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HKDSE 2014

Paper 1 observations

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Key observations

- The 2014 Paper 1 exam is strikingly similar to the 2012 and 2013 Paper 1 exams.
- The use of a short story in Part A represents a departure for the HKEAA. Other new text types are likely to be seen in future Paper 1 exams.
- The number of texts remains unchanged from last year, as does the distribution:
 - Part A—1 reading passage
 - Part B1—2 reading passages
 - Part B2—1 reading passage
- The word counts are not hugely different from last year's, though there is a bigger difference this year between the Part A and B2 texts (the latter being almost 200 words longer than the former).
- The difficulty levels of the texts are also reasonably similar to last year's. Part A is possibly slightly easier.
- The themes of this year's reading passages are broader and more universal than those of last year's:
 - Part A—Making apologies to people you have wronged in your life
 - Part B1—Writing encouraging letters to strangers
 - Part B2—Celebrity

There is also something of a link between the theme of the Part A passage and that of the two B1 passages. Obviously, the two passages in B1 are also very closely related to each other, as they are both from the same *Guardian* article.
- As for the comprehension sections, Part A starts out much easier than last year's, but then introduces a few rather tricky questions towards the end. Overall, Parts A and B1 seem closer in difficulty this year. The questions in B2 come across as somewhat easier than last year's.
- Each of the three comprehension sections contains more questions than last year's:
 - Part A—30/25
 - Part B1—29/20
 - Part B2—25/20
- The number of marks remains unchanged in Parts B1 and B2 (41 each), but has increased slightly in Part A (47 compared to last year's 41).
- The most popular question type this year is specific factual, and the most popular question format, by far, is short response.

Part A

Reading passage: Text 1—Apologies all around

| | |
|-------------------------|-----------|
| 30 questions (47 marks) | 956 words |
|-------------------------|-----------|

- Text 1 is the first short story being seen in the Paper 1 exam. It's an adapted version of 'Apologies all around' by Jeff Soesbe (<http://www.flashfictiononline.com/f20080202-apologies-all-around-jeff-soesbe.html>).
- The language is not particularly advanced, but the underlying message—that apologies do not always come naturally to us but are liberating when expressed—is likely to escape less able students.
- The story is set in the future, in an unspecified place.
- Slightly shorter than last year's Part A text (which was 1,088 words) and possibly less intimidating because of the short story layout.
- A slightly longer comprehension section this year, with 30 questions (compared to last year's 25) and 47 marks (compared to last year's 41).

Comprehension section: question types

- There is a lot less diversity in the question formats in this year's Part A. Notably, there are no vocabulary questions.
- Straightforward specific factual questions and very basic inference questions make up the majority of the questions in Part A, making for a rather easy comprehension section.
- There is a total of ten inference questions in this year's Part A—i.e. more than last year's.
- Four reference questions, same as in the 2012 Practice Paper (compared to just one each in the 2013 and 2012 exams).
- Q28 can reasonably be labelled a 'higher-order thinking question', a question type we have only seen in Part B2 in previous years.
- There are three open questions worth two marks (Q21, Q27, Q28) in this year's Part A.

Comprehension section: question formats

- No radically innovative question formats.
- The most common question format, by far, is short response (a total of 13).
- As in last year's Part A, there are two True/False/Not Given questions—This is likely to remain a popular question format.

Question types used in Part A

| Question type | Question number | 2014 | 2013 | 2012 | Practice Paper |
|-----------------------|--|------|------|------|----------------|
| Thematic | - | - | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Language usage | - | - | 1 | - | - |
| Specific factual | Q2,Q4,Q6,Q8,Q9,Q10,Q16,Q19, Q20,Q21,Q22,Q25,Q26 | 13 | 9 | 7 | 4 |
| Specific/Inference* | - | - | 5 | - | 1 |
| Main idea | Q24 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| Vocabulary | - | - | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Reference | Q5,Q7,Q15,Q18 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Inference | Q1,Q3,Q11,Q12,Q13Q17,Q23, Q27,Q29,Q30 | 10 | 3 | 5 | 2 |
| Figurative language | - | - | 1 | - | 3 |
| Views justification | - | - | - | 1 | 4 |
| Sequencing | Q14 | 1 | 1 | - | - |
| Higher-order thinking | Q28 | 1 | - | - | - |

*These are factual questions that require a high degree of inference.

