

Number of candidates and examination subjects

Participation

This year, 494 schools participated in the HKALE, presenting a total of 31 666 candidates. The number of private candidates was 9 906. The total candidate entries of 41 572 represented a decrease of 1.2% from last year, and 40 515 candidates eventually sat the examination. On average, school candidates entered for 5 subjects and private candidates entered for 2 to 3 subjects.

Examination Subjects

The HKALE offers subjects at the A-level and AS-level. Altogether 17 A-level and 18 AS-level subjects were examined this year. The subjects examined are shown on the Examination Timetable on page 13. Twenty eight subjects offered both Chinese and English versions and all of them received entries in Chinese. The percentage of subject entries taken in Chinese was 34.8%.

Registration of entries

Registration

Registration commenced in September 2011. Entry forms were issued to schools in early September. 429 schools submitted the examination entries of their students electronically, using the Web-based School Administration System (WebSAMS). Private candidates registered for the examination through the online system, by post or at the HKEAA registration centre in San Po Kong. Entry forms for private candidates were also distributed at the HKEAA offices and through the District Offices of the Home Affairs Department.

Handbook for Candidates

Each candidate was given a copy of the *Handbook for Candidates* in late November 2011. The Handbook contains the examination regulations and special instructions including warnings against offences which could lead to disqualification or mark penalties.

Examination centres and invigilation staff

Examination Centres

302 examination centres were used for the written examinations (including listening tests), for an average period of 5 to 8 days each for a total of 2 540 sessions. In each centre, the examination was conducted in either Chinese or English, with the exception of 23 sessions where both language versions were examined in the centres as the number of candidates was small.

197 and 173 school halls were used for the listening tests of Use of English and Chinese Language & Culture (Cantonese) respectively. The listening tests were broadcast by RTHK Radio 2 in the majority of centres. 29 and 27 school halls with unsatisfactory radio reception used the infra-red (IR) transmission system to deliver the Use of English and Chinese Language & Culture listening tests respectively, providing an additional 6,200 places. Candidates sitting the listening tests at these IR centres listened to the broadcast using their own earphones and the receivers provided by the HKEAA. The quality of broadcast is comparable to that of FM radio.

The oral tests of Use of English and Chinese Language & Culture were conducted in classroom centres of 22 and 16 schools respectively.

The practical skills of school candidates in Biology, Chemistry and Physics were assessed by schools in a Teacher Assessment Scheme. Practical examinations for private candidates in Biology and Chemistry were held in the laboratories of The University of Hong Kong. The practical examination of Physics was held in the laboratories of 3 schools.

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, special instructions and specimens of examination documents. Separate handbooks for the Use of English and Chinese Language & Culture examinations were also distributed.

Centre Supervisors' Conferences were held on 10 March, 19 March and 21 March 2012 to brief centre supervisors and their deputies about the procedures for the conduct of examination.

The number of invigilator-sessions for the written examinations and listening tests was 11 053. Participating schools provided for 88% of the total invigilation requirement. The remaining 12% 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. For the practical examinations, invigilators were recruited from tertiary institutions and centre schools.

To enhance the provision of effective and real-time administrative support to examination centres, the "Public Examinations Communication & Support System" (PECSS) had been piloted in different examinations since 2007 prior to its full implementation. In addition, to ensure the accuracy of candidates' attendance record and collection of answer scripts, the HKEAA has developed an "Attendance & Script Tracking System" (ASTS) in 2009. In the 2012 HKALE, 302 examination centres participated in the implementation of the PECSS and ASTS. PECSS was fully implemented in all written examinations except Visual Arts while ASTS was implemented in some of the written examinations. The feedback from the examination centres and examination personnel concerning the two systems was generally positive.

Distribution of Question Papers and Collection of Scripts

Question papers were delivered by courier in the morning of each examination day to 301 (99.7%) examination centres which had opted for this service. A depot was also operated in San Po Kong to distribute question papers to centre supervisors who had opted for collection by themselves.

Five collection centres were set up in Heng Fa Chuen, San Po Kong, Tsuen Wan, Shatin and Tuen Mun for the return of scripts and other examination documents from centres after the examination. Three additional centres in Yau Ma Tei, Tai Po and Yuen Long were operated on the examination days of the two language subjects.

