a coat, was attached or placed somewhere such that it did not touch the ground. This is the meaning in the sentence in question. Hence, 'hanged' in the phrase '...the coat she was wearing and hanged it...' needed to be corrected to '...and hung it...'.
  - 6(ii): The clause which required correction - 'I got a lot warm' - should have been changed to 'I got a lot warmer'. A number of candidates were not awarded the point as they changed the adjective 'warm' to the noun 'warmth' to create the clause 'I got a lot of warmth'. Although this is grammatically correct, it is extremely difficult to imagine how 'got a lot of warmth' would fit in the text in terms of meaning. With some effort it may be argued that 'got a lot of warmth' could be a figurative use of 'warmth' hence meaning receiving friendship or love. However, this is not congruous with the narrative of the surrounding text. Hence the simpler correction of 'got a lot

warmer’, which fits the meaning of the narrative, is correct. Candidates would be well advised to consider the meaning of their corrections in relation to the surrounding text as opposed to simply correcting the immediate grammar within the clause or phrase.

- 7(ii): This item proved to be problematic for many candidates. In this item, candidates were tested on their knowledge of noun phrases which contain a non-finite postmodifying clause; a grammatical structure that frequently causes problems for Hong Kong students. In particular, this structure required the use of an ed-clause as a postmodifying clause. Hence, the incorrect ‘chocolates shape like hearts’ should have been changed to ‘chocolates shaped like hearts.’
18. In Task 2B, candidates were given incomplete explanations of errors/problems. Candidates were asked to fill in the blanks with one or more words so as to make the explanations complete. Many candidates did this successfully, but below are some examples of common problems in Task 2B:
- 12(ii): Some candidates wrote 'countable' instead of 'plural'. However, ‘countable’ is not possible here as the word ‘form’ follows the gap in the explanation text. ‘Countable’ is a type of noun, unlike ‘singular’ or ‘plural’, it is not a ‘form’. Hence ‘countable’ is the wrong answer here. Candidates are advised to read the question and the explanation given carefully in order to ensure that their answer fits the content of the explanation text.
  - 16(ii): Many candidates failed to show that the modal with perfect aspect ‘would have been’ in the sentence refers to a hypothetical situation with reference to past time. Writing 'hypothetical situation' on its own was therefore deemed to be too imprecise here and was not awarded a mark.
  - 17(iv): This item was an open-ended item, in which candidates were expected to provide a clear explanation as regards the difference in meaning between two adjective + preposition patterns: 'pleased for' and 'pleased with'. The expected answer was that ‘pleased for’ means that one is happy on behalf of another person while ‘pleased with’ means one is satisfied with a person, thing, action or outcome. Unfortunately, many candidates failed to provide such an explanation.
19. Candidates are reminded to check the spelling in their responses very carefully and to review their answers to make sure they are logical and grammatically correct. It is crucial that appropriate meta-language/terminology is used. Candidates are also reminded to demonstrate their understanding of the linguistic problems with complete linguistic terms and not abbreviations.

### **Paper 3 (Listening)**

20. This year’s paper consisted of three sets of items relating to three different listening texts. The first text consisted of a podcast about tourism; the second was an excerpt from a radio chat show in which the participants discussed a recently released report about the safest cities in the world; and the third text was part of a talk about stress by a health psychologist. There were male and female speakers in the test speaking at a normal to occasionally slower speed for the type of interaction involved.