Question formats used in Part A

| Question format | Question | 2014 | 2013 | 2012 | Practice Paper |
|------------------------------------|---|------|------|------|----------------|
| Multiple choice | Q1,Q10,Q11,Q18,Q19,Q23 | 6 | 7 | 6 | 9 |
| Matching subheadings to paragraphs | - | - | 1 | - | - |
| Cloze: rewriting main ideas | - | - | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Table completion | - | - | - | 1 | - |
| T/F/NG | Q6,Q9 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Labelling pictures | Q8 | 1 | 1 | 1 | - |
| Definition: dictionary entry | - | - | - | - | - |
| Definition: table completion | - | - | - | - | - |
| Single/multiple blank | - | - | - | - | - |
| Short response | Q2,Q3,Q4,Q5,Q7,Q12i,Q15,Q16, Q17,Q20,Q22,Q25,Q29 | 13 | 7 | 6 | 8 |
| Sentence completion | - | - | - | - | - |
| Matching sentences to speakers | Q30 | 1 | - | 1 | - |
| Cloze: dialogue completion | Q24* | 1 | - | - | - |
| Extended response | Q12ii,Q13,Q21,Q26,Q27,Q28 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 3 |
| Ordering events | Q14 | 1 | 1 | - | - |
| Timeline completion | - | - | - | - | - |

*This was a new(ish) question format which involved completing the character's thoughts using given words/phrases.

Part B1

Reading passage: Text 2—The World Needs More Love Letters

| | |
|-------------------------|-----------|
| 14 questions (20 marks) | 372 words |
|-------------------------|-----------|

- Like in last year's Part B1, there are two reading passages, the first of which being this article about Hannah Brencher and her 'charity drive' to write encouraging letters to complete strangers. There is something of a thematic link to the short story in Part A, and a very obvious link to the second reading passage in Part B1.
- The paragraphs are quite a bit chunkier than those of last year's B1 reading passages, which might make these texts more intimidating to very weak students, but the level of Text 2 seems to be roughly the same as last year's Text 2.

Reading passage: Text 3

| | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 15 questions (21 marks) (41 in total for B1) | 522 words (894 in total for B1) |
|--|---------------------------------|

- This text is actually just the second part of the *Guardian* article from which Text 2 was adapted, but it is quite a bit harder. Text 3 is much more colloquial and uses a potentially confusing mix of present and past tenses in the narration.

Comprehension section: question types

- As in last year's Part B1, specific factual questions make up the vast majority of questions (9 out of 14 for Text 2, and 6 out of 15 for Text 3). Some of these require a basic understanding of paraphrasing, but they are mostly rather straightforward.
- There is a noticeable switch from straightforward specific factual questions to ones that require more inferencing in Text 3, making the questions for this text quite a lot harder. Three out of the four inference questions in Part B1 come from this text.
- There is a total of four vocabulary questions in Part B1 (two for each text), which is the highest number yet. This also makes Part B1 the section with the most vocabulary questions (there is none in Part A and only one in Part B2—compare that with 2012 when there were six in B2 and only two in B1).

Comprehension section: question formats

- As far as question formats go, Part B1 mirrors Part A almost exactly.
- The most popular format is short response (13 out of 29 questions).
- There are also 5 MC-questions, compared to 6 in Part A and only 2 in last year's Part B1.
- T/F/NG-questions remain popular in B1 as well, with two more appearances (same as in Part A and last year's B1).

Question types used in Part B1

| Question type | Question number (45–59 from Text 3) | 2014 | 2013 | 2012 | Practice Paper |
|-----------------------|--|----------|------|------|----------------|
| Thematic | Q59 | 1 | - | 1 | 2 |
| Language usage | - | - | - | - | - |
| Specific factual | Q31, Q32, Q33, Q34, Q35, Q37, Q38, Q42, Q44/Q45, Q49, Q52, Q53, Q54, Q57 | 9/6 (15) | 12 | 6 | 8 |
| Specific/Inference* | Q47, Q48 | 2 | 1 | 1 | - |
| Main idea | - | - | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| Vocabulary | Q36, Q40/Q46, Q56 | 2/2 (4) | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Reference | Q41/Q55 | 1/1 (2) | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| Inference | Q39/Q50, Q51, Q58 | 1/3 (4) | 3 | 4 | 6 |
| Figurative language | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Views justification | - | - | - | - | - |
| Sequencing | Q43 | 1 | - | 1 | 1 |
| Higher-order thinking | - | - | - | - | - |

*These are factual questions that require a high degree of inference.

