



## External Assessment Report 2013

Subject(s)	Cantonese/Mandarin
Level(s)	Intermediate 1

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 fifth year of presentation of candidates at this level. It is encouraging to note that there was an increase in the number of participating centres. This set of question papers contained a range of well-selected texts, which candidates engaged with very well, on the whole.

The content of the examination was at an appropriate level; it related clearly to the Prescribed Themes and Topics, and, in terms of difficulty, was in line with Modern Languages Arrangements. Overall performance was very good.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

The majority of candidates seemed suitably prepared for the examination and had been presented at the level appropriate to their ability.

### Reading

Overall, candidates achieved an admirable standard in the Reading component. They seemed to identify with the selection of topics and themes set out in the texts.

### Listening

The paper was handled well and with confidence. Candidates are to be commended for their pleasing performance in this paper; they were particularly assured in tackling the topics of 'school subjects' and 'weather' this year.

### Writing

In the Writing tasks, there were many superb responses that were well-thought through, and clearly exceeded the requirements of the task.

## Areas which candidates found demanding

### Reading

Most candidates dealt with Reading texts 1, 2 & 3 to a high standard. However, there are a number of areas that candidates could improve upon in the future:

- ◆ Text 2: Direction has proved to be one area, where some candidates were uncertain.
- ◆ Text 3h): Some candidates found the difference between 'market' and 'supermarket' tricky.
- ◆ Text 4 was deliberately designed without any supported questions, in order to stretch candidates' ability, and as a result the performance was varied. Interestingly, some candidates performed outstandingly on demanding questions, but failed to identify family members '奶奶' in 4e).

## Listening

Examiners noted pleasing performances from this year's intake. Most questions were tackled competently by the majority of candidates. However, it seems that some found the topics of transport and directions challenging this year.

## Writing

There was an increase in the number of candidates who failed to attempt more than three topics, which was disappointing.

Candidates should be aware of the pitfalls of overusing 'and (和)' when considering literal translation from English to Chinese. In Chinese, 'and' has a much narrower application than in English.

Another observation concerns character grids on exam papers. Centres are advised to guide candidates on the structure of characters and, more pertinently, how to fit these characters accurately into the character grids. Candidates frequently err by separating radicals in a character, and hence misplace them in the grid.

A final area of consideration regards the use of a dictionary. While this is permissible for this paper, over-reliance appears to have generated a number of errors. Some examples include: 'live in' 活着 (住在); and 'photography' 照片 (摄影). In both instances, candidates have likely made the mistake by seeking a partial literal dictionary translation to confirm their answer, rather than relying on core grammatical knowledge. Clearly the latter is of prime importance if the student is to become competent in the language.

## Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

### General

- ◆ It would be advisable for centres and candidates to make greater use of SQA past papers and marking instructions as part of their exam preparation. This will help ensure that candidates are familiar with task requirements and respond accordingly.
- ◆ Candidates should develop the necessary dictionary skills, so that they can make effective use of this resource under exam conditions.

### Reading

- ◆ Centres should maintain good practice in preparing candidates for Texts 1, 2 & 3, and continue providing candidates with more opportunities to familiarise themselves with the handling of longer texts.

### Listening

- ◆ Performances in this component were polarised — there were some excellent responses, and a small number of rather disappointing responses. Candidates have the opportunity to listen to the recording three times, and it is important that they do not presume the context of what they hear and avoid guesswork.

## **Writing**

- ◆ As advised in previous years, Centres must reinforce the need for candidates to attempt ALL sections rather than focusing on perfecting one or two sections. Examiners cannot stress enough the importance for Centres of impressing upon candidates the need to make a response in each of the sections.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

### Intermediate 1

Number of resulted entries in 2012	56
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Number of resulted entries in 2013	68
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## 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	48.5%	48.5%	33	70
B	22.1%	70.6%	15	60
C	16.2%	86.8%	11	50
D	4.4%	91.2%	3	45
No award	8.8%	100.0%	6	-

## 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.