21. Markers' evaluation and feedback indicated they found the topics to be of interest to teachers. They judged the instructions and questions to be clear, and found the marking scheme easy to follow. The Markers' Meeting was perceived to be efficient with markers commenting that the marking scheme 'covered most possible answers', that discussion of queries was helpful and that marking procedures were 'smooth and facilitating'. During the Markers' Meeting, the markers were asked to do the test themselves to get a feel for the questions and the answers that should be accepted, and they felt that this was particularly useful.
22. A variety of task types were included in the paper, which allowed for a range of micro-listening skills to be tested, focusing both on gist and intensive listening. The paper included blank-filling, table-completion, ordering/ranking, sequencing of a narrative, summarising ideas, multiple-choice and open-ended questions. Of the different task types, those that required candidates to summarise ideas that they heard and write them in their own words proved to be more challenging as such tasks require not only accurate identification of information but also synthesising into wording appropriate to answer the question. There was no evidence that any format was more difficult or easier than any of the others for candidates.
23. Of the three texts, candidates found the third text a little easier than the other two with the first two texts of equal difficulty.
  - 23.1 Few items were found to be particularly difficult, with just four being answered correctly by fewer than 35% of candidates.
  - 23.2 The most difficult item in the paper proved to be Q.3(iii), with 19% of candidates answering it correctly. This item required candidates to summarise in their own words the idea that a reason for the growth in the travel industry is that there are now many airports in the world that have increased the connectivity for passengers. Most candidates were unable to get both parts of the answer and so failed to get the mark. Many simply wrote that the reason was the increased number of airports, which the speaker did not actually say.
  - 23.3 Another item that proved to be difficult for candidates was Q.12(i), which was answered correctly by 29% of candidates. The answer required was a specific term, corporate risk, and so only the correct term correctly spelled was accepted. The intention was to test that candidates were able to identify the term through accurate listening rather than through existing knowledge of business terminology. The item proved to be relatively difficult, though it did discriminate between stronger and weaker candidates.
  - 23.4 Twelve items were answered correctly by more than 90% of the candidates. In general, the relatively easy items tended to require answers that were clearly and unambiguously stated by the speakers in the recordings and required little or no reformulation or paraphrasing.
  - 23.5 Overall, the test items showed a variation in difficulty level that was appropriate for the candidature and provided a good test of listening comprehension.
24. Advice to candidates

- 24.1 When addressing items that required rephrasing what is heard, some candidates struggled to express themselves coherently and succinctly. Candidates should be careful when attempting to copy verbatim chunks of what is heard as this may lead to writing down information which is not relevant to answering the question. If the answer requires a comparison, for example, then candidates should consider this when composing their answer. If the emphasis of an answer is not addressing the question, no marks will be given.
- 24.2 When considering what form an answer should take, candidates should pay attention to two things: (1) the number of marks given for the item and (2) any example answer given. In Q.23, two-part answers were required and so each item was allocated two marks to reflect this (though no example answer was provided in this case).
- 24.3 For some items, answers were not accepted if the spelling of the key word was incorrect, for example ‘corporate risk’ in Q.12(i) and ‘built’ in Q.14(v). It is also not possible for a mark to be given if the spelling of a word significantly changes its meaning, such as candidates writing ‘breath’ rather than ‘breathe’ in Q.31(viii). Candidates should spend time proofreading and amending their answers where necessary.
- 24.4 Candidates are reminded to check the phrasing of each question to ensure that the answer fits grammatically, particularly if the answer demands completion of a statement. Although grammatical accuracy is not the focus of the mark scheme, markers cannot give credit to answers that do not fit the stem and hence become structurally unintelligible.
- 24.5 By listening to a wide variety of oral genres in English, candidates can increase their awareness of natural spoken English through the use of collocation, compounds and idioms.

#### **Paper 4 (Speaking)**

25. Paper 4 consists of two parts. In Part 1 there are two tasks, Task 1A: Reading Aloud and Task 1B: Recounting an Experience / Presenting an Argument. There is one task in Part 2: Group Interaction.
26. Candidates are tested on six scales of performance. Task 1A assesses candidates on two scales: (1) Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation and (2) Reading Aloud with Meaning. Task 1B assesses candidates on two different scales: (3) Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range and (4) Organisation and Cohesion. Finally, Task 2 assesses candidates on two scales: (5) Interacting with Peers and (6) Discussing Educational Matters with Peers.
27. Each individual candidate has five minutes to complete both Tasks 1A and 1B, with Task 1B beginning immediately after Task 1A. After the five minutes for Task 1A and 1B, candidates are asked to return to the preparation room where they wait for a short time. They then return to the assessment room for Part 2 – Group Interaction, in which candidates discuss together a topic of relevance to the educational context of Hong Kong. The Group Interaction lasts for either 10 minutes (if there are three candidates in a group)

or for 13 minutes (if there are four candidates in a group). A series of precautionary measures based on recommendations from the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) were implemented to ensure the health and well-being of candidates whilst ensuring the performance of the candidates was clearly audible for the examiners, for the other candidates in Part 2 and for the Oral Recording System (ORS).