Question formats used in Part B1

| Question format | Question | 2014 | 2013 | 2012 | Practice Paper |
|------------------------------------|--|----------|------|------|----------------|
| Multiple choice | Q50, Q51, Q55, Q56, Q59 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 7 |
| Matching subheadings to paragraphs | | | - | 1 | 2 |
| Cloze: rewriting main ideas | | | 1 | 1 | - |
| Table completion | | | - | - | - |
| T/F/NG | Q42/Q52 | 1/1 (2) | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Labelling pictures | Q37 | 1 | - | - | - |
| Definition: dictionary entry | | | - | - | - |
| Definition: table completion | | | - | - | - |
| Single/multiple blank | | | 1 | 2 | - |
| Short response | Q31, Q32, Q33, Q34, Q36, Q40, Q41/Q45, Q46, Q47, Q49, Q53, Q58 | 7/6 (13) | 6 | 4 | 11 |
| Sentence completion | Q57 | 1 | - | 1 | 2 |
| Matching sentences to speakers | | | 1 | 1 | - |
| Cloze: dialogue completion | | | - | - | - |
| Extended response | Q35, Q38, Q39/Q48, Q54 | 3/2 (5) | 4 | 1 | 3 |
| Ordering events | Q43 | 1 | - | 2 | 1 |
| Timeline completion | | | - | - | - |
| Ticking boxes/blackening circles | Q44 | 1 | 3 | 1 | - |

Part B2

Reading passage: Text 4—Celebrity

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| 25 questions (41 marks) | 1,150 words (including the explanatory notes) |
|-------------------------|---|

- This year's B2 text is lifted from *The Fry Chronicles* by Stephen Fry.
- Pretty advanced language—certainly a massive difference between this and the Part B1 texts.
- The comprehension section was probably a bit easier this year.

Comprehension section: question types

- The most noteworthy thing about this year's B2 comprehension section is that there are no questions that can be labelled 'higher-order thinking'. The only such question in this year's exam appeared in Part A.
- As for the most common question type, there is a roughly even split between specific factual and inference questions. However, many of the specific factual questions require a bit of thought as well as an understanding of rather advanced vocabulary, making them much harder than their Part A and B1 counterparts.
- As in Part A, there are three questions worth 2 marks each (Q66, Q74, Q77).

Comprehension section: question formats

- Again, the most noteworthy thing about the question formats is how little of note there is as far as changes go. There are literally no new formats in this section.
- As in Parts A and B1, short response is by far the most common question format. The remaining questions are all made up of an entirely unsurprising mix of the usual suspects.

Question types used in Part B2

| Question type | Question number | 2014 | 2013 | 2012 | Practice Paper |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|------|------|------|----------------|
| Thematic | | | - | - | - |
| Language usage | | | - | - | - |
| Specific factual | Q62,Q65,Q68,Q71ii,Q72,Q74,Q77 | 7 | 5 | 3 | 3 |
| Specific/Inference* | Q61 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Main idea | Q70,Q84 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 4 |
| Vocabulary | Q78 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 3 |
| Reference | Q69,Q71i,Q73,Q80,Q82 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| Inference | Q60,Q63,Q64,Q66,Q67,Q79,Q83 | 7 | 2 | 8 | 10 |
| Figurative language | Q75,Q76,Q81 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Views justification | | | - | 1 | - |
| Sequencing | | | 1 | 1 | - |
| Higher-order thinking | | | 2 | 3 | 2 |

*These are factual questions that require a high degree of inference.

Question formats used in Part B2

| Question format | Question | 2014 | 2013 | 2012 | Practice Paper |
|------------------------------------|---|------|------|------|----------------|
| Multiple choice | Q60,Q63,Q68,Q72,Q80 | 5 | 4 | 9 | 12 |
| Matching subheadings to paragraphs | Q84 (matching main ideas, not subheadings) | 1 | - | - | - |
| Cloze: rewriting main ideas | Q70 | 1 | 2 | 1 | - |
| Table completion | | | - | - | 1 |
| T/F/NG | | | 1 | 1 | - |
| Labelling pictures | | | - | - | - |
| Definition: dictionary entry | | | - | - | - |
| Definition: table completion | | | - | - | - |
| Single/multiple blank | | | - | 1 | 1 |
| Short response | Q61,Q62,Q65,Q67,Q69,Q71,Q73, Q75,Q76,Q78,Q79i,Q81,Q82 | 13 | 4 | 11 | 8 |
| Sentence completion | Q77 (extended response) | 1 | - | - | - |
| Matching sentences to speakers | | | 1 | - | - |
| Cloze: dialogue completion | | | - | - | - |
| Extended response | Q65,Q66,Q74,Q79ii | 4 | 7 | 9 | 6 |
| Ordering events | | | - | 1 | - |
| Timeline completion | | | 1 | - | - |
| Ticking boxes/blackening circles | | | - | - | - |