Services for Candidates with Special Needs

Same as previous years, special examination arrangements were made for candidates with special needs so as to enable them to be equitably assessed under suitable conditions. This year, special examination arrangements such as extra examination time allowance, arrangement of supervised breaks, provision of braille/enlarged question papers and special answer books were made for 257 HKALE candidates with various special needs such as candidates with physical, visual, aural, oral or specific learning disabilities.

20 special centres (2 for oral and 18 for written examinations) were set up to serve these candidates. Some candidates were exempted from part of an examination such as listening or oral test. An annex was attached to the certificates of these candidates, with information on the exemption given. The reason for the exemption was not listed on the certificate.

3 candidates who were hospitalised during the examination period were given permission, with the consent of their doctors, to sit the examinations in the hospital under the supervision of external invigilators hired by the HKEAA.

Special arrangements were made for 7 candidates who, due to religious reasons, could not take examinations on Saturday mornings. These candidates took the Chinese Language & Culture Listening Test after sunset on the examination day at a special centre under the supervision of the HKEAA.

Arrangements were made for 3 candidates serving sentences to take the examinations inside the correctional centres, under the supervision of invigilators provided by the Correctional Services Department and the HKEAA.

Marking and Grading

The barcode system has been introduced since 2006 to enhance reliability and efficiency in the processing of examination scripts. In 2012, over 643 000 scripts were scanned in total.

This year, on-screen marking was used for Chinese Language and Culture, Use of English, Chinese History, Chinese Literature, Computer Applications, Computer Studies, Liberal Studies, Physics Paper II and Geography Paper II. About 265 000 scripts were marked on-screen.

There were over 643 000 scripts from the written examinations this year. 1 628 markers, mainly teachers from tertiary institutions and secondary schools, and 554 marking assistants were recruited for the marking of HKAL examinations. The same marking scheme and grading standard were used for the Chinese and English versions of subjects with bilingual versions. All the marking assistants and approximately 46% of the markers marked the scripts on-screen. All marked scripts were checked by a team of 150 checkers for the detection of unmarked pages, addition errors and score-entering errors. All discrepancies found were rectified before the grading of results.

Over 678 oral examiners were appointed to conduct the oral examinations.

Examination Irregularities

All cases of irregularities reported by centres, schools or candidates were processed by the Standing Committee chaired by the Deputy Secretary General of the HKEAA 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 on page 17 Table 1 — Statistics Overview.

Examination Results

Release of Results

The examination results were released on Friday, 29 June 2012. Results notices were issued to school candidates through their schools. Private candidates' results notices were sent by post. Schools using the WebSAMS to submit entry data were also given softcopies of their students' results. Participating schools were given analyses of results of their own students as well as the statistics of all day school candidates and the entire candidature.

Private and evening school candidates were able to view their results on the Internet from 8:00 am on 29 June, for a period of three weeks. In addition, those who had registered for the SMS service received their results through mobile phones before 9:30 am on 29 June.

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. 13 applications were approved this year. The assessed results of the subjects concerned, either grade C or grade E, were listed on a second page to the candidate's certificate. Candidates with assessed results below grade E were not awarded any assessed grade.

Rechecking and Remarking

Candidates with supporting reasons may apply for rechecking and remarking of their examination results within 7 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 technical errors and remarking of answer scripts) for up to four subjects. Requests for rechecking and 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 101 and 30 365 applications were received for rechecking and remarking respectively this year. Candidates and schools were notified of the outcome of these rechecking and remarking applications on 27 July 2012. The office of the Joint University Programmes Admissions System (JUPAS) was informed of the upgraded results of the candidates concerned at the same time. JUPAS has a special arrangement to process the applications of candidates with upgraded results after rechecking and remarking.

Appeal Review Committee

Candidates who disagreed with the decisions of the Public Examinations Board on examination irregularities, had doubt about the process of rechecking / remarking or the marking of examination scripts after gaining access to scripts might submit an appeal review application to the independent Appeal Review Committee. A total of 33 applications for review of the processing of examination irregularities, the process of rechecking and remarking or the marking of scripts were processed in 2012.

Certificates

Certificates were distributed to school candidates via schools and sent by registered mail to private candidates in October 2012. The performance of candidates in each subject sat was recorded on the certificate in six grades, from A to F. Results below grade F were unclassified and were not listed. Component results in addition to the subject results were printed for the subjects of Use of English, Chinese Language & Culture and Liberal Studies. The language medium in which a subject was taken was not recorded on the certificates.