### ***Part 1: Task 1A Reading Aloud***

28. The passages that candidates were required to read for Task 1A were selected from contemporary literature and covered a range of topics and themes. The passages presented sufficient context for candidates to understand their meaning while allowing opportunities to read aloud descriptions of setting, narration of plot and dialogue.
29. The two scales for this task are (1) Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation and (2) Reading Aloud with Meaning. The passages included a range of lexis and sentence structures, allowing the accuracy and clarity of pronunciation of individual sounds and words to be assessed reliably, as well as stress and intonation over stretches of text. The passages also allowed candidates to demonstrate their ability to read with meaning through employing pitch and tone along with varying speed and employing appropriate pausing to communicate mood and thought groups.
30. The passages were all of a similar length and long enough to ensure accurate assessment to take place yet short enough to allow sufficient time for candidates to complete both Tasks 1A and 1B within the assigned time.
31. Of all the tasks candidates were required to undertake, Task 1A, Reading Aloud was where candidates' performance appeared to be weakest in terms of (1) Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation and (2) Reading Aloud with Meaning. Having said this, a number of candidates were able to demonstrate the ability to sustain a level of accuracy in terms of their pronunciation, stress and intonation. In terms of reading aloud with meaning, a number of candidates showed some level of understanding of the text whilst having an awareness of an audience. This was often exhibited in the manipulation of speed and pausing along with stress, rhythm and intonation.
32. Amongst those candidates who were able to demonstrate a stronger performance, they were often able to show a greater degree of accuracy in pronunciation over a wider range of lexis, especially low frequency lexical items. In addition, such candidates were also able to effectively use a wider range of phonological features including connected speech and appropriate deployment of strong and weak forms.
33. Alongside these pronunciation features in Task 1A, candidates who demonstrated a stronger performance were able to show a very high level of sensitivity to the text. This means moving beyond simply differentiating between narration and dialogue in the text. Stronger candidates demonstrated a deeper understanding of the mood of the text and were able to mark transitions within the text. In addition, such candidates demonstrated an understanding of the characters in the text and the characters' attitudes and were able to express more subtle, nuanced meaning by effectively manipulating speed, volume, pitch and tone.
34. Less successful candidates often had problems in articulating individual phonemes. Common examples of these issues were problems distinguishing between long and short

vowel sounds, omission of final consonant sounds, as well as problems with pronunciation of consonant clusters. Particularly weak candidates required significant effort reading the text, doing so word-by-word, with frequent phoneme errors. This resulted in temporary confusion for the listening examiners.

35. In relation to those candidates who were less able in their performance of Task 1A, pronunciation features including sentence stress, rhythm and connected speech were often negatively impacted by an inappropriate pace; both a slow laboured delivery or a rushed delivery. A slow reading of the text often failed to communicate effectively due to the disruption of thought groups and consequently was unable to express the mood of the text. A rushed delivery often presented as an overly dramatic rendition inappropriate to the mood of the text and the characters.
36. To help candidates prepare for Task 1A, they are recommended to practise reading a text for the meaning, mood and attitudes of the characters. To do this, candidates must start with a closer reading to develop an understanding of the tone / mood of the text by looking at the setting, characters, details and word choices. Then candidates are recommended to practise reading the text aloud hoping to achieve a naturalness in terms of pace, rhythm, pitch and intonation. Listening to good models of reading aloud may help candidates understand how to read clues within the text such as punctuation, referencing and word choices. With regard to pronunciation issues, candidates are recommended to develop an awareness of their own weaknesses paying attention to some of those common issues highlighted above, i.e. problems distinguishing between long and short vowel sounds, omission of final consonant sounds, as well as problems with pronunciation of consonant clusters. In addition, candidates are recommended to avoid over-articulating every sound and instead to consider those features of connected speech that will improve the pace and fluency.

