



## External Assessment Report 2013

Subject(s)	Mandarin (Simplified), Mandarin (Traditional) & Cantonese
Level(s)	Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the examination.

# Comments on candidate performance

## General comments

2013 was the fourth year of presentation at Higher level in Mandarin (Simplified), Mandarin (Traditional) and Cantonese. The number of new centres has increased significantly. The content of the examination related clearly to the prescribed Themes and Topics for Higher level, and was of an appropriate level of difficulty.

On the whole, candidates' performance was good, and they were well prepared for each component.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

Many candidates performed well in all aspects of the examination, and there were some outstanding performances. Most candidates were clearly well prepared for the examination, and familiar with the format.

Reading and Translation were done particularly well, with many excellent performances. Candidates clearly found the content and vocabulary of the reading passage '流浪动物 (abandoned animals)' accessible and the topic one to which they could relate easily.

Many candidates performed well in the Translation section of Paper 1. There has been a noticeable improvement in this section.

In Writing, candidates performed very well in both pieces, and there were some outstanding short essays in which learned language was successfully adapted to suit the context. In Directed Writing, many candidates fully engaged with the topic.

## Areas which candidates found demanding

This year, the **Listening passage** was seen as slightly challenging. Candidates found the content and vocabulary of the listening passage '实习·工作经验 (work placement and work experience)' less familiar than in previous years. Some candidates failed to demonstrate comprehension of the 'easier' points by failing to recognise the more factual information required — for example, in Questions 1 and 2.

In **Directed Writing**, a number of candidates failed to address all bullet points as required, and were penalized for this. In particular, many of them missed the bullet point 'What you did to help the group'. This issue has been mentioned in PA reports in past years; however, the issue remains the same.

In the **Writing** part of Paper 2, some candidates lost marks due to inaccurate expression. There was some evidence of literal translation from English to Chinese: some candidates copied what they looked up in the dictionary without checking for accuracy and how to fit it into the whole sentence.

In the **Translation** section, some candidates continue to lose marks through a basic lack of accuracy in the appropriate inclusion of articles ('a' and 'the') and in the use of tenses.

## **Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates**

### **Reading and Translation**

- ◆ Centres should continue with established good practice in preparing candidates for reading questions.
- ◆ Continue to highlight to candidates the difference between reading for comprehension and providing accurate translation.
- ◆ Centres also should encourage candidates to read the passage globally rather than sentence-by-sentence, to gain full understanding of the whole passage.
- ◆ In the translation section, encourage candidates to pay particular attention to the articles and tenses used.

### **Directed Writing**

- ◆ Centres should continue with established good practice in preparing candidates for writing.
- ◆ Writing a long passage but missing out bullet points will not result in a high mark. Advise candidates: to read each bullet point carefully; to ensure that they do not miss any bullet point; and also to ensure that learned material is both relevant and appropriate to the bullet point.
- ◆ Candidates should develop good dictionary skills, not just copy what appears in the dictionary. They should also use dictionaries to check the accuracy of what they have written, not to create and invent new sentences.

### **Listening and Writing**

- ◆ In the Listening passage, encourage candidates to make use of the questions as a means of anticipating the sort of information they will need to extract from the text.
- ◆ It is important that candidates do not presume the context of what they hear, and that they avoid guesswork.
- ◆ In the Writing task, ensure candidates read the stimulus and incorporate and adapt learned material that is relevant to the aspects contained in the stimulus.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2012	74
Number of resulted entries in 2013	66

## Statistical information: Performance of candidates

### Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark 100				
A	92.4%	92.4%	61	70
B	3.0%	95.5%	2	60
C	4.5%	100.0%	3	50
D	0.0%	100.0%	0	45
No award	0.0%	100.0%	0	-

## General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.
- ◆ Each year, SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.
- ◆ An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related, as they do not contain identical questions.
- ◆ SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.