### ***Part 1: Task 1B Recounting an Experience / Presenting an Argument***

37. Both Task 1A and 1B are completed in the assessment room within 5 minutes. As soon as the candidate has finished reading aloud Task 1A, Task 1B begins and proceeds until the remaining time within the permitted 5 minutes has elapsed.
38. The prompts for Task 1B reflected a range of issues, topics and themes that are relevant to contemporary life in Hong Kong or to education matters in general. Candidates were asked to present arguments using their own language resources to produce a coherent and cohesive response to the given topic.
39. The two scales used to evaluate a candidate's performance are (3) Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range, and (4) Organisation and Cohesion. The scales assess the candidates' ability to organise ideas and demonstrate lexico-grammatical range and accuracy in spontaneous or semi-spontaneous spoken English. The candidates can choose to present their response to the task in a more conversational, informal discourse or as a more formal style with a clear introduction and conclusion with more explicit signposting throughout. Both approaches were acceptable as long as the argument presented was cogent and the relationships between ideas were clear.
40. In Task 1B, candidates seemed to perform relatively well in both of the scales of assessment. Candidates predominantly chose to deliver a more formal style of response to this task incorporating clear structural signposting identifying both an introduction and

conclusion along with more formulaic signposting with the main ideas put forward. This was exemplified by such examples of organising phrases as marking an introduction ('I agree with the idea that... there are two main reasons for this. '), indicating cause and result ('As a result people think... '), emphasising important points ('The main reason people believe that... ') and contrasting ideas ('on the other hand... ').

41. Amongst those candidates who demonstrated a stronger level of performance in Task 1B, it was noted that they were able to structure their responses with less overt, formulaic signposting. Instead, they were able to incorporate a wider range of strategies to help the listener follow the flow of the discourse. This involved both more overt organising phrases along with less overt strategies including using parallel structures and pronoun referencing, developing lexical chains across their response as well as referring to and adding to their previous statements in order to develop support for their propositions ('likewise', 'even so', 'albeit', 'meanwhile').
42. In relation to those candidates who were less able in their performance of Task 1B two key issues were identified by examiners. Firstly, these weaker level candidates produced incoherent discourse resulting in confusion for the listener / examiner. The second issue was a lack of development of ideas resulting from either producing an extremely short response or responses marked with a lack of relevant ideas with which to build and develop an argument in support of their opinions / propositions.
43. Amongst those weaker candidates their argument was limited in its development as a consequence of relying on a rather restricted range of connectives. For example, there would be a reliance of simple connectives such as 'and', 'so' and 'then'.
44. In terms of grammatical and lexical range and accuracy, such weaker candidates exhibited a somewhat limited range of vocabulary to express their ideas resulting in a lack of precision as well as lacking an ability to successfully paraphrase any gaps in their lexicon. Grammatical structures contained errors in both simple and more complex structures, with attempts at more complex structures either limited or marked with greater inaccuracies.
45. In contrast, those more successful candidates were able to access a wider range of lexis to add greater precision to their ideas. In addition to this, their performance was marked by a wider range of grammatical structures with a greater degree of accuracy incorporating features such as more complex verb phrases; embedded clauses and modal verbs to develop their ideas related to the theme / topic as well as to express more complex ideas and their attitudes towards the theme / topic.
46. Candidates are reminded that Task 1B is designed to elicit language that is to a large extent, spontaneous (or semi-spontaneous). This cannot really be achieved when candidates read from a pre-prepared 'script'. Consequently, more successful candidates speak from prepared notes (in bullet point form or note form) where ideas are outlined in a well organised structure rather than a 'script'. This allows the candidate to produce a more spontaneous spoken text.
47. Candidates should also be conscious of the time allowance for completing Task 1A and 1B. Candidates have 5 minutes in total to complete both tasks, one following immediately after the other. Therefore, candidates should be mindful of how much can realistically be said in Task 1B in a period of approximately two to three minutes, and should make full

use of the time available. When candidates exceed the five minutes allowed for Task 1A and Task 1B, examiners ask the candidates to stop at that point; when candidates complete Task 1B before the full 5 minutes have elapsed, examiners check with candidates if they would like to add anything further.

48. To help candidates to prepare for Task 1B, they should be familiar with the assessment criteria and the descriptors in order to understand what is being assessed. Candidates should develop an awareness of their own inaccuracies and deficiencies in their lexicogrammatical range in order to improve in these areas. In the preparation for Task 1B, candidates should consider the complexity of arguments and counter-arguments and avoid just listing out points. Arguments should be expanded on and should be expressed through a range of grammatical structures and linking devices.

### ***Part 2: Group Interaction***

49. Part 2 of the paper requires candidates to take part in a professional, collaborative discussion on an education-related, school-based issue, plan or project. During the course of the discussion, all candidates have the opportunity to contribute their own views and ideas, explore and challenge the ideas of others, and develop and collaboratively complete a task agenda. Generally, this task was well handled, with candidates achieving greatest success on Task 2 of the three components of the assessment. Candidates clearly demonstrated an ability to participate in a collaborative, professional discussion.
50. The two scales for Part 2 are (5) Interacting with Peers and (6) Discussing Educational Matters with Peers.
51. Less successful candidates in Part 2 often produced more limited contributions to the discussion in terms of development of their ideas and opinions, as well as limited frequency of contributions. In addition to this, some less successful candidates provided ideas and suggestions that were tangential to the discussion of the group. Such performances were exemplified by a lack of ability to effectively develop or build on the ideas of others in the group. These candidates seemed to lack active listening skills and the conversational skills required to be able to interact effectively with the other group members. Such candidates were often unable to ask appropriate follow-up questions or offer any commentary on others' ideas. The overall impression of the weaker candidates was a general lack of engagement and confidence with the topic.
52. Such a lack of engagement was often characterised by sequential turn-taking where points were made without the candidate taking on board the ideas of the other group members. In these discussions, there was little collaborative professional exchange or 'genuine' interaction. This involved a more limited range of discussion functions which had an impact on the flow and development of the conversation, with contributions from candidates often either not related to each other or only superficially acknowledged (e.g. just stating 'I agree' before moving on to a different issue). This had the effect of appearing mechanical and superficial.
53. Among those candidates who were more successful in their performance, a more engaged and meaningful exchange was evidenced. This would involve a wider range of 'discourse moves' such as making claims and suggestions; asking for and constructively exploring the views of others; facilitating collaboration by accepting and conceding others' views; and demonstrating an ability to keep the discussion focused and on-track.

54. The more successful candidates were willing to both make their own points with a clear justification as well as link their own contributions to the other candidates' contributions. Alongside this, more successful candidates were more willing to sensitively encourage more passive members of the group to contribute, to develop their ideas as well as ask for clarification of contributions that lacked precision.
55. In terms of Discussing Educational Matters with Peers, such stronger candidates were able to draw on their understanding of (language) learning and teaching, as well as a level of professional reflection and insight, in order to ensure that discussions were meaningful and focused on practical outcomes. This was demonstrated by a familiarity with and an understanding of more precise lexis related to the education-related, school-based issues, plans or projects under discussion. This resulted in candidates contributing ideas but more importantly justifying those ideas with relevant pedagogical reasoning.
56. To help candidates prepare for Part 2, they are encouraged to participate in meaningful professional exchange and dialogue by discussing learning and teaching issues with their colleagues as well as reflecting on their own learning and teaching experience and knowledge.
57. Candidates should be mindful of more natural features of collaborative interaction and the range of functional language needed in order to be comfortable producing these discourse moves in Part 2 of the assessment. Candidates are advised to avoid producing extremely lengthy 'monologues' which can hamper the development of ideas in the discussion. During the assessment, candidates are advised to listen closely to the other group members' ideas and to incorporate these into their own contributions. Candidates should not be afraid to revisit ideas expressed earlier in the discussion if it is useful to do so and candidates are encouraged to seek clarification from group members should any points raised be unclear.

## **Paper 5 (Classroom Language Assessment)<sup>2</sup>**

58. A total of 355 candidates were assessed between November 2020 and June 2021. About 95% of candidates attained Level 3 or above on the four scales of performance: (1) Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range; (2) Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation; (3) Language of Interaction and (4) Language of Instruction. Comments on candidates' performance on each of the four scales are given below.
59. Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range
  - 59.1 Grammatical and lexical competence of candidates was, on the whole, sufficient for meeting the demands of the English classroom in Hong Kong. The majority of candidates possessed the linguistic repertoire to communicate successfully with acceptable to good use of language structures and vocabulary, in spite of the more frequent occurrence of errors made when attempting to use more complex structures and compound sentences. They were often natural and spontaneous in their speech, and sometimes capable of making self-correction and paraphrasing their ideas wherever appropriate.

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<sup>2</sup> Administered by the Education Bureau, which contributed this section of the Assessment Report.

59.2 Candidates demonstrated an adequate grammatical range with a reasonable degree of accuracy. Nevertheless, a proportion of candidates were not confident or proficient in using a wider spectrum of more complex structures, for instance, conditional sentences, indirect questions and noun clauses. Missing plural endings and inaccuracies in subject-verb agreement remained noticeable, prime examples of common errors made by less cautious candidates.

59.3 In broad terms, candidates' lexical accuracy and range was good enough for maintaining clear communication in the classroom discourse. Aside from a larger variety of lexis, better performance was also marked by awareness of connotative levels of meaning. For weaker performance, the lexical range was restricted to the words and phrases of familiar themes in the textbooks or teaching resources prepared in advance, with unidiomatic expressions spotted at times.

## 60. Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation

60.1 The attainment rate was the best amongst the four scales. Candidates' performance on this scale, which covers the clear articulation of vowel and consonant sounds and appropriate and natural use of stress and intonation patterns, was pleasing. Isolated, occasional errors might induce undue strain on or unpleasantness from the listeners; yet, the intended meaning was rarely impeded.

60.2 To enhance accuracy of pronunciation, candidates are advised to be more careful in the distinction between short and long vowel sounds (e.g. /i:/ as in 'read', 'meal' and 'keep', /e/ as in 'leg') as well as voiced and voiceless consonants (e.g. 'zoo', 'cosy'). Wrong articulation of consonant clusters (e.g. 'glasses', 'present', 'screaming') was another challenge experienced by some weaker candidates. Omission of initial/final consonant sounds (e.g. /v/ as in 'verb', /p/ as in 'help', /k/ as in 'clock') and mispronunciation of past tense markers (e.g. 'provided', 'talked') should equally warrant their attention.

60.3 While the more successful candidates showcased a near-native proficiency, to serve as a role model of oral English for students, it is recommended that the weaker candidates bend their efforts to the prosodic features in speech. As regards stress and intonation patterns, many of such candidates tended to emphasise the weak or final syllable(s) inappropriately and enunciate sentences without a proper tone, thereby making their speech unnatural-sounding and monotonous. There was also room for improvement in terms of linking features. Candidates should hone their skills in articulating linking sounds correctly to achieve greater fluency.

## 61. Language of Interaction

61.1 This scale explores candidates' linguistic effectiveness of functional interactive skills including eliciting responses from, and responding and giving feedback to students in the English classroom. Candidates, on the whole, exhibited the capability of maintaining smooth interaction through using appropriate functional language in asking questions and sometimes providing clues and hints to invite more responses, followed by acknowledging answers and offering encouragement.

61.2 A range of functional language and spontaneity are crucial factors that differentiate

levels of performance on this scale. Evidently, the more competent candidates were able to employ an array of functional language to sustain meaningful interaction with students, in particular, in seeking clarifications, prompting extended explanation to stimulate further thoughts and providing constructive feedback in an unrehearsed fashion. In contrast, the less competent candidates tended to confine themselves to using display questions which demanded brief and expected answers, leading to limited and superficial interaction, and give perfunctory remarks such as “great” and “well done” most of the time.

## 62. Language of Instruction

- 62.1 Many candidates managed to present lesson content, provide instructions for classroom activities and unfold stages of lessons by making use of appropriate instructional language which was accessible to their students, fairly lucidly. Commendable performance was manifested in candidates’ ability to maintain a logical and coherent flow of ideas as well as to clarify and resolve ambiguities through giving further explanations, if required, with no communication breakdowns.
- 62.2 The lessons conducted by weaker candidates were found not entirely coherent because of the limited range of instructional language at their disposal. Typical problems consisted of a lack of spoken cohesion in some parts of the lesson; also, precision when explaining ideas and concepts regarding the language system. In a few rare cases, candidates showed close to no suitable instructional language for effective classroom management and simply repeated the instructions verbatim from the teaching materials without elaborating them to enhance